

Cliff Lowerson by Rosie Bray

At a recent interview I was able to extract some memories in the life of Clifford Alva Lowerson.

Let me introduce you to Clifford Alva Lowerson who has lived in the Eltham, Briar Hill, Montmorency and Watsonia areas for nearly 90 years and still thinks that the area is a good place to live.

Clifford Alva Lowerson known to all as Cliff was born in Ararat Victoria on Bastille Day July 14th 1920. He was number 5 in a family of 7 children. Cliff chuckles when he reflects on his second name Alva, because he was named after Thomas Alva Edison and says that perhaps his parents saw a light when he was born. Cliff's father was a steam train driver based at Ararat and his mother had her hands full looking after the large family.

When asked what his first memory was Cliff promptly answered, "Crying at the Ararat Primary School gate for my sister to take me home on my first day at school." Cliff soon got over first day nerves and went on to become a very good student.

In 1927 Cliff's father received a promotion to drive electric trains and the family came to live in Eltham where Cliff attended the Dalton Street Primary School later going on to Eltham Higher Elementary School where he graduated at 15 years.

Cliff recalls that life was fairly simple in those days. The family recreation was based around the Methodist Church and local sports activities and definitely Sunday was a day of rest. That meant no playing cards or any sporting activities of any kind. "These were the rules and they were kept and no one was worse off," said Cliff.

Cliff's memory goes back to when the only made road in Eltham was Main Road then called Maria Street, and Montmorency was still a village. The locals always looked forward to the great event when the circus arrived each year. This always caused great excitement.

Cliff began work in 1935 at the age of 15 years with A.E. & F. Tame in Abbotsford. His 48 hour a week job was to weigh screws and 'silver frost' various articles all for 7/6' per week. This included Saturday mornings until 1pm which sometimes ate into his valuable time of local sporting activities. Cliff travelled by train from Eltham to Clifton Hill Railway Station and walked from there to Abbotsford and he reversed the return journey. It was a long working week.

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Cliff later sat for a Post Master Generals (PMG) telegraph messenger's exam and initially did not think that he would be accepted. He was delighted that at the age of 15 years he was accepted and he began a career with the PMG as a telegraph boy based at Heidelberg Post Office. The wage was 19/6 and supposed to be 48 hours, however sometimes when late telegrams were sent, they had to be delivered that night. Cliff told me that there were lots of sad and funny stories about delivering telegrams and he enjoyed the job.

In his teen aged years Cliff continued to play sport and belonged to the Eltham Tennis Club with Church on Sundays.



In 1944 Cliff went on to work for the Customs Department working mainly from Customs House Melbourne. He retired from there in 1979.

Life changed in a flash for Cliff when in 1946 he attended a dance at the Eltham Public Hall, met his wife Iris and promptly asked to take her home. Both Iris and Cliff knew that this meeting was special. They became engaged in 1947 and married in the Eltham Methodist Church in 1949.

The young Lowerson's first home after their marriage was a sleep out at the rear of Iris's grandfather's house in Gladstone Road Briar Hill, where they lived for 7 years. Iris looked after her grandfather and 4 children were born.

In 1956 they bought a house in Rattray Road Montmorency raising 5 children and attending the local Presbyterian Church. In the 33 years that the Lowerson's lived in Rattray Road the property was well known by the locals for its lovely garden.

After Cliff retired from the Customs Department in 1979 and the family had 'grown and flown' the Lowerson's moved to a smaller house in Reeves Street Watsonia. They spent 25 happy years there.

Retirement was not to be a quiet life. Oh no, Iris and Cliff launched out on a program of helping people and they were regular visitors at the nursing homes. They never owned a car and did all their visiting by public transport or walking to the location. When

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visiting the nursing homes both far and near they took with them puzzles and games to engage the nursing home residents, always on the lookout to help where needed. In 2007 Cliff and Iris were awarded an Australia Day Award for their services to the community. In her speech while presenting the award Jenny Macklin M.P paid a wonderful tribute to Cliff and Iris for their life of community work. The Lowerson's were embarrassed but the people who attended gave a great ovation showing that they fully agreed with Jenny Macklin.

Cliff and Iris loved their 4 months annual holiday to Queensland each year and rented the same house for 35 years. Neither of these two enjoyed the Melbourne winter, and gladly soaked up the sun and made many friends while they were there. Sadly Iris died in 2009 just shy of their 60th wedding anniversary and left a huge void never to be filled. At the end of our talk I asked Cliff if he had any regrets during his long life. He reflected for a moment or two and said that one was the death of a child at 19 years and the second was not meeting Iris earlier because he was 29 years old when they met and there was so much time wasted.

I was so lucky to have met Iris and Cliff Lowerson, true community spirited people who just loved you for who you are.