



GROWING UP IN SAN REMO

Personal recollections of my life, from living on
our family dairy farm to becoming a fisherman

by Lindsay Talbot

Before my time, my father worked in the Wonthaggi Coal Mine. When he was 38 he enlisted in the army and was sent to fight in France during World War 1. Upon his return he bought a farm under the Soldier Settlement Scheme, so moved to a property two miles out of San Remo.

This property is now commonly known as 'Carson's Farm', but he had named it 'Corbie Farm' after the place in France where he was stationed as a machine gunner with the 5th Machine Gun Regiment. The farm was recently purchased by the McLellans.

I was born in Nurse Jones' in Wonthaggi about 18 months later in 1921. As my father had been married before, but lost his first wife after childbirth, I had an older half-sister, Elaine (16), and an older half-brother, Russell (14). I also had an older sister, Violet, who died aged three of diphtheria in 1919 before I was born.

When Violet died our sister Betty was adopted into the family. We were not aware that she was adopted until Betty was about 12 years old, and we weren't told anything more about where she came from or why my parents had chosen to adopt her. A fortnight after my second birthday my beloved sister Elsie was born.

Betty, Elsie and I lived together with Mum and Dad on the farm until adulthood.



Corbie Farm San Remo about 1930 - Mabel and Ralph Talbot with Lindsay, Elsie and Betty

At six years of age I began school at San Remo State School, No 1639. I walked with Betty, we set out at 8.30am and with a spritely pace we would make it just in time to start classes at 9.15am. At the time the school had between 20 and 30 students. I remember there being three Poxons, three Simpsons, three Talbots, two Shroders, about five Bagleys, two McNeals, three Ingbritsens, three Thompsons, three Kirklands, about three Crofts and one lone teacher.

Myr teacher was Laurie Mien for the first couple of years, then Kathleen Bulger for many years after that, until she took sick leave. The very attractive Jean Badger came as the relieving teacher. I remember all the young bucks hanging around the school gate hoping to escort Miss Badger home. My last teacher was James (Jim) Hefford.



San Remo State School No 1939 – about 1930

During school time, if we ever heard an aeroplane we were let out of class to watch it fly over as they were rare. They were quite slow so it gave us a substantial break.

Having no sewerage, a couple of the older boys at school were given the job of emptying the can from the thunderbox. They were paid a shilling a week for their trouble. This was Fred Ingbritsen's and my job for our last couple of years at school. We had to dig a hole and bury the contents of the can. One day we had the idea the we'd bury it shallow where the girls would fall in. Our plan backfired when our teacher Kathleen Bulger fell into the mess.

I remember when David Edgar was getting the strap from Miss Bulger. She told him to put his hand out and he grabbed the strap from her and threw it in the corner. He didn't get into any further trouble, as his mother was a friend of the teacher.

The school went through until Year 8. As I was one of the younger students in my year level I was only 13 and a half years old when I finish Year8 and sat for the Merit Certificate. I failed one subject, Mental Arithmetic, but as I wasn't old enough to leave school anyway I continued to my 14th birthday. I returned to school six moths later to resit the Mental Arithmetic test. I passed and finally got my Merit Certificate,

During my school days there were only about 40 dwellings in San Remo, including shops and pubs. There was a tennis club located where the Lions Park now is. I remember planting the row of pine trees along the coast on Arbour Day 1930. The two pubs in San Remo have existed as long as I can remember. What is now the Westernport Hotel was called the Pier Hotel. The San Remo Hotel has not changed its name in my time.

The Burgin family owned the San Remo Hotel as well as the local store. Some time during my teenage years the Williams brothers took over both hotels, the Williams family still runs the San Remo Hotel to this. Elaine Williams recently commented that she now has served four generations of Talbots at the bar of the San Remo Hotel.

We had a 168 acre dairy farm, so we couldn't go swimming after school with the other kids. And if we wanted to play any sport we had to be home by 4 o'clock to milk. In those days we milked the cows by hand. In about 1936 I told my dad that I wasn't going to hang around and milk cows if I had to do it by hand. For once in my life I had given an ultimatum that was successful, and milking machines were soon installed. As a kid it nearly broke my heart that the chore of milking the cows stopped me from playing cricket, but this was the way of life for us, and I quite enjoyed the farm work.

We were one of the first families in the area to buy a car, it was a T Model Ford. However, the first mode of family transport that I remember was a phaeton, a single horse drawn buggy. It came to San Remo on the steamer, the Genista, which ferried passengers and freight to and from Stony Point daily.

My mother, who travelled to Melbourne by train, purchased our phaeton in Melbourne. She was from Surry Hills and went to visit her mother a couple of times a year. Having been raised in Surry Hills as a city girl, farm work wasn't really her thing. She never milked the cows, instead she looked after the house and raised turkeys to sell for Christmas dinners. The turkey were sold for a pound each, which was a lot of money in those days.

I was about ten years old when the T Model Ford was purchased, and I learnt to drive straight away. When I was about 14 we sold the Ford and purchase an ex-Yellow Cab, which our mother had painted blue. This new car had gears so my father never bothered learning to drive it. From there on I was the driver of the family. Although you had to be 18 to get a licence even back then, I managed to avoid being caught driving by parking in the back streets when we went to Wonthaggi. To this day I have a clean slate on my driving record.

The Depression went from 1930 until 1939, but living on a farm we never had any fear of going hungry. Bread was delivered to the farm from the bakery in Dalyston twice a week, as was the meat from the butcher in Bass. Orders were placed a week in advance and deliveries arrive by horse drawn cart until about 1935. Swaggies dropped in for a feed every now and again.

I was about 12 when my brother Russell moved home because he was out of work. He had been working on tobacco plantations up at Myrtleford before this, and decided to try his hand at planting tobacco on the farm. He planted out five acres and it grew like crazy until the wind blew it out of the ground. It was a heartbreaking experience for him. To my knowledge this was the only tobacco that has ever been grown in the area.

After this devastation Russell packed up and moved back to Melbourne, but became my hero when he gave me his .22 calibre rifle as he left. That rifle provided my entertainment for the next five years, shooting rabbits. I never had time to be bored. I save up my of the money I made selling rabbit skins to buy my first car.

Some time around 1932, the fishermen from Queenscliff first came to San Remo for the spring, mostly fishing for couta. San Remo's fishing industry was rather minor in those days, consisting mostly of couta boats and bay netting. After the war many returned service men bought boats to catch couta. There were at least 50 couta boats here in those days, there aren't any now. Up to 1000 boxes of couta per day were transported out of San Remo. The San Remo Fishing Co-op, known as 'The Freezer', was built to cater for the couta industry in the early 1950s. As the couta mysteriously disappeared around the world in the late ??? the industry eventually died out. The shark industry simultaneously grew bigger with the introduction of net fishing, and the fleet of shark boats in San Remo swelled to around 20.

Fishing is the only industry San Remo has been developed on. About 100 years ago, before my time, San Remo had a sandstone quarry; at times at low tide sandstone blocks can still be seen uncovered near the pier.

When I was a child there was no road transport to Phillip Island, even though some beef and sheep farmers had begun farming the land. To transport stock from Phillip Island to San Remo farmers would swim them across at low tide. In the early 1930s a two-car punt service towed by a motor boat was established. This was bought out by the Sambles a couple of years later.



San Remo – Newhaven Punt

The Sambles became well-known business people and land owners in the area. They replaced the two-car punt with a six-car punt that was towed by a bigger boat. It could take up to two hours to cross the channel if the tides were running hard. Sometimes the punt would end up on the beach in Cleeland's Bight. Everyone who worked on the punt ended up doing their back in pushing the punt off the beach. In 1940 the original Phillip Island Bridge was opened.



Original Phillip Island Bridge – opened 1939

The bridge was built with the intention of lasting 30 years and had a load limit of six tonnes, Not long after the bridge opened coaches began bringing tourists from Melbourne to see the penguins. The tourists would be unloaded and made to walk across the bridge to reduce the load. This only happened in daylight hours though, at night a lot of overweight traffic crossed the bridge, including full buses of tourists and truck loads of water for guest houses. But it never collapsed so not too many people must have done the wrong thing.

As scheduled the original bridge was pulled down after the second bridge was opened in 1969. We had a huge dance in Keam's Hall the night the original bridge was opened. Dances were also held there every Christmas. After the opening of the bridge Phillip Island boomed as a tourist destination, however, San Remo seemed to stagnate for years until recently. San Remo was often bi-passed by holiday makers.

Betty left home when she was sixteen to train as a Nurses Aide. As teenagers Elsie and I used to go to the movies each Saturday night in Wonthaggi. We travelled in Charlie Pearson's Chev panel van. He took as many people as would fit in, sometimes you'd get a cuddle on the way though. I remember another time when I'd been out with the boys and I was coming home in the back of Frank Oakley's ute. There were about five of us in the back when the ute broke down near the Killy Bridge. We all walked home along the railway line in the dark to Anderson. I got home around 2am, that was the only time I've had to walk home after a night out in Wonthaggi.

I volunteered for the army when I was 17. This took me to Seymour for military training. I stayed in the army for four month until my parents had me called home, as they needed me to help on the farm. At the time I wanted to go to war and resented being called home. Naturally, after the war I was quite thankful for it, but like most who didn't go to war, I still can't help feeling a bit guilty for not being there.



At Seymour Army Camp 1939

When I was about 20 I met my wife to be, Mary Kerlake from Wonthaggi. Around the same time Elsie met her husband to be, Bert Johnson. Mary and I were married in 1945 and Elsie married Bert in 1946 when Bert returned from the war. Mary and I continued to live at my parent's farm for the first twelve months of our married. After Elsie and Bert were married the farm was sold.



Mr and Mrs Lindsay Talbot, May 23 1945

Bert was from a family of fishermen, so he intended to go back to fishing for couta in Queenscliff and he asked me to come along. Bert, Elsie and I moved to Queenscliff, soon to be followed by Mary and our new son, Bruce, and stayed there for about four months.

We came back to fish in San Remo for the spring, we all stayed in the boarding house Redcliffs (then know as Cumagen) at Newhaven for the first couple of months. Then we moved into a house in Newhaven with just the five of us. Bert and Elsie stayed with us for almost a year, during that time their first child Kathleen was born and they moved to their own home in San Remo.



Mary Jane – Lindsay’s first boat

Bert and I fished for couta for a couple of years until my dad had a cray boat, the Evening Star, built by JC Bull and Son at Metung on the Gippsland Lakes. When dad died soon after, Elsie and I had to buy my brother and sister’s out of the boat as he left us equal shares. We managed to find the 3300 pounds between us to pay out the other three by catching more fish and selling our cars. Bert and I worked together crayfishing, sharking and scalloping on the Evening Star until I retired from fishing at 48 years of age.



Evening Star – San Remo