

Greensborough Bushfire - Nancy Fowkes nee O'Neill

In 1965 I was 15 years old and on my way home from Zercho's Business College in Melbourne when the train was stopped at Macleod and the passengers told there was a fire and the train would go no further.

No arrangements were made and we were expected to make our own way home so I was very grateful to be offered a lift by a lady whose husband was coming from Watsonia to pick her up. I would have walked from Watsonia but they offered to take me to Greensborough and we managed to get as far as Grimshaw Street where the car was stopped by the Police but I was allowed to proceed on foot.

When I turned the corner into Main Street it was like walking into a ghost town.

There were no people, dogs or birds and there was an eerie silence to go with the smoke.

My father Bill's greengrocer's shop was locked up like all the other shops and I became even more concerned when I rounded the corner at the Hotel as there was not a noise and I was used to hearing the usual banter from the bar.

We had an old weatherboard house at 9 Hailes Street and as I passed the laneway that led behind the Hotel to the back of the shops I sighted my father with a wet hessian bag attached to a broom handle putting out the last of the flames on our fence.

He looked exhausted and had managed to save the house but lost the fence and he was quite shocked that I was there as the fire had only just passed.

I asked if there was anything I could do and he said he would love a cup of tea and then could I go up to the swimming pool and tell my mother and sister Janet it was safe to return home.

Even though the house had been closed up the soot had covered every item and it took Mum (May) days of washing and cleaning to get it back to normal.

When we were all settled Dad went back up to the shop and loaded all his boxes of oranges, mandarins and grapes onto his truck and drove them to the men still fighting the fires.

That night the sight from our front door was amazing as the whole of Partington's Flat and as far as you could see up the hill was glowing red with smoldering trees and fences.