

Oral History

Mr and Mrs Brian Roberts, having bought 59 Hume Street, Briar Hill just prior to their marriage and honeymoon, were now in residence with the dowry Boxer dog "Squire." As was the custom (in those far off days) the bride was carried over the threshold of her new home.

The house was very bare and so we moved in with Brian's three quarter sized army disposals type bed, my radio/tablegram, an antique chest of drawers from Brian's bachelor pad, a cast off upholstered chair of Aunty Joan's and Brian's Father's old oak Cutler roll top desk.

The first excursion to buy household items saw us heading off to the Danks Company in South Melbourne to buy much needed necessary items such as a refrigerator, wheel barrow, gardening implements, pots, pans and kitchen utensils, buckets, mops, brooms etc. Last of all, much to my surprise and dismay, a Fowlers Fruit/Vegetable Bottling /Preserving outfit and then to top it off, to my horror 100x2lb. jars and 50x1lb. jars complete with lids, rubber seals, metal clips, thermometer and instruction book. When I looked askance at the latter items, Brian observed that with the 40 apricot trees, 8 apple trees, countless plums and the mulberry tree WE would have plenty of produce to process. The "town sparrow" came down to earth and realized that despite living on the edge of suburbia, for her, this was going to be a much more challenging life than she had romantically envisioned earlier! And so over the many summers ahead the old orchard kept producing when our need was greatest, keeping those jars filled over. Finally after about 20 years all the pruning and feeding failed and all except the ancient mulberry tree gradually died. Even after living at "Blackjack" for 45 years the mulberry, although gnarled with a major branch sturdily propped, was as healthy as when we arrived. For some summers, in the children's primary school years much was learned about the natural world due to the life cycle of silk worms fed on mulberry leaves. A wonderful outdoor activity shared with neighbouring friends.

In the large main room of the house there was a bay window with a very accommodating cushioned window seat about six feet long whilst outside in spring, a lovely climbing rose, similar to a double "Cecile Brunner" was festooned with baby pale pink flowers. We first saw the house in the spring of 1956 with the rose rather romantically in full bloom. I'm sure it helped sell the house together with the river frontage and the proximity of Greensborough Station. It was here we set up our card table for meals and sat on upturned fruit boxes when we had the occasional visitor.

Brian rang me from work soon after we had moved into "Blackjack" saying a couple of bachelor friends would like to come to visit and he had invited them for a meal that night, goodness knows what I gave them to eat, probably spaghetti... can't have been much as I was no cook, but with ample wine we laughed our way through tales of our new lives, sharing the window seat and upturned fruit boxes at the card table. As a "house warming" gesture our friends brought us a nice lavatory brush and holder and looked surprised when I stated that we would have to wait to put the gifts to use as we still had the "night cart man"! More laughter when I told them that for some weeks I wouldn't use the outside dunny as there was a blue tongue lizard living under the outhouse and he'd poke his head out or be lying on the path to the

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entrance which terrified me as I thought he was a snake...I would relieve myself in the bushes ...anything but go past the "snake". To me at the time it was no laughing matter and after a while Brian convinced me that the lizard was harmless.

Little did I realize that there would be more wildlife challenges ahead! Early in our marriage in a bid to keep costs down Brian decided to remove the ceiling in our bedroom prior to having it replastered. As it happened there was a delay before the ceiling was reinstated. Once in bed Brian would fall asleep immediately whilst I would lie awake wild eyed wondering what the other presence in the room was, finally waking him, only to be told not to worry it's only little bats whirring past! I would steel myself nightly as it really didn't help much now knowing it was bats! Of course added to this was the guttural bushy tailed possums snarling and their seeming stampede over our tin roof in boots. Another wildlife challenge was the spiders, particularly the large Huntsman spiders which again Brian was reassuring, saying they only eat mosquitoes. It took a while but I soon became accustomed to them and the wildlife in suburbia. Again little did I foresee that within the decade I would have to gird the loins yet again to adjust to a much larger animal. Pussies and dogs, fine, but a horse still to come. Also it was just as well that I hadn't even considered babies at that stage!

When we moved into "Blackjack" we were surprised to find there were a couple of beehives in the orchard. Fortuitously on talking to a neighbour, Archie Blackman, who lived in one of the newly built houses which backed onto our land he offered to come and look at them and advise. As Archie had experience with such things we soon settled into a very agreeable arrangement that he'd rob the hives, collect the honey and we'd share the harvest! Home grown honey from our well pollinated orchard.

Gradually we accumulated a bit more furniture. Neighbours up the hill from us, Kenny and Frank Andrew had a 5 acre holding, and they had a lovely old oak table in excess which they loaned to us for a couple of years which made a huge difference. Fortunately there were some really good heavy curtains left by the previous owners which made the main room look less bare. Fairly early in our marriage we bought 6 leather covered mahogany "Edwardian" dining chairs which have seen a deal of use over the years and when we'd finally finished the children's education, finally got them reupholstered. Early on we bought a rather ghastly striped lounge suite, of course at a sale and at that early stage of my domesticity I was influenced by the "modern look" and I think it was that purchase and having to live with it until it was worn out that made me realize that some of the furniture my Mother was fond of was best suited to our old house. So as we could afford older style furniture we bought it.

I will never forget the day we purchased the Victorian cedar sideboard. Aunty Joan had kindly loaned us a lovely old 6ft. Victorian era cedar sideboard which was in excess and she was wanting it stored until Frannie got married and so for many years we were delighted to use it. It looked at home in our high ceilinged huge main room, complimenting the 6 foot window seat at the other end of the room. However when we had to hand the sideboard /chiffonnier back when Frannie married Dick some years later we found the gap in the main room unbearably

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bare as we'd come to love this piece. We felt compelled to find an equally large elegant replacement, despite the fact that we could ill afford it. We had been looking in the newspaper for weeks trying to find a 6 foot long sideboard...there had been many smaller ones on offer but not for us. A smaller version would look lost in this main room!

At last one Saturday a likely one was advertised in Kew. I must add that we looked the most unlikely buyers. Our only car at the time was a rather battered ute, Brian was dressed in old pants and his old footy jumper. I was very heavily pregnant with Claire and Anna a rotund 9 month old baby. We looked like Ma and Pa Kettle come to town as we arrived at the lovely old Kew address. The lady of the household was pruning roses in the garden and on summoning her husband looked askance when we agreed to buy this precious sought after item of furniture with Brian offering a cheque! Brian had the greatest difficulty understanding why anyone would be reluctant to be paid in this way! (Out of earshot I whispered to Brian "just LOOK at us") Finally we agreed to get cash if they would hold the sale until we returned later in the day, remembering in those days there were no ATMs. Hugh Coventry, who lived next door to us at the entrance to our drive in Hume Street, was the manager of the local Cox Furniture store and it was with his help raiding the stores cash takings for the day (writing a cheque to cover same amount!) that we were able to return to Kew and complete the cash sale by carting off the prize in the back of the ute!

A few years later our dining room furnishing was completed when my Mother decided to spend her Father's legacy on "giving with a warm hand". She decided that a decent antique table was needed to compliment the Victorian sideboard and the Edwardian chairs, so off we set having a lovely time cruising around antique shops until we found the lovely Honduras mahogany one which seated 12 when extended and 8 without the "leaves". Mum also did the same for my brother Arthur which gave her as much pleasure as it did us.

My Mother said to me early in our marriage "don't be in a rush to have children as you need time to get to know your husband properly and it is the most carefree time in marriage because once you have children they will never be out of your heart and mind". How right she was, no matter what the age. So with this in mind it was 22 months before our first baby was born. Mother June was 28. What a joy (although I hadn't reckoned on the length and pain of the process!) Women/mothers have short memories!

I must add here that as everyone knows opposites attract and I was far from being the sporty type, however Brian had made it clear that on Tuesday nights he would continue to play competition squash at Kooyong Tennis Club so he would be home very late for dinner and on Friday nights he looked forward to meeting up with skiing/uni friends at the Public Schools Club in the city and again would be home for a later dinner. Luckily we were too impecunious to afford spirits, otherwise I might have had alcoholic tendencies earlier. As it was I waited to dine with him and was not in the best of humours particularly on a Friday when he missed the Greensborough train at Princes Bridge station, then having to walk across the Plenty River footbridge and further up the hill to "Blackjack". Yes, it was a long day of work for him requiring

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relaxation on arrival home however I too was tired and wanted to sign off duty also. Thinking about it later I realized that "home duties" was not and still is not considered work! A decanted jug of red wine with dinner and the weekend ahead was home based and relaxed family DIY...Brian was home and we metaphorically "pulled the drawbridge up!" There was no spare money to do anything else!

Brian, being an Industrial Chemist, was working in the Footscray Dye house of Davied Coop and when Anna was 2-3 months old he was sent overseas for 4 weeks. I was terrified at being left alone to fend for myself and the baby but one had to cope somehow. Thank goodness for the wonderful resource of the local Baby Health Centre. There were no neighbours near as houses were only just starting to be built on the five acre subdivision around our old house. At this stage Mum and Dad were still living in Melbourne in East Malvern they didn't have a car which meant only occasional contact, so one had to "get on with it and get over it". Of course the predictable happened, Claire was born a year and a day after Anna's birth. I must have been so happy to have my husband home again!

For me those early years seemed to be consumed with coping with the incessant renovations, juggling pregnancies, childhood ailments, gardening, produce processing, making most of the children's clothes and curtains, entertaining friends, overseas visitors and Brian going overseas quite often until some years later he was given a company car and I had the use of the car one day weekly. What a relief to be able to drive to the pet shop supplies in Heidelberg for our Boxer dog's meat and then do a BIG weekly shop in Greensborough....so much easier than the trek over unmade dirt roads with the small children, across the river footbridge and then uphill to Main Street. After some years Brian was able to afford a car for me and until we had been married over 30 years I had a succession of "older" cars, ("bombs) for my personal use. The keys of my first new car were handed to me when I was 55 which I love and will "see me out". However these second hand cars were often challenging to start on a frosty morning and had a habit of breaking down!

I don't know why but during the first ten or so years of marriage I was plagued with many bouts of asthma, mainly at night. The treatment then was very basic...one ephedrine tablet initially, followed by another if the attack was really bad. This involved sitting upright in a chair for easier breathing until the tight, painful, wheezing chest eased as did the gasping, fighting for each breath. As this anti histamine is a stimulant one constantly needed to wee and one was absolutely wide awake with no chance of sleep overtaking the effect of the drug. I found it best to sit up most of the night and morning would find me hollow eyed and tired having to get on with the new day and the relentlessness of family life. I was probably not much fun to be with whilst Brian was climbing the corporate ladder! No running away money, always pregnant and wheezy to boot! (Having a private income might have given one the choice of whether to stay or go...I had no choice but to stay...thank goodness as it turns out.) Remember this was the 1960/70's by this time and single motherhood was not subsidized!

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Fortunately Brian seemed to enjoy his work although in the early years he had a long way to travel to Footscray. Later on he joined the management of Preservene at Richmond which was much nearer. Despite this he was usually away from home 11-12 hours daily and I must say I envied the amount of overseas travel which was necessary for his work entailing visits of 3 – 4 weeks at a time to Italy, America, Britain and Switzerland, Japan and Mexico. I know that there were many times he was very lonely, particularly in America as there were few occasions he was invited to a family home, particularly over the Thanksgiving holiday period. However the rewards were there in other ways as he was usually given first class accommodation and travel. Many friendships were forged as well, particularly with the many Proctor and Gamble people who in turn came out to visit Preservene in Burnley, Melbourne. Their products were made under license for them. People such as Jack Leighton, Peter Leuthold, Bob Dillard, Christian von Steiglitz, Deiter Schultz and many others. What citizens of the world they were, so articulate, friendly and in many cases multi lingual which highlighted even more to me how “unworldly” and parochial I was. Anyhow we enjoyed entertaining them at home and I was given a local taste of “the high life” when they reciprocated, going to many restaurants we certainly couldn’t have afforded to patronize.

Eventually as the children got older I began to look forward to the quieter times when my husband was away. I would eat with the children instead of having 2 sittings of the evening meal as most nights when Brian was home he didn’t want to eat immediately on arrival and so we would eat 8 - 8.30pm so that he could “wind down”...with the exception of course being Tuesday and Friday nights 9pm+ as mentioned earlier. After a jug of wine we would be in bed by 10ish so that he could have an early start the next morning. I used to be quite envious (oh dear! How could I be envious as our lives were so different?) of many of the locals whose husbands were home in time for a 6 o’clock dinner and help bathe, feed and read stories to their children.

At the weekends Brian was forever busy when in the early days he would always oil change, grease and maintain our car....I think I remember him also being challenged by replacing cylinder head gaskets and occasionally seemingly playing meccano trying to fix a mechanical problem. He has an incredible capacity for work and of dogged determination and will not give up a task until every avenue has been exhausted to find a solution to the problem, with me begging him to give up. I’m sure this is due to his Mallee farm upbringing and the determination instilled into him by his parents during those impossibly difficult challenging early soldier settler farming years after the First World War.

Spring was the busiest time of all and with our extra large block, the grass had to be kept in check. At first Brian used his Father’s old scythe from the Mallee farm. The terrain was fairly steep and very hard work on the orchard terraces and the sloping Plenty River acreage and at this stage a motor mower was not affordable. Our uphill neighbour had a similar problem. Frank Andrew, whose 5 acre property in Simmons Court backed onto Hume Street, suggested a solution that he and Brian should co-own a decent sized motor mower. This was a great idea as Frank had an even larger holding than we had. As one can imagine with all the work the

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two of them had to do, the mower often had to be stripped and repaired which seemed to take as much time as the actual mowing....still they enjoyed this task as it wasn't as solitary as the mowing. Soon afterwards Brian and Frank bought a small rotary hoe together and of course as it was second hand often needed the same treatment as the mower! A vegetable garden followed. Summer time was equally full on for other reasons such as the apricot, apple and plum crops which Brian diligently picked (waste not want not!). Bucket load after bucket load would be brought into the kitchen for me to process. Of course the height of the apricot season was just prior to Christmas through to New Year, I couldn't even offload some on to neighbours as everyone was too busy. So jars were filled and preserved, jam, chutney, sauce and fruit drink made which, whilst a bother at the time it was a boon in winter having the pantry filled. Brian was so meticulous harvesting that not much was left for the birds. Both of us have the same values having been born in the Great Depression era in the late 1920's and 1930 with both sides of the family affected.

In those early years Brian slaved on making the house a home....the outer bathroom wall was demolished then rebuilt with a high window and room reconfigured to enable a toilet to be incorporated inside when we could afford to install a septic system. That came a couple of years later when an old well, positioned outside the bathroom proved ideal for the sewerage pit. When the time came to connect up Brian did most of the trenching as well with a local plumber, Tom also a Hume Street resident doing all the connections.

With the help of a carpenter, built in cupboards/dressing table made a huge difference to our bedroom; bookshelves built around a rebuilt fireplace in the front "green room" and much later a window seat installed there as well. We now had three window seats under the three large bay windows in three different rooms which meant that there was the capacity to sleep three visitors should the need arise. Further improvements were a three paned corner window replacing one very small window in the little den together with an oil heater in the fire place there; old cupboards removed from the kitchen and replaced with more modern ones with an eating bench, wall oven installed and an oil heater placed in the floor near kitchen; the extremely "airy" sleep out replastered and windows in place of fly wire made the room into an acceptable bedroom.

Our wonderful mentor Frank Andrew, continued to help us and designed a workshop/garage as well as a stable which Brian then built over many, many weekends. We could see our needs were changing over these first 10 years as gradually the sandpit became obsolete, our eldest daughter Anna became the proud owner of a horse (Patch), and we now had 2 cars. Frank was also instrumental in sourcing our beloved Patch from Inga and Graeme King at Warrandyte (well known painter and sculptor respectively) whose daughter had outgrown the horse. I think Patch was about 16 when he came to us and died on the property at the age of 33. What a heartbreaking day. All those day rides on the districts dirt roads over many years gradually stopped as the bitumen took over and Patch got older. Frank was also Anna's mentor as when he first introduced himself to us it was on one of his district rides. Many years later his horse

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was killed on that steep rise in Hume Street coming off St. Helena Road, having escaped from his paddock on to the newly made road with disastrous results!

I estimate that the above improvements happened over roughly 15 years and as we could afford it carpenters and other professionals were employed. As Anna and Claire were sleeping in the same room and Michael and Meg together also, it was evident that an extension on the house was a dire necessity. Our aim had been to have this building done before we were involved with private secondary school fees. Alas this was not possible as every time things became easier we would be hit with another major cost such as the sewer connection and then road making. In each case the cost was shocking as in the case of the sewer it was necessary to have the pipes all in cast iron (because of the large trees) and the nearest connection was near the Plenty River behind the Batemans property in the newly created Greenmyer Court. The road making cost too was prohibitive despite our narrow entrance at 59 Hume Street, the frontage to Bannerman Avenue had also to be covered. Many times we had to remind ourselves that having decided we wanted to live on a larger than the usual quarter acre size block, sacrifices had to be made and that the DIY spirit made our later life at "Blackjack" necessary and to outsiders enviable.

Also there is a lot to be said for our outer suburban areas in the post WW2 years of the 1950/60's despite the financial constraints of the time individuals banded together and were able to foster a great sense of community. Those who bought the newly subdivided land without made roads and sewerage, had the will to help themselves. The local Progress Association had been established prior to our arrival and the members were instrumental in lobbying Heidelberg Council when dirt roads needed regrading, organizing street work parties to spread metal on the road afterward; filling in potholes in winter, repairing temporarily the footbridges across the Plenty River after flood at Rand and Flintoff Streets until Council redesigned and rebuilt same. Facilities such as a Community Hall at Greenhills were built which in turn was used by a multiplicity of groups such as Scouts and Kindergarten etc. A regular newsletter "Neighbourhood Watch" kept us up to with community activities giving us a great sense of our neighbourhood.

Most families who lived in our street soon had young children and our small neighbourhood was laughingly termed "fertility hill"! This was told to us when we bought "Blackjack" from the Robinson family. This lovely couple had lived on the original 5 acres for 15 years only selling because with 5 boys they decided that a 2 bedroom home on a small acreage was no longer a long term prospect. When they put the old house on the market nobody could afford such a large parcel of land, so reluctantly the property was subdivided. Banks were reluctant to lend for properties on dirt roads, no sewerage, no fences and a tin roof! Frank Robinson had kept the remaining house lots for a final buyer and that's when we arrived on the scene and the rest is history! It had taken him 2 years to sell the property and then move on to a much larger holding at Wallan. Little did I realise that I too would add to the "fertility hill" numbers with 4 children under 5 years old, a broken ankle in the middle and no twins!

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Hume Street provided a very safe environment once the proliferation of babies matured into primary school children with Briar Hill Primary School being the destination. A virtual "crocodile procession" of young children would begin from the Patterson's near our driveway and proceed up the Street calling into the Roberts, Craig's, Vales, Johnsons, McPhee's, Fabbs, Faures, Kents, Wraights are the ones I remember. There could be more! Once the children got to the corner of Britnells Road (later renamed Mountainview Road) the Watters and a couple of others would join the informal "crocodile".

Turning right they'd then walk about half a kilometer along Britnells and turn right into the lane which leads to the school. Very few families were 2 car families, so needs must and even when the Mums had a car the only time for a school run was if it was very wet or very hot! In this way healthy exercise helped forge not only friendships but independence. By the late 1960's Briar Hill State Primary School was bursting at the seams with "corridor classes" in an attempt to cope with the "baby boomers". Then came portable classrooms and a new Primary School built at Greenhills.

The only holidays Brian and I had were occasional skiing trips, the children being minded by my Mother earlier on before my parents moved to Sydney or next door neighbour Vera Blackman and a Kinder friend Marion Purchase. Friends such as the Caithnesses and the Hartleys were very generous sharing their beachhouses with the 6 of us. Many happy summer holidays were spent with them at Blairgowrie/Sorrento with all our children, 9 when at the Caithnesses, 6 when at the Harleys.

I remember that often whilst staying with the Caithnesses, Brian and Ian would come for the weekend on the Friday evening, spend the weekend on the beach, sailing and at night we'd play cards "up and down the river" till all hours and then the men would return to work on the Monday morning, leaving Podge and I with the 9 children. The two of us took it in turns to do the headcount it was so constant as they were forever in and out of the water there was little time for relaxing reading!

I can't remember when we sold off some of the apricot orchard which had gradually ceased to be productive to the Kottecks next door...I think they wanted to expand their garden. Having agreed we found we had some spare money and decided to buy a beach block at Ritchie Avenue at Blairgowrie back beach, hoping one day to build a holiday house. Sadly, much to our regret this didn't ever eventuate and when we sold this Blairgowrie block after many years used the cash to buy back the land we'd sold off originally! This was a very expensive exercise due to a legal blunder.

I can't remember the exact year (probably about 1971) when we started the extension on the house to provide an extra 2 bedrooms plus another bathroom and also incorporating the laundry within the house. I had been struggling with a copper and wringer in the early years in the broken down old outside laundry. Washing had been a daylong affair as first of all I'd gather twigs for kindling, fill the copper with cold water and keeping the fire well stoked only then would the washing as such begin, labouriously hauling out the clothes from the steaming

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copper with a wooden pole to rinse and wring in the adjacent tubs. After this one would carry washing out to the old wire washing lines which were held up with a wooden prop. After about 5 years of this performance friends donated their cast off electric washing machine, what joy despite when the washing machine was in the spin cycle the whole of the wooden "washhouse" structure shook!

By now Brian was working for Parbury Henty who owned Preservene and as another subsidiary of the company made fiberglass swimming pools we thought maybe a pool could be afforded as we could get it wholesale! As the hole for the pool was next to the house this took first priority after the extension and then whilst earthmoving equipment was on site we decided we would have a tennis court formed so that over the next couple of years Brian could build retaining walls on our sloping land and finally have the court fenced and surfaced by professionals. Brian employed John Anderson Architect to design and oversee the build and to our delight it made our home so much more comfortable for the growing offspring.

The children were so pleased to have single bedrooms and as very modern Scandinavian furnishing fabrics were all the rage the children all chose their bold colourful Marimekko bedspread materials etc. for their rooms and I set to making bedspreads and curtains for the four individual bedrooms. We had bought a couple of small desks as well so there was the opportunity to do homework there too. I too was liberated from the outside laundry. It was so wonderful having this facility inside....when I think of the 15 or so years of winters, particularly dashing up and down the path to the "wash house" when the children were young was a particularly testing part of housekeeping! What joy and luxury also having a second lavatory and bathroom (early 1970's).

Once the building extension had been finished there was still a massive job to be done building the tennis court which took another couple of years. Again, Brian resolved to underpin the court (to the sloping fall of the riverbank) himself using methods that I'm sure had been in existence since the construction of the pyramids in Egypt. Having done this over many weekends the family was then recruited to build a long high bluestone wall about 120 feet long to retain the house side of the court. As the bluestone pitchers were so heavy it took two of us "apprentices" to handle each stone consequently Brian did the majority of the work. After this the pool area had to be landscaped and built then a large brick terrace with lovely bluestone barbecue and seating area gradually took shape. Dear Dick Finlay had given us a rough sketch of his design ideas which we agreed would enhance the area. So after many more weekends of heavy work the ideas became a reality. Bluestone benches, brick paving, pergolas and shading vines to cover this westerly aspect. So finally after 20 years hard yakka, our home was complete.

Looking back, the change that had been achieved over those twenty or so early years was monumental, mainly due to Brian's energy and drive and need to do hard physical work balancing his long weekday "white collar" work. Brian was only too pleased to be home based at the weekends to achieve the tasks he/we had set whilst I became restless as I was too much

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home bound with the housekeeping/mothering/husbanding/gardening/preserving/cooking and entertaining. This meant few holidays apart from the generosity of friends and very little in the way of cultural stimulation. Something had to give with this schedule and it was achieved by spending as little money as possible on ourselves and doing as much of the work as possible. I said many times I was "cheap to run"; however, I've made up for it since to a degree!

At this time the "feminist movement" had begun to rear its head and in the early 1970's I attended a "Women's Forum" with the guest speaker Marie Coleman who was the CEO of the Victorian Council of Social Services. At the end of the very inspiring session she appealed for volunteers to help in the city office of VCOSS. I responded and I attended the office at first on a fortnightly basis which after a while became weekly. I found this very satisfying; particularly since the previous year I had found myself wanting and had lost all confidence when I tried unsuccessfully to return to nursing at the Austin Hospital. In the late 1940's I had trained as a Nurse at the Royal Melbourne Hospital and after finishing the training worked overseas for two years and on return continued nursing until I married. I had always considered myself a good nurse, however after a short reintroduction to the job at the Austin Hospital, working three days a week, I soon found juggling demanding work and the needs of a young family too much. Having been free of asthma for some years it came back with a vengeance and I reluctantly decided I was not made of sterner stuff and to my regret not even a good nurse any more. I decided without help I was unemployable! Also Brian was working long hours and it was not fair on him to have an exhausted wife and mother even though some extra money would have been welcome.

I did this voluntary work at VCOSS for about 18 months which entailed office duties and eventually I was put in charge of ensuring that any pertinent social welfare changes which were published in "Hansard", the Parliamentary Gazette were noted and then typed up to send out to Social Workers throughout the State. Early in 1971 Marie Coleman asked would I take on the organization of the VCOSS Combined Charities Shop, I would not be in charge as a manager would be appointed, however I would need to do all the groundwork before the Shop opened, liaise with the charities involved, organize the voluntary help, train them and be full time in the Shop when it opened. For this I would be paid an Honorarium. With some misgivings I accepted, although after my last abortive effort at working I wondered how I would manage. However as it was only a 6 week stint of full time that first year, with the children's help, I thought I'd manage. Brian was happy for me to do this but stated I'd have to be self sufficient. So with renewed confidence in myself I accepted the challenge little realising that as the Shop grew, so would the demands on my time and energy and on the positive side I would grow as a person. I found I loved organizing the 110 volunteers who manned the annual Combined Charities Christmas Shop and it was so gratifying dealing with the 50 charitable agencies involved. I could not have put in 25 years in this work without the support of the family, particularly in the first few years when I had "L plates" on!

As the family grew up our property became the venue for much family entertaining, treasure hunts, tennis parties, barbecues galore etc. even our youngest daughter Meg's wedding. In the

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latter 20 years of our life at "Blackjack" we were able to afford to spend more money and time on the garden and hired Gordon Ford the noted Eltham Landscaper to design and install a natural looking environment around the house. Later still we replanted all the old orchard terraces with natives. However with the "nest" being empty for many years we reluctantly decided that the garden maintenance was getting too much for my creaking back and knees and Brian finally decreed that the DIY mowing and maintenance was getting a bit much also.

Whilst it was sad to leave our property, for us the area had outgrown us as all our struggling, starting out friends had moved long since and neighbours had changed many times over in our 45 year tenure with only two local friends remaining.....time to go. It was so pleasing however to know that the Geer family who bought "Blackjack" had four young children and appreciated the old house and garden seemingly as much as we did.

This is now 2012 and I believe the Geer family are still there, although the original block before 1956 was 5 acres, by the time we bought it was roughly two and a half acres and we sold off about half, so the house still stands in over an acre, shielded from suburbia by a narrow drive and a bushy river frontage.

June Roberts

2012