Well this is my story I am Lesley Marigold Hooper I was born on 8th January 1936, 80 years ago, at the little weather board house, at the top of Grimshaw street, opposite where Centre Link is now, and for those who want to know exactly where it is. It is still in use as professional rooms by dentists and blood collection. The lady that does the blood collection is quite aware of the historical significance of that building because at some stage our friend Faye Fort (nee Partington) has given her the history of it, so she is very well versed in it. It was a little white house formerly owned by Fred and Nellie Butterworth, my Aunty and Uncle and both Jennifer and Geoffrey Butterworth were born there.

It is the old hospital that Dr. Cordner used, after they finished with this hospital around the 1940’s it was shifted to Eldale Avenue. It was called Genista.

After I was born they brought me home to my grandmother’s house where they lived in Main Street, Greensborough. The house was owned by my grandparents, who were Alfred William (Will) Roy and Millie Hewitt, the house was called Millgrove. It was a beautiful home, I think they built the house about 1905, I think I have the dates right. It was very early I believe a lot of local builders helped build it, one was Wally Godwill, who was from a very old family of Greensborough. Their descendant Ray Godwill is living at Nagambie and he is a GHS member.

(Insert Roy House)

Millgrove was the most beautiful home and had a lovely garden. We had a very lovely garden with a big mulberry tree and we once hosted a Red Cross Garden Party.

(Insert garden pic)

People looked at it a lot as it was very nice, it was just one of the houses in Main street, there were only two other houses, my cousin Lorraine Poulter’s house which was one block away and the other house was owned by The Luxford family. Their daughter Jean Luxford is well into her 90’s, sharp as a tack, and continually askes about other old people from Greensborough.

One of the original old buildings is on the corner of Grimshaw and Main streets. I think someone should take a photo of that building as it’s called Jessop’s Corner.

Grimshaw street has changed it was a split-level road with one side higher and one side lower. I’ve been thinking very hard, the land that we owned now has a new Medical clinic on one side, the walkway through the middle and the Westpac towering modern buildings just where Tom Vickers had his Chemist shop and Vickers Lane with the mural all gone.

One of my earliest memories of Greensborough, was of me being lifted into a jinker outside the house in Main street and going off on a ride to St. Helena. Up Old Eltham Rd which was unmade and just like just a dirt track and taking lunch up to my Grandfather Will Roy who at that stage was clearing out all the wood, he was an original destroyer of timber.

(Insert cart pic)

There was lots of vacant land, lots of sloping paddocks and dams and at Studley Court was another big dam. This was part of our childhood because there was nothing else to do and it was great to go yabbying there. Opposite Jessop’s corner was the Anglican Church, there was a path to the Vicarage. Then a path down Main street to the Methodist Church. I remember when I was a child there was a grocery store then the PMG with the lane beside it. A lot of romances and goings on happened there by local identities; no names mentioned, but we would go and spy on them.

Then there was a haberdashery store, then the Masonic Hall above the Ashril theatre and Mr Head the bootmaker on the other side.

(Insert Ashril pic)

Then a little tiny laneway that took you to Mountford’s. Let’s put it this way, nobody was prosperous in those days because World War II started when I was about four. Mountford’s house was very old and rickety but a lovely home to go into. They had a lot of men in the family and they had a cow. My mother went over night and morning to milk the cow and for some reason or other we would trail over.

(Insert milk billie pic)

I think Alan Partington comes into this scene somewhere because in fact someone cut the top off my mother’s finger on a chopping block at Mountford’s house, she always used to say with a smile on her face that it was Alan Partington, but I never knew if that was right or they were just mucking about with me, but that was before we went over to milk the cow.

The Mountfords were important to the area because their son Dick Mountford was captured by the Japanese and was a Prisoner of War, so it was a sad time. You were always waiting for Dick to come home, always waiting for news that he was coming home. Then there was Alf Montfort who was also a Prisoner of War. Then there was a third local man Kevin Arrowsmith who was also a Prisoner of War of the Japanese.

They were simple times and I was very good friends with Joanie Slater the little child that lived with the Mountfords. We used to have wonderful adventures, we would go on big long walks. Their house had a big veranda point blank on the street and they had no electricity. They also had a pond with tadpoles and frogs.

The next one down Main St was Rob Willett’s butcher shop, then there was the fruit shop, Faye’s mother worked there. Faye’s mum and my mum were great friends as they grew up together. The story of my mum’s life in Greensborough I don’t know about as she didn’t live long enough to tell me stories, mum didn’t tell stories.

(Insert Rob Willetts pic)

So, it was war time and you were consumed with when the war would end. Then you will have this new and that new. I remember Faye saying Lesley has lovely clothes, but she didn’t realise I had my cousin Lorraine Poulter’s old clothes. I had this lovely skirt and I thought it was really nice.

Back then there were coupons and you would buy clothes with coupons, but you didn’t just buy clothes anywhere you had to go into the city and to only a few dress shops. In those times shopping was different due to rationing as it was war time. Our one treat for the year was a new dress and new shoes for the Methodist Sunday School Anniversary.

We would sometimes have the windows blacked out and there were times when you wouldn’t put the light on. The street lighting was turned off and when I think about it, it was all in Black and White. Now when I think of Greensborough now I think of the Westpac signs that glitter, the stores in the street and now people selling things out the front of the Two Dollar shop, it was nothing like that.

Greensborough was just sleepy, quiet and beautiful. When you stopped on your bike at the top of the hill waiting to go down, you looked up there was nothing to see but green hills and Sondermeyer’s always Sondermeyer’s house that was all you saw.

(Insert Sondy pic)

And again, I recall the things from the War, the soldiers had to go on marches from Watsonia Camp and one day I remember vividly as my grandmother who was very sick at that time telling me to get something out for the soldiers are coming. They would throw fruit at them to catch and take out sandwiches for them to eat, things like that, just soldiers stuck in the middle of a march you wouldn’t think about that now. We couldn’t give them chocolate as there wasn’t any, and they were our boys, I think they went up to Briar Hill.

I remember all the little things, like when the Plenty River flooded right up to the old bridge and a truck tipped over with apples and pears, and people came from everywhere. Everyone slipping in the mud and we all took the apples, they were the highlights because you did nothing else but hang around your homes, but then we would go on walks.

(Insert flood under bridge)

On Sundays when it was blackberry season we would all go off with the billy’s, all the family’s and the Mountford’s, so off we would go to get the blackberries to make the jam, down at the Plenty River that’s where the blackberries were. Twenty years later they were still doing it, Norm and the Leaford family up to Willis Vale in the 60’s. Everyone went yabbying and cooked the yabbies.

They closed the river swimming pool back then because all the waste from the shops. Dr. Cordner got it closed, but that made the river more attractive, I was never allowed to go. Joan Slater used to go swimming but I was never allowed to go because I had rheumatic fever and mum said you can’t go to the river till you learn to swim. So, I never learned to swim because I never went to the river. I used to go and watch them, there was a swimming hole up past Faye’s home called Bucks dam, but nobody had towels.

We used to go on the picnics and Uncle Joe Poulter would come up and we would have to go rabbiting. That wasn’t always pleasant because he had the ferrets we would go up the back of Faye’s with the nets and picnic lunch and us kids would go because we had to stand right beside the hole to catch the rabbit. If we missed a rabbit Uncle Joe Poulter would get very cross and was known to throw cow dung. I was terrified of them and a bit wimpy. I would say to Lorraine when are we going home, when are we going home.

Ferreting was with me all my life with Ray my husband enjoying it too. So, all my life I’ve been haunted by ferrets. I met Ray Hooper at a dance at Yarrambat, a bit of love at first sight, but that was back in the 50’s, I remember Ray was always around, as he lived at Briar Hill.

Back to the picnic lunches I think that was a way to get rid of us kids, a tin of sardines and a hunk of bread and cake if mum had any. We would open the tin of sardines, I don’t know if the knife he used to gut the rabbits, was the one he used to spread the sardines, but I don’t eat sardines anymore. Then we would help carry the rabbits home, that was quite exciting so that was the one highlight.

Then my cousin Lorraine had moved out of the house in Main Road, they had rented it out to Keating’s and had gone to a News Agency in Church Street Richmond. So, they had gone for those episodes of my life. They used to come back because Uncle Joe went to the Anglers Club. I think it was the 1st Thursday of the month that Uncle Joe and the men would go off to the Anglers.

We always had quince jelly, they were growing down the back of our land on the sloping part. My mother also had horses, she loved horses and had a bit to do with Benny Weir’s riding school. It was right down the back of Nepean and Nell street.

People came to the Greensborough pub by the name of Dawes as nominees and I was very friendly with daughter Joyce. Joycie Dawes and I would spend hours on the swings hanging from the big pine tree in our back paddock in Main St. We had wonderful fun there because you swing so high on them. I think the tree was still there in the late 1960’s.

About that time, I went to Ivanhoe Girls Grammar school to complete my schooling. The reason I went there was because there were not many secondary schools around, only Eltham High and Westgarth Girls school. I don’t think there were any others other than the Emily McPherson College. Elinor Partington went there and Faye went to Eltham High.

I also had a friend called Dorothy Davey who lived in Sellars street. It was nothing like Sellars street now but the hill is still there, they had a huge poultry farm, Dorothy and I went to school together at Ivanhoe Girls Grammar school. I am talking about 1949-1950.

There was another house there, could have been two sisters. A lovely brick house in Sellars street that is still there, right on top of the hill. Dorothy and George Hill owned it until it was taken over by The Board of Works. Dot Hill was the dress maker who made my wedding dress.

There were two lots of Franklin’s in Greensborough, one lot lived in Flintoff Street, and the other lived in Grimshaw Street. They were quite well to-do people and they had a lot to do with the Red Cross. The Red Cross was big during the War as they had a lot of functions at the back of the hospital where there were lovely gardens and they would have an annual Garden Party. Everyone would bring afternoon tea, meeting the Mayor and Mayoress of Heidelberg who were A.K. Lines and his sister Ivy. It was always a big thing in Greensborough, with all the girls. Who would they ask to present the bouquet to the Lady Mayoress to open the Garden Party? I was never chosen, you would always get a new dress, sashes and ribbons and always put your best foot forward. They would call the girls, but never me. Unfortunately, that day I got the sulks and wasn’t very happy about not being chosen.

They also had Red Cross Concerts that were good, and all the children from the primary schools would go they would have a presentation and would do a little play, I could not remember how to read the poetry, but I had a little plate and had to say “I only want a little bit of honey for my bread” and they had a number singers including Dr. Cordner and Tom Vickers. All the community joined in to make it a colourful night.

Tom Vickers came to work at L.J. Thompson’s chemist, he had to find somewhere to live, so he came to live with us in Main Street Greensborough, when I was a baby, I think he lived in the outside bungalow with an outside toilet and bathroom with an old chip heater (no electricity). I loved the chip heater, it would spit out the hot water, which you wouldn’t believe, bath night was a big night. You would have to find your own chips and wood, all very primitive back then, lots of smoke in Greensborough. In the winter, you would know what time to go home because mum use to say when you see the smoke coming out the chimney you must be home by then, nobody had watches, we just played paper chases and yabbying.

Where Flintoff and Main street meet down the middle there was a bit of a gully. When the quinces ripened at the back of my place, the kids from Flintoff street Tom, Margaret and Bluey Hope, the kids that lived on the corner of Flintoff street and Para roads and a few from the Greensborough Primary school with Mountford boys and the Leaford’s and maybe the Whittingham’s and the Halliburton’s all came as they all had bikes. Then you would hear the noise, what’s going on? Then there was a really big qwanger (quince) fight with the boys, that had to be broken up. The trees were just loaded with quinces but nobody ate them. When they started fighting Lorraine and her brother Ray Poulter would say to me go back up to the house as we had the big pine tree at the back of my place and I would wait for them there.

The kids that came from Plenty to catch the train to school, would leave their bikes on the veranda at Emily and Bill Barratt’s old house before they built at 4 Poulter Avenue, they had the most savage dogs. There was a little yellow bus for the people that lived in Plenty.

Once a year we would go on a picnic to Mordialloc beach in a furniture van. It was organised by either the Anglers’ Club or the Fire Brigade. We would sit on benches around the sides of the van and hang on to ropes suspended from the roof. It was all great fun. Races were held for adults and children. There were lots of raspberry vinegar and corned beef sandwiches.

Mum never lived long enough to tell me all the tales, but I just recall my mother as being a woman of the times who never said much. She was exceedingly pretty even though I say it myself. Everybody acknowledged she had Paul Newman blue eyes, none of the family have got them, blue eyes and lovely long black curly hair. She was only about fifty when she died. When she was a young woman she went, and got her licence and a car, I think it was a Chevy.

But I have stories to tell you about my mum and the SP bookies at the Greensborough pub. I won’t mention names, but there was a resident in Greensborough very well known to people and he ran the book, so you would meet him up the lane near the pub. You see there was no TAB but we had two SP bookies, one day there was a raid and he ran into our place. I remember mum saying go down the passage and out the back door quickly, mum liked to have a bet so she didn’t want him to get caught. We also had a sly grog up in Vermont Parade, but no names.

We use to love watching them unload the beer the big wooden beer barrels of the truck and lower them down in a trap door in the foot path. Down from us was the Commercial Bank and the Health Centre then Stubley’s Grain store where Thomas’s lived up the top and the bottom shop was a boot shop. We would spend hours in the grain store, always getting into trouble. They would yell out, to get out of the wheat and hay bales. The middle part went straight through to the back of the lane where Harry Trevithick worked.

In the fifties Tom Vickers who bought the land from my mum built the new shop which was on the high side of the lane then on low side was Stan Ashley’s menswear shop. The lane next to Savers went to the back of the shops and that is where the Air raid shelters where. We used to have air raid drills at the primary school to go to the shelters and the Pound for lost animals was next to it.

Getting back to my school days one of my memories at Greensborough State School was when they dug trenches for air raid shelters. I started there when I was five or six and was absolutely petrified of the ruthless Percy Watson.

The Whittingham’s and the Halliburton’s walked from the top of St. Helena every day in the rain. I still have visions of the big open fire place and all the shoes, boots and clothes hanging everywhere. They were tough times for everybody and you took your own lunch. Mine was a dainty lunch being an only child and a bit pampered. The kids had their lunch wrapped in newspaper no paper bags, two-day old bread with big hunk of sausage in it and we all ate lunch in the shelter shed. All the boys grew up to be big strong fellows and they all played footy and cricket on the oval and we would play Skippy, Who’s afraid of Virginia Wolf and hop scotch. The Whittingham and Halliburton girls would kill everybody with their sporting achievements. I think about it now; the kids today have everything and we had nothing. Then the shop opposite the school, run by Mr Foard started baking pies and they were thruppence each.

The fire station was in Church St down from the corner of Grimshaw street.

Jack McGill had the men’s hairdressers that was right down the bottom in Main street and the next shop was Connie Burkett’s Lady Hairdressers. John had his first hair cut there, it was nearly sixty years ago. Jack was a prisoner of war with the German’s in World War 2 and a wonderful man. I will let you into a secret that Ray and I had our first kiss and cuddle on Jack’s door step.

On the same side of Main St and across the road from the pub a big store was a fruit shop run by Thompson’s, then it became the Welkay Store with Mr. Walter Kenyon then next to that an old house that sold second-hand things and in the back, was Powers’ bakers and you would know when it was baking because the smell went all-over Greensborough.

The Rechabite Hall was in Main street where the Ashril picture theatre was and then it was taken over by the Masonic Lodge and mainly used by them. Then they started having dances there but the floor was no good for dancing, but they had a few Debutantes’ nights there. We also had the Methodist church hall and a Scout Hall down in Hailes street.

(Maybe Frank & Cockie pic)

For year’s I went to the Partington’s house always at two o’clock every Sunday. I had more to-do with Elinor than Faye because Elinor was older. Margaret Hope was another close mutual friend of Elinor and mine. I used to like going to the Partington’s, Elinor would do sewing and we would take some afternoon tea and go to the ford. I would take my boyfriend’s down there and they would all play billiards with Mr Partington. Names I remember were Harry Barratt & Charlie Wanhope.

(Insert group pic)

They also had a pianola, that was fabulous we would put the roll in and it would play away all the old songs and we would all sing along, Faye was always helping Wyn make the tea for the family and they always had horses.

When mum started driving we would go down to Richmond on Saturday afternoons to visit Poulter’s. Then come home along Punt road to Clifton Hill and way down through Heidelberg. It seemed to take no time to get there.

Then another thing the gypsies came to Greensborough during the War. They came up Main Street to Henry Street in a pickup truck like a trailer they would stay on the flat part opposite the school where Memorial Park is now. Mum would say don’t go outside when the gypsies are here and mum would get the washing in off the line.

About that time, we had some people pitching tents in Sellars Street. They had bought land and where starting to build their houses.

Then the war finished and three prisoners of war came home, they had an afternoon tea for them at the Masonic Lodge. It was big, people now would not know what a country afternoon tea was like, it was like a party and the men wanted to have a drink with them. There was a band playing music and other returned service men marched in their honour, it was quite a big home coming for them.

In the post war period, there were horse and pony gymkhanas. All the local lads would try to have the best horses and win all the prizes and ribbons. Donnie McDowell was the best horseman in the district. About this time the circus would visit Greensborough and setup on the flat ground at the foot of Sondermeyer’s Hill. This is where Pioneer Park is now.

The Ashril Picture Theatre was a major source of entertainment for everyone in 1950’s.

Nan died in 1945 and Pa Roy died in 1951. Both lived in Millgrove in Main St Greensborough to the end.

I went to Zercho’s business college, I did office work, and got a job in Elizabeth Street at John Thomson’s Engineering Company.

(Insert wedding pic)

I got married to Raymond Hooper in 1955. We lived in Main street till 1957, then Rob Willet bought the house when we moved to Watsonia and had a weather board house built and had four children. I went back to work in 1971 till 1992.

Ray passed away on 31st January 2013 and I still live in Watsonia. I have 4 children namely John, Anne, Carolyne and Robert, 5 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren.

I have always lived happily in the Greensborough Watsonia area.

Lesley Hooper

12th November 2016