

Paradise lost

You might go to Surfers Paradise for a holiday, but would you want to live there? All is not well on the Gold Coast. **Peter Wilmoth** reports.

"A young Sydney man's Gold Coast holiday ended dramatically when he was shot in the stomach with an air rifle. He was walking from Australia Fair at 10.15pm when the shot was fired from a nearby vehicle. 'What do they say about this place? Beautiful one day, shot the next?' he said." (Weekend Bulletin, quoted in Bond University report on crime in Surfers Paradise.)

A LINE of low-slung cars driven by young petrol heads from out of town is snaking along Surfers Paradise Boulevard. The cars are souped-up, fat-tyred, growling wagons – "hot" in the correct terminology – and their drivers are visitors from the rougher southern suburbs of Brisbane, here for some kicks.

One car follows the other. Safety in numbers. The looks on the drivers' faces tonight – a leering aggression that tries to cover for whatever failing leads to needing loud cars – suggests their horsepower is considerably greater than their IQs. A group of six police stand in a knot. There's not much they can do. Lowering the tone of a place to a climate of quiet intimidation does not happen to be against the law.

It's party time in Kitsch Town. Surfers is turning it on. In the mall, touts are trying to sell time-share. In Orchid Avenue, Surfers' version of Kings Cross, an English tourist is flogging all-night rave parties. At the Party nightclub, they are counting down the hours until the "Wet Wet Wet Covergirl Search".

All this activity gets the appetite up, so punters are making their way over to the city's restaurants and bars (the Pink Elephant or Cocktails and Dreams), or maybe to the "world famous" Bavarian Steakhouse, where a sign invites patrons to "join in the hilarious fun and antics with our German

ghetto" and points to "a decline in the image of the Surfers Paradise CBD". It wants to re-capture the "casual yet refined beachside character".

It is, says local real estate guru and "Mr Gold Coast" Max Christmas, "a change in the theming of the place". Which is, of course, all code for giving Surfers Paradise's image the buffing of a lifetime. "It is time to start the engines," says Max Christmas.

Down on the boulevard, the petrol heads seem to have beaten him to it.

"THIS is a suffering place," says Bob Hammond, a former nightclub doorman, part-time Father Christmas, actor and journalist. "The image which has been fostered with a certain amount of relish is that this is a has-been place which would have been OK if there had been development control. It is possibly irretrievable. It is a place without a soul. We live in an era where morality has been abandoned. It's so patently obvious that money rules ...

"Twelve years ago we had some lovely little arcades. They were all pulled down for duty-free shops ... Surfers has become Kings Cross by the sea."

Surfers is trying to reclaim itself. Like the Tin Man, it needs to find its heart. Especially when leading denizen Max Christmas predicts: "Surfers Paradise will be an international theme park shopping centre..."

And now, the city on the beach just might need a third miracle. This time, it's an attempt to locate a heart



Top location: Surfers Paradise caters to the world, but has the state's highest burglary rate.

Pictures: LEIGH HENNINGHAM, STEVE HOLLAND

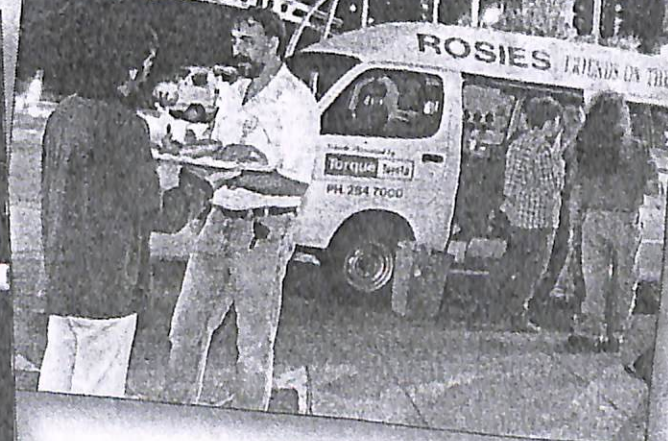
It's true Surfers is booming, with massive new hotels being built to cope with the 841,000 international visitors who flock in each year. It's just with all the cash registers ringing, no one heard all the locals leaving town, to Broadbeach and beyond. The shops in Surfers are very nearly exclusively for tourists. The locals never come in, even to shop. Many wouldn't go near the place, let alone live there. Why would they? Surfers has one supermarket.

The shops here sell metre-high stuffed koalas, opals and strip shows at the Crazy Horse. They sell an unrestrained mall culture. You can buy everything, except anything useful. "We call it T-shirt city," says veteran Gold Coast local Bob Hammond. Surfers wants a people-led recovery. "We've got to encourage Gold Coast residents to come back," says city manager Greg Young.

While growth on the Gold Coast

thefts and assaults reached crisis point, they put a police station in the middle of Cavill Mall, cracked down on nightclub owners and their less-than-strict entry policies and cleaned the place up. Or so they thought. During the past three years in the Gold Coast area, offences against person and property have both increased. Surfers Paradise heads the burglary rate for Queensland. For the large percentage of older residents, Surfers has become a salty version of Gotham. "The quality of life is changed markedly," says the Bond University report. "They orientate their existence inwards, turning their homes into fortresses and reducing the number of public activities in which they participate."

IT IS 11 o'clock on a Friday night and sheets of rain are falling in Paradise.



Two sides of the coin: Wendy and Fred Baines (left) found success, but the welfare van (above) helps many regulars.

is in Surfers. The Steakhouse a dress code. "Shorts and swimwear are required" and "After 10pm swimwear not permitted".

IS with a heavy heart that Pastor Richard Nugent hopes Surfers Paradise can be saved from the stench of moral pollution. "We live with the hope that it might turn up in this city and change it," he says.

Pastor Nugent is bleeding for a paradise that appears to be godless, Sodom and Gomorrah with a population of 15, more lethargy than energy. Yet another Victorian teenage, Pastor Nugent arrived here two years ago after 25 years in chilly Gippsland. "I had a miraculous call to come here, to change this city," he says.

From his Assembly of God church on the highway on the town's outskirts, Pastor Nugent asked the council whether he could hold a Christian festival over Easter in Cavill Mall, Surfers' best, shall we say, secular street. It was like asking permission to hold a boy scout jamboree in Kings Cross. The council gave it the nod and last year 3000 people gathered to groove to Christian rock bands.

Another Surfers miracle. The town is not new to them. Its first miracle was converting a sleepy low-rise suburb into a high-rise tourist metropolis and Australia's most successful tourist attraction. The second, given Surfers' undeniable depravity, was that people kept coming back.

And now, the city on the beach might need a third miracle. This time, it's an attempt to locate heart and soul, a more ethereal result that won't be found in any birth register.

A recent report conducted by Dr Wileman and Paul Wilson at the University revealed that 99 per cent feared the behavior of young people and 79.6 per cent said the youth crime problem was its worst in Surfers Paradise. It also found 12.4 per cent of Gold Coast residents had a weapon at home and 40.5 per cent of those had a gun.

Here's a sample of media reports from Surfers, from the Bond report: "A teenage beauty salon worker, stabbed at knife-point, said she died for her life ... An Isle of Man woman was sexually assaulted and robbed at knifepoint as she walked home from a nightclub ... A woman, 26, was raped at knifepoint after offering to help a man who claimed to have run out of petrol ... A teenage girl was left lying on Surfers Paradise beach after she was raped brutally and killed..."

The Gold Coast City Council recently appointed a taskforce and committed \$30 million over five years to "re-focus" the town, to renovate it. The town elders advised in the taskforce report, that Surfers has become a "tourist

Up here in his swish Cavill Mall office, Mr Christmas, a jovial 42-year veteran of the area, won't be swayed from his view that Surfers has got the lot. Negatives emanate from sour Victorians who can't live here. Victorians are "working their backsides off" to attract tourists but "they haven't got anything to offer, except the Grand Prix".

"It became fashionable in the '50s," he says. "Victorians created it. New South Wales had its own beaches. Wealthy Victorians brought their kids here, and those kids kept coming back."

Credit the Victorians then. But Mr Christmas is a long way away from happy with the southern media coverage his town gets. "We cannot stop the press writing up a three o'clock episode with a drunk ... That isn't the Surfers Paradise story, but that's the only story told. You're only here because you've heard a whisper there's something going on. If we had all the things the journo's wrote about we'd be a ghost town," he says. "The flats would be empty... Surfers is really catering to the world."

iating what town planners call "the doughnut effect" - decentralisation, a town without a heart, a theme park which looks very ordinary when the rides are turned off. "There are lots of examples around the world where the heart of a city dies and you have the doughnut effect," says Young. "Surfers has deteriorated. Like any property it needs renovation."

The taskforce will try to slow down the cruising petrol heads on the beach road, to improve lighting, gardens and trees and to do something about the increasingly dominant Japanese signage which locals see as a problem.

The signs, he says, have caused "a degree of criticism from foreigners" because "people want to adjust to the other culture".

The council has tried to get rid of the touts, who harass passers-by with offers of time-share properties, negative-gearing deals and pub crawls. Court action against them has failed twice in recent years. "Like any good restaurant, you have to change the menu from time to time," says Lex Bell, a long-time Gold Coast councillor and a Lifeline counsellor for 25 years.

Several years ago, when the

mail rats, the rickshaw drivers and a group of homeless people accepting a free cup of coffee and a kind word from a local welfare van.

"I'll be in a car park tonight," says a young man who calls himself Chris. "I got rugs and stuff. No probs. We move on before the police realise we're there. But we have a lot of problems with the born-again Christians trying to ram the word of Lord down our throats."

Chris is 21 and has a large gap in the middle of his mouth. "I myself, I believe in God, but every weekend!"

Chris is originally from Melbourne but left when the heat from the police became a little intense. "I did burps to supply my speed need. I got arrested, which wasn't such a bad thing. It meant I went home to my folks."

But after breaking up with his girlfriend on New Year's Eve 1993 he headed north to Surfers, where so many like him come to seek a new life. Things didn't work out for Chris. Now, he meets the welfare van here in the mall twice a week. "I come here to meet people, have a bit of a talk, have a nice cup of tea and a bit of a doughnut."

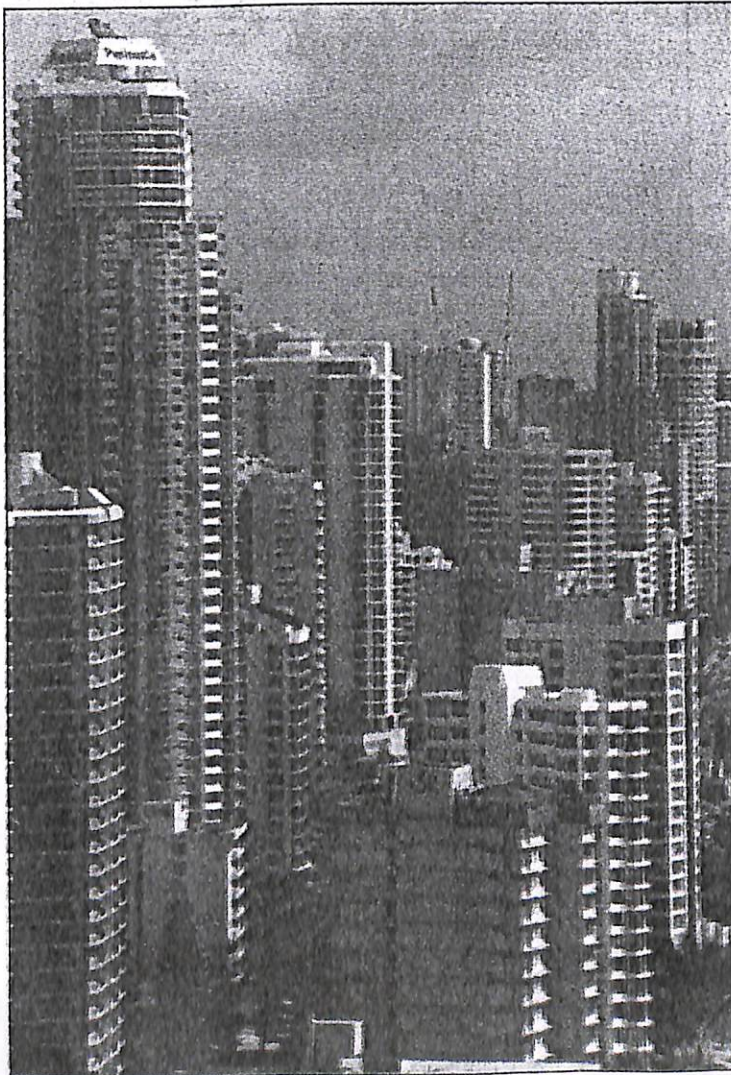
Four kilometres away, in more sedate Broadbeach, another couple of Melbourne refugees are settling into their version of Surfers. Local real estate agent Fred Baines, 66, on his way later tonight to show a Singaporean businessman a half-million-dollar apartment, and his wife Wendy, 61, are breathing the rarified air of their 10th-storey beachside unit, complete with gym, sauna, pool and 180-degree view.

For them, Surfers has been the dream turned into reality. "A friend said 'Come up and work in real estate'," Fred Baines remembers. "I said 'I know nothing about real estate', he said 'Doesn't matter. They come in, they give you some money and it's sold'."

Here on the Baines's balcony, the problems of Surfers - the drugs, the violence, the bashings and the town losing its soul - seem light years away. The city lights wink away below, Jupiter's Casino over there, the fashionable restaurants of Broadbeach just around the corner. A Victorian football match is on the TV. Bryce Courtenay's new novel sits open on the coffee table.

This is the Baines's own little slice of paradise. "And they still have the footy. We sit here watching the footy while you Melbourneans are freezing your socks off," he says. "I'll bet you \$10 it will be 28 degrees tomorrow, with three or four degrees variance. And Sunday will be the same, and Monday will be the same."

The next day, Surfers had a top temperature of 26 degrees.



Up, up and away: The high-rise face of Surfers Paradise reflects a tourist industry that brings in millions of dollars every year.



Old Vic Nash
The Veterinary
'The Vet' Surgeon

Herb
Exner
Herb
Exner

(Tom)
George Thomas Baines
Fred's dad

Lil Gadsden

Vic Nash
Jnr

Marjory

Mum
Vida's
Dad
Enfried

Vida's
Mum

Exner
Vida May
Baines

Herbert Nash
(Bow)

Married one.
of the Allan girls
Heather

Little Harold
Frederick (Frea)





Hilda (Lena) 1921
Hilda Mary Benson (Bess's theme)



Lillian Gordon & Bonnie
flower girls to Sister The Bishop
1914-15



Marion Portland & Bonnie
flower girls to Mary & Billings



Mum & Dad's House. Baker Rd. Pandemonia



Joan & Lot Blank

The Benies
Grandchildren



1921

Hilda Barnes (ne. Lane)
Barns Mother

Hilda May



1923 Tom Barnes (Barns Land)

Panna Barnes (Belinda Hall)

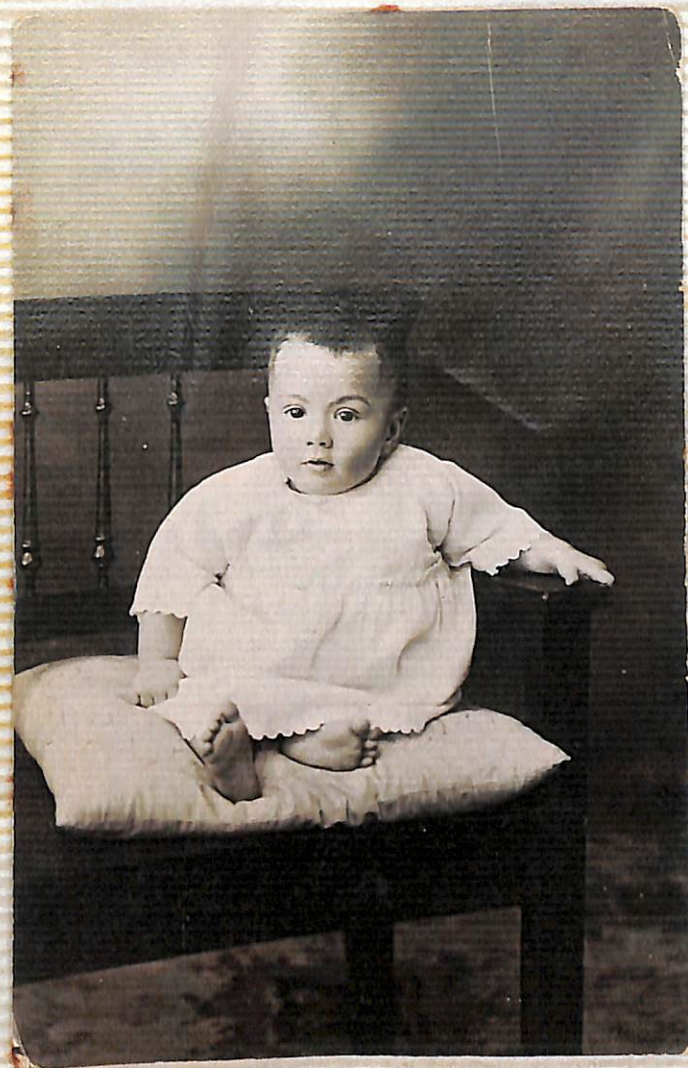


George Thomas Barnes

Belinda Barnes

Harold Frederick Barnes
Barns brother 5 mth 1930

Son of Tom & Hilda Barnes
Born 23-1-30



11 1/2 mths.



11 1/2 mths.



Fred 2 1/2 months



Fred & Stan Sutton

2 1/2 yrs.



Fred 3 1/2 yrs.



Fred



Fred 5 1/2 yrs.



1921 age 17



Hilda Brines (ne Brines)

Born 1 Pauls Bluff 1922 age 15 yrs



Granoweth house 4 Hill St



Born
40p
raw
2nd on
high



Mum, Uncle Herb + Auntie Bertha Park 1961



Brother +
Sister
Auntie Bertha
Gordon Waite

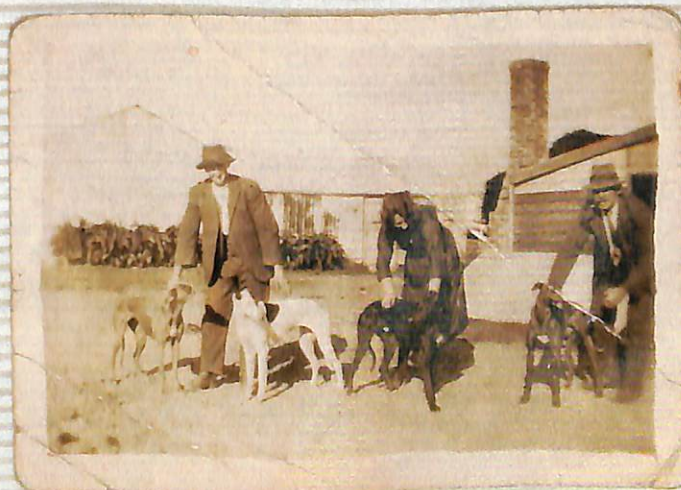
Mum,
Uncle Herb
+ Auntie Bertha
+ Uncle J. Mum



Mum, Dad, Auntie Bertha, Mum + Auntie Jane + Dad



Mum, Nelly, Mum + Dad





Anna Berthel (nee Exner)



Anna Bertha & Uncle Leo Post



aged
9 months



Bonnie May

daughter of John & Helen Donald
Born 13th Oct. 1916

Bonnie

1 yr.



8 months



2 1/2 yrs.



1 yr.



1 yr.



Bonnie 6 months



Had 9 yrs
Bon 1 yr.



2 1/2 yrs



Had 9 yrs
Bon 1 yr.



Bonnie 1 yr



Amber, Paul (Paul's sister) & Bonnie



Dad, Fred &



2 1/2 yrs



Fred 3 1/2 yrs



Fred 10
Bon 3



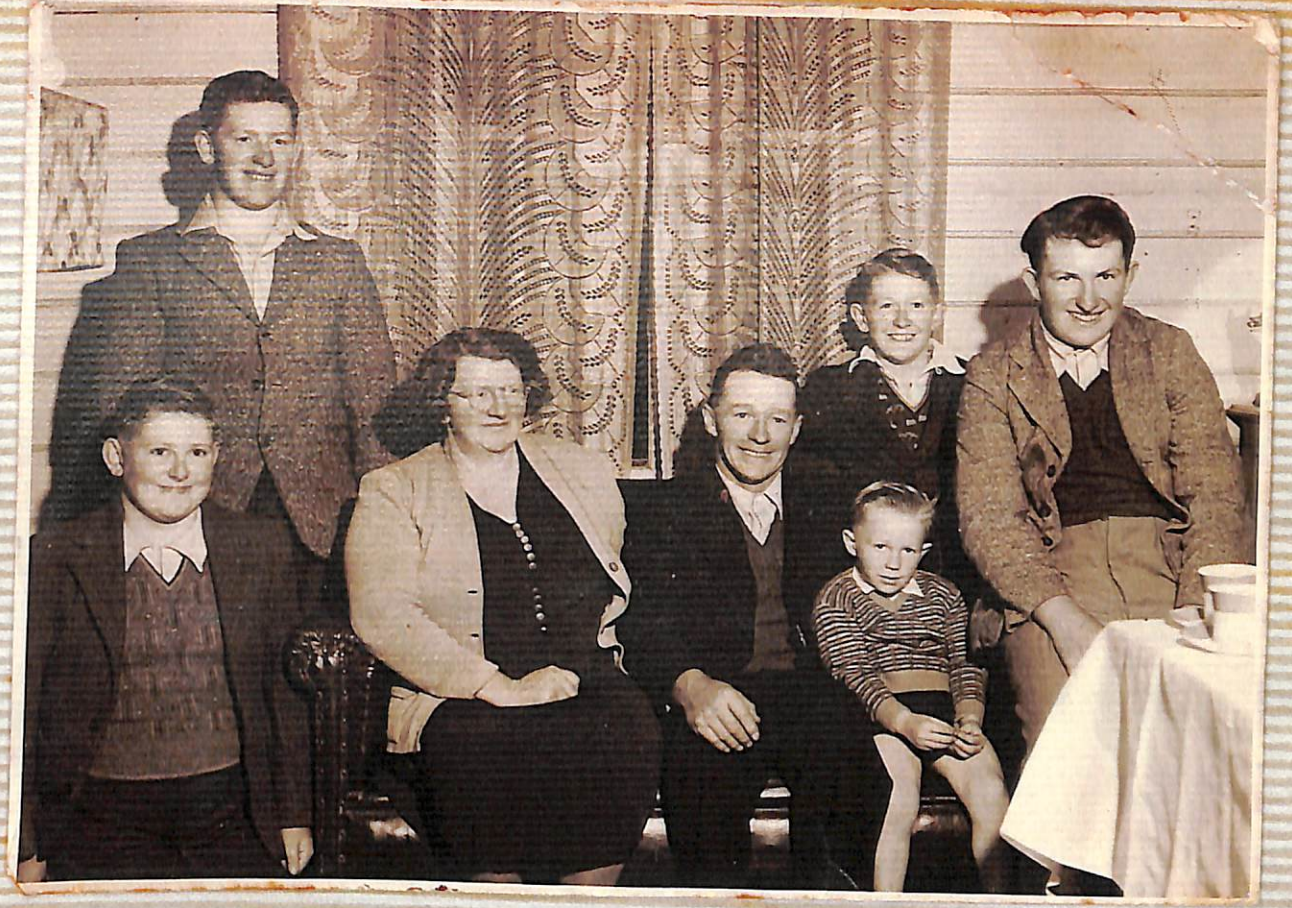
Alma, Bonnie, Ben, Fred, Helen, Stan,
Bonnie, Dot, Ray, Joan, Grace & Len

Bon & Irene Indolice
Lynn



Fred, Bonnie, Ben & Helen, Grace, Joan,
Ray, Stan, Sutton, Alma, Bonnie, Dot, Len &
Ben, Lynn

Uncle Ray, Sister Lou, Ben & family 1948.



The Sutton Boys — Stan, Ray, Ron & Graeme.





GIPPS-GATE Vol 32, No 1 FRED BAINES WITH BAND ON A RAMPAGE



"opening of a Butcher's Shop-Gold Coast
FRED ON PIANO

FRED BAINES - WITH BAND IN SURFER'S
Q'ED.

