

## MY MEMORIES

by Eric Barclay

I was born at the Queen Victoria Hospital in Melbourne and lived at Whittlesea until I was six months old, then in 1938 my father bought an old weatherboard house on ten acres of land at Grace Park Greensborough. Later some of this land was sold to Mr Cleverley who bred and raced greyhounds.

We had a couple of cows and about 100 chooks, and we had a Coolgardie , we couldn't get ice, the ice man wouldn't come up our road it was too rough and, boggy when it was wet. It was the same with the baker; we only got fresh bread twice a week, when the baker's red cart would come around.

We used to have our meat delivered; sometime Robby Willett or one of the others would drive the butcher's cart delivering the meat. Mr Clarkson the grocer from Watsonia, just near the station, would drive his old Chevy car across the paddocks to deliver our groceries. Mum used to make butter which she would swap for coupons for tea, sugar or anything else we needed. We had kerosene lamps and didn't get electricity until the 1950s, and it was pretty tough.

Snowy Jessop, who had the only taxi in town, wouldn't drive up our street either; he would say "I'm not getting my car covered with mud." He would drop us off down the bottom, and we had to walk the rest of the way. Snowy ran the "Sly Grog Shop" and was the SP bookie, in those days most towns had a "Sly Grog Shop" and an SP bookie.

My first recollection was the Boells family, they had about five girls, and they thought I was pretty good. When the Boells moved to Richmond, the Dunstone family lived there. Soon after that Mr and Mrs Bell and their family came, they had Don, Jean, Ken, John and I can remember when Allan was born. I still keep in touch with Don, he was like a big brother to me. Then there were the Edwards's, a little bit further down. It was like a little colony up there (at Grace Park). The properties were all small farms of five or ten acres; everyone had their own cow and chooks.

World War II was on and we would annoy the hell out of the soldiers at the Watsonia Army Barracks. They had a sewerage system there with pipes and wires above it and we used to swing on these; the soldiers were always chasing us away. They had ramps for the Bren gun carriers, we played on those too; they also had sand pits - they threw grenades into the pits – and, yes, we played there as well, always being chased by the soldiers.

I will never forget my first day at school in 1943, "the big kids" were taking me to school. I was five years old. Don Bell, Jeannie Bell and others, we were walking down Henry Street, still unmade, when the bell rang, the big kids "took off". Me, this little five year old, started running behind them. I dropped my lunch, it fell in the dirt. I had to pick it up and wipe the dirt off, and anyway, we eventually got to school, then I had to line up with all of the big kids. Percy Watson was the headmaster. I was terrified, my first day at school and I was late. Teachers at the

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school were Miss Ladd, she was there forever, Mrs Downs, she taught us knitting, Miss Cantie, and Myra Roper, just to mention a few.

Something else I will never forget was Les Iredale and me playing allies with Geoff Butterworth. We were playing for keeps; Buttsy lost, but wouldn't pay up, so we dumped him in the horse trough just up from the corner of Kerr Street where Ross the electrician had a shop. The next day just before we got to the school we saw Mrs Butterworth standing with Percy Watson (the Headmaster), I said to Les "oh God we are in big trouble", sure enough, at assembly Mr Watson called out "Barclay and Iredale, come out the front." He asked whether we dumped Geoff in the horse trough. Our reply, "Yes sir," so we got six of the best with the cane. At recess we told Buttsy, "you still have to pay or we'll do you again". He did pay up.

Percy had a way of deciding whether you got the strap or cane, he would ask, "Do you want the strap or cane?" If you said the strap – which didn't hurt as much – you got the cane, if you said the cane, you got the cane it was an easy decision to make.

I remember walking to school on those unmade roads with big pot holes everywhere. There would be frosts which made those pot holes look like there was snow on them, sometimes filled with water other times covered with ice. Tough times saw some kids walking to school with bare feet, they had no shoes. We were called the Grace Park Kids, Harry Arrowsmith, Don Bell, Les, me. We entertained ourselves with a fight every night (just for fun), I used to do quite well, I was a solid kid. Some of the big days, we would say to the 'Burra boys, "I'm going to get you today", we would all be running through the big paddock where Diamond Village is today. We would make a stand there, because we were close to home, and have a "cow !\*?t" fights, then take off home when the other kids looked like they had had it.

The Plenty river was everything to us, we all learned to swim in it, we fished in it, and we spent a lot of time there. When I was about six, Les Dunstone made me a fishing rod, it was a broom handle with a cotton reel on the end and a piece of cord. Les had all this flash gear and we went down to the river near the Monty football ground (Hodges had a market garden down there). I was just sitting there with the rod; when I pulled it up there was a Red Fin hanging on the end. That started our fishing, from then on we would take the dogs and go fishing regularly. We would take a tin of baked beans, light a fire and cook them, there were a lot of platypus, water rats, possum and various other animals in or around the river. It was a good, fun, healthy life and we had a great time.

I should say here that my father was married before and had three sons and a daughter, one of his sons died in World War I, he and his wife had a property in Mount Dandenong Road, South Yarra. When his wife died he moved out this way and set one of my half brothers up in a Guernsey Farm at Whittlesea. My mother was a nurse but gave up nursing to help her brother, who lived in Preston and had an invalid wife. He had a baker shop, my mum worked in the shop, and I think this was where she met my dad.

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My father was sixty and my mother forty when I was born, I was their only child. By gee, I loved my dad, I always kissed him goodbye, he was an honourable man and a good father. Imagine putting up with a young son when in your mid sixties, he was great. Dad had to go back to work after I was born, he worked for the Stubley family, in the hay and grain store. Bob Stubley told me my dad was the best worker they ever had. Mr Coe worked there too, and he was a lovely man.

Later dad ran a market garden at Yallambie for Mr and Mrs Bush, her mother Mrs Murdoch, owned the land. I used to go over there and wash their two Daimler cars, I was paid about three bob (three shillings) and this helped a bit at home.

Dad always supported me in everything I did, cricket, football etc. I went to Eltham High School in 1950, the first year it became a "High School", before that it was a Higher Elementary School. Once again I got 'six of the best', on my first day for being out of bounds. (Outside the boundaries of the school.)

In 1953 I was to sit an exam for the PMG to become an apprentice, unfortunately it was the same day that Collingwood were playing in the grand final. The football won, I didn't sit the exam. And Collingwood won! In 1954 I got an apprenticeship at the Newport Railway Workshops, I became a fitter and turner. They were a good bunch of blokes down there, I became the Rep. for the Credit Co-op. I had an expense account and they bought me a car, I used to go all over the state, it was OK.

It was hard to get an apprenticeship in those days; there were so many looking for them. I went to High School not Trade School so they tried to get me to work in an office. I could never have handled that, so they gave me the apprenticeship. The funny thing is I passed every exam I had to sit with flying colours; later when they made me a foreman, I was the youngest foreman they had ever had. I met a lot of great blokes, made a lot of great friends and they taught me a lot about life.

The toilets were "starting stalls" with no sides on them. For hot water we had to boil a bucket on a fire, we had to be careful, the foreman would watch us to see if we put the bucket on too early. When we did, the bottom of the bucket would burn through. We made soap out of sand and soft soap.

We didn't make a lot of money but we did OK. Many years later an old bloke said to me, "Eric during the depression we were paid a half sometimes a quarter of our pay, but we got through OK." Some people had no jobs.

I was working at Newport when my father died, the day before Cup Day in 1959. McDougall won the Cup (I had bet on McDougall before dad died, and mum had bet on White Hills, because of the area she had lived), White Hills came third.

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The Connell family became my second family, when I went home after dad's funeral there was a note on the back door, "Come and see me as soon as possible – Wes Connell." He was an absolute gentleman. When I went to see Wes he said, "You are to come here for tea on weeknights and Ailsa will do your washing "; there was no arguing with Wes, I did this for about two years. I first met the Connells through the cricket club when I was a kid.

June (Evans) Hall

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