**Some Memories of growing up in Briar Hill
Pat Smith-Davey**

We lived at 1 Sherbourne Rd, Dad had built the house before they were married. Uncle Jim built the two houses next door and then sold them.

Across the railway line were our cousins and their parents who lived on the farm where our Grandparents had settled. They still milked cows so we walked over the bridge for our Billy of milk each day.

During the war mum helped to milk as Dad and Uncle Jim were away, Dad in Brisbane and Uncle Jim in Darwin helping build aerodromes, I think. I got the mumps and soon after Mum and my sister Sylv caught them so Dad was sent home to care for us.

Briar Hill was well named, each year at school we collected hips and haws for the Austin Hospital. It was made into jam for use at the hospital. We didn’t have to walk far to fill our buckets every vacant block was covered in briars. We also had egg drives for the hospital and had a “house” competition for points for the most eggs. I was in Red House. There were a lot of poultry farms on Sherbourne Rd and everyone had backyard hens.

**Briar Hill School**

I started school on my fifth birthday, 22nd October 1942. They needed more students to gain another teacher so I only spent 2 months in Prep then moved to Grade 1 in February. There were 2 rooms with 3 teachers, Mr. Mawson had 5, 6, 7 and 8. I always shut my eyes when he wielded the strap, we could see it above the glass dividing wall. Mrs. Barling had 3 & 4, she always carried her sock knitting under her arm to keep her arthritis at bay, and Miss Fraser had prep, 1 & 2. Although it may have been Miss Hile, Joyce Hope mum’s friend and Miss Fraser in the 3rd room when it was built. I enjoyed the boxed books which arrived each month from the State Library, being able to use the stereoscope when work was finished, stand in front of the fire to warm up on cold mornings, hot cocoa the Mothers Club provided, making huts with skein of wool in the cypresses, kick-the-tin (a chase game), hopscotch, basketball, and the monkey bars, there were a few broken arms when they were first installed.

Mr. Galvin was headmaster when I got to Grade 5 and they were they only teachers we had. He had lots of lists of words we recited as well as maths tables. I could still reel off a list of no action verbs or pronouns or words that start phrases (prepositions), these came in useful when doing grammar at High School.

Lots of traders came to the door, the butcher, fruit shop, milkman, iceman, woodman, travelling Library and other bits, we waited for the bag of lollies as this was our Uncle Dunc.

Mum still often shopped at the Victoria Market. She and Auntie May would struggle home from the station with a side of lamb and fruit and vegies each fortnight but the vegies for tea would be on the table by 5pm when Dad got home.

The Timber Mill whistle was a good reminder for all the kids to get home from playing in time for tea. We did have some fire scares from the mill though. I remember Mum putting papers and some treasures in my brother’s pram and waiting on the street to see what was happening with Sylv and I hanging on.

During hot weather we sometimes had swimming at Eltham Pool, we walked to the station and caught the train up. The water was pumped out of Diamond Creek on Mondays so lots of sore eyes and infections. I didn’t learn to swim there though. Friday afternoon was mostly needlework or sport and an occasional basketball match against the catholic School or Montmorency State School, walking there to play.

We walked everywhere between Montmorency and Greensborough and St Helena or after my 11th birthday I rode the bike including to school at Eltham High. We started Sunday school very young as our cousins went and took us to Montmorency Presbyterian Church. Anniversaries and picnics at Black Rock in a furniture van are well remembered, raspberry vinegar and races, egg & spoon and sack races.

The roads were all gravel & dirt, sometimes in winter the puddles were icy and we would pick up the sheets of ice. The water in the pipes would freeze so no water to drink until the sun came up. Clouds of dust rolled in during summer.

We had school excursions to the city, the museum, state library, art gallery, gardens, kitchen’s soap factory, a sauce factory and fire station. We would catch the 9 o’clock train in all dressed up in our best with our lunch in a paper bag. Great Fun.

Mr. Andrews was the station master, he delighted in closing the gates when he heard the train and wouldn’t allow anymore through. His nickname was ‘Dynamite’. A friend who was on the station one day when he did it heard him say “Now watch all the rabbits come out of the hills and want to get on!”

Miss Humphries had a lolly shop opposite the school. When her plum tree was ripening she would sell them for 6 a penny. We could pick them as we walked in under the tree.

We were well looked after at Primary School in such a small group so High School with its many buildings and 200 pupils was a big change and scary at first. I remember not being able to find the room for a class and getting very upset. Later having to go to University High School for Form 6 was even scarier, 1000 pupils and public transport every day.

We loved walking down the railway line when the spring wildflowers were out. Luckily there weren’t too many trains although we had a scare when Sylv was pushed over the bank in the cutting near our home. Luckily a neighbor heard me scream and had her on his back and climbing up as a train came through.

We were lucky to grow up in such a time, happy school days and home and freedom to roam the district without fear.