Memories of Brian (the RedHeaded) Blackburn

My association with Hillside Main Street Greensborough (later to become 3 St Helena Road) began around 1942 when my Uncle Fred purchased it as a holiday home during World War 2 and my family used it on many occasions over the next couple of years, then when Dad was demobbed in 1945 we brought the ¾ acre property from my uncle (who is still going today at 98). But we were not able to move in as it had been rented out to an elderly couple and with the Landlord and Tenancy Act biased toward the tenants we had a long legal battle on our hands which lasted for over two years. In an attempt to shame them out Dad, Mum, my older sister Val and I moved into two ex-army tents right up at the back of the block. This move saw me installed at Greensborough State School grade 3 (I can’t remember the teacher’s name) where I sat next to a kid by the name of Lenny Simons (Len and the Simons family were to remain good friends up until the present day (although only Nance and Robert are still alive).

The attempt to shame the tenants out of Hillside did not work mainly because the frosts and cold of early 1946 plus the long trip to cart water and the long dark trip down to the single pan toilet (dunny) became too much for Mum, so a move out to Kangaroo Ground to a house without power or water on 20 acres of bush was effected. I loved it as I learnt about chooks, trapping rabbits, chopping down trees and cutting firewood, could have my own dog and I could roam the bush to my heart’s content.

We finally moved back to the Burra, just after Christmas 1946 after dislodging the tenants out of Hillside, and so back to Greensborough State for 1947 and ‘48 under the guidance of Percy Watson and then on to Eltham Higher Elementary School (becoming Eltham High School in 1950 and still had no electricity when I left at the end of fifth form 1953).

Greensborough was to be my home town for the next 28 years, this period of time saw me grow up, get a job in the medical field, find the right girl, marry, build a new home (next to Hillside part of the original ¾ acres) and become Dad to four kids, two of each over a five-year span, before paling fences separated me from the bush and set us scurrying to a new life in the back blocks of Emerald in the Dandenongs. Although King Island, Southern Tasmania, and now central Victoria, have filled the life of yours truly, I still regard the St Helena Road, Diamond Creek Road and Plenty River area home.

I find it interesting that you, Faye Fort, settled into Delfin Crescent as for you it must be a bit like home anyway because it was my belief that most of that country from Greenhills Road right across Diamond Creek Road over the Plenty and up to your Mum and Dad’s place at that time all belonged to the Partington family.

That block behind Hillside I treated as mine with all my spare time being spent wandering through and exploring that country until I knew every square inch of it, trapping rabbits (until someone decided to pinch all my traps), making huts, learning about the local wild life and being a bit of Phantom cum Tarzan in “My” jungle.

My ranging broadened considerably when it was decided that our horse (Peggy by name) needed more area to roam and we set up an arrangement with your parents to run her on your block on the other side of Diamond Creek Road, (this was the reason for my weekly visits to your place to pay the two bob agistment fee), the only problem there was no water on that block, so every morning it was my lot in life to catch up with Peggy (with the help of a couple of bits of bread) and take her through the gate on the top of the hill to the dam behind the old house occupied by old Tom Ryan. From time to time Peggy went AWOL which led me to cover a lot of that country at the back of “Old Lady Partington’s place” right up to Bucks Dam in the Plenty during my searches. Although Old Tom and I had lots of long chats I never ever learnt his story, my guess was he was an old digger from World War 1, that dam by the way was the best yabbie hole in all my travels.

Memories of fishing, swimming and tin canoe wars in the Plenty I still bore my kids with and now my grandchildren suffer the same stories, although it is hard for them to think that I was ever a kid. Times of chasing football after Rudi Sondermeyer, Bill Cecil, Mickham Bruce and Co had let one go during End to End at footy training to let the little Redheaded 10-year-old chase after and kick back to them, this was when the Burra’s home ground was at the bottom park behind Lobb’s Tea Rooms.

I delivered mail for the Cecil’s before I went to school of a morning, helped my brother in law Billy Pringle deliver bread to many places such as Loyola College, Watsonia Army Camp when it was a migrant hostel after the war, in a horse and cart ranging from the shop at Monty down to the Catholic Convent in Lower Heidelberg Road up to Loyola Seminary in Grimshaw Street.

Those years remain vivid in my memory with lots of swimming in the two pools in the river, fishing for Redfin along its banks, taking our lives in our hands in homemade tin canoes, particularly during the flood times, on two occasions having to be pulled out of the willows by Mr Smith as I washed past their place. Improvised sleds (bits of corrugated iron) used for rapid and hair-raising descents down the steep face on Sondermeyer’s hill. Such freedoms are not available to the youth of today.

About fifteen years ago I came across a nursing sister at the North West Private Hospital, Burnie with the name Sondermeyer and after a chat discovered that she was the wife of Rudi, who at that time was a Tug Captain pulling ships around Burnie Harbour. From memory Rudi’s dad was a mariner also. Evidently Bill Cecil and his wife had just been over to Tassie for a visit.

Living down on the northern side of the Plenty I didn’t mix a lot with the people up above the railway line, although names like Hank and Billy Cecil, all the Pringles (my sister Val married Billy the eldest of the boys), the Leafords John Joy and Margaret, Jimmy O’Brien, of course the Lobbs and the Smiths, the Butterworths, the Simons, Jack Curran, Ron Jones, Geoff Snow, and most of the kids in the footy team 53, 54 and 55. (I was a bit of an outsider being from the other side of the river and didn’t socialize much outside football).

I remained close friends with Ron and Val Jones, (Ron passed away about 18 months ago), Geoff Snow was a great friend but he also passed away a few years back, so that leaves me and just Rob Simons (the youngest) as my best and closest friends.

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