

Geoff's story.

I was born at St Helen's Hospital in Thomas Street. Sister Morgan ran what I think was a maternity hospital, but I'm not so sure. Dr Ian Hart officiated.

When I was two, I contracted Diphtheria, and had to be sent to Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital.

Mum insisted on travelling to see me each day, and so nearby neighbours and friends, May and Jack McFarlane offered to look after my brother, Peter.

I can remember being there. There were a number of little kids together all dressed in grey flannel night shirts all running along a corridor. I remember screaming when they sat me on a wooden bench and stuck a tube down my throat. All in all I don't think I enjoyed it one bit.

After six months, a nurse advised mum to take me home as another nurse couldn't stand bed wetting and was punishing me.

So I came home. I hadn't seen Dad over that six months, and it was another six months before I accepted him. My loss!

We moved to 80 Melbourne Road when I was about three, and I was quite a handful. To the extent that Mum had me enrolled early at the Dandenong West Primary School in 1938.

The war started the next year, and ended during my last year, so my formative years were full of uniforms and war.

I gradually became an expert in aircraft identification, weaponry, Naval ships and Uniform insignia. It was all extremely exciting.

Then one day in 1945, I was out in the playground during morning break when I noticed my brother sitting on the school fence.

He was now at the Dandenong High School. I asked him why he was there, and he replied that the war was over. I didn't believe him, but he said that the boss (J L Griffiths) had given the high school the day off to celebrate.

Celebrate what, I thought.

So I did the forbidden thing and went back into the school building. One of the teachers yelled at me but I stood my ground and told her what my brother had said.

I got an immediate response.

Within minutes the headmaster announced over the loud speaker that the war was over and we could all go home.

I was devastated. What was I going to do? I had spent so much time thinking about which service I would join; whether I'd be a pilot, a commando, or on a destroyer.

Now there was nothing for me to do.

The next year I went to Dandenong High School.

And something that would affect the rest of my life happened.

Roy Barnes transferred from Bendigo High to become the science/Chemistry/sports master. And he brought with him his daughter Lesley Maureen Honeysuckle Barnes.

We ended up in the same form, and in the 4th form Mr Barnes was our form master.

As luck will happen everyone in the form related well. We still see a number of them at the re-unions and have close contact ten or so, meeting a few times each year.

My achievements were limited to being the whistle boy during the second form and Clematis house captain in year five.

Lesley, however became house captain three years in a row, and Senior Prefect during her last two years.

We used to attend dances and house parties as a group and walk home on our own at midnight. Amazing.

I left school and became a draftsman at Kelly and Lewis, and then at International Harvester. National Service then reared its head.

Every eighteen year-old had to register.

I saw an ad in the Sun which called for young men to learn to fly in the Fleet Air Arm. I thought my boyhood dreams had been answered.

I skipped work that morning and went to the recruiting office. I suddenly found that I was to have lots of physical, mental and medical tests, and if selected I'd be in the Navy. If Dad agreed!

Much to my surprise Dad signed the forms immediately; Mum wasn't so pleased.

So over the next month I had to sit exams, see Naval doctors, and front Naval panels.

Suddenly I was accepted. I asked the CPO at the recruiting depot about National Service. He told me that this would be my National Service, And after the six month period, I could whether or not I'd stay.

So on March 11th 1951, I took my suitcase to catch a bus to Flinders Naval depot and met 14 others of my

group called NAC 5. We completed a 3 months short recruit course, and then nine of us went RAAF Archerfield in Queensland where we completed a basic flying course. Five went to England for Observer training.

At the end of the course a Naval Officer explained the Naval facts of life. Within two years of that date we would all be Lieutenants, and within eight years Lieutenant Commanders. After that promotions were a battle. Most resigned after 4-6 years.

Well, I had learned to fly and fly solo, yet the Naval future didn't really appeal to me.

So I settled back home with Mom and Dad.

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Mum's old friend Rene McClellan (now Brooke) rang Mum one night to ask if I could bring some of my friends to her daughter Helen's party at East Bentleigh.

This was no problem at all. So we drove over to this party of mainly girls, and I was very pleased to find that another guest was none other than Lesley Maureen Honeysuckle Barnes. I was a gone goose.

It turned out that Les was related to the family. We talked all night and when I left we'd agreed to meet at Melbourne Teachers College, where Les was studying.

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In 1952, I found myself working at Westminster Carpets. It was a wonderful experience. With wonderful mentors like Jack Dews and Eric Davies I learned all facets of engineering. Civil, Mechanical, Electrical, Hydraulic and Nuclear. The latter was the one that was most interesting.

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In 1954 Lesley and I were engaged and we were married in the Methodist Church in Dandenong on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1956 by Rev Clifford Blainey. We moved into our home at 73 Jones Road after our honeymoon.

Our first child, Susan Jane arrived in August 1957, and our son, Anthony Peter arrived in September 1959.

After a lapse of four years, Janet Claire arrived in August 1963.

During 1959 – 1961 Westminster Carpets built a plant to house the world's largest privately operated irradiation plant. The irradiation source was a massive amount of the isotope Cobalt 60. Basically it was to kill the Anthrax virus, which had already killed one of our employees, and affected another who survived.

It was successful and ran for many years. Additionally it provided a sterilisation service to the medical supplies industry.

Our children went to my old school. The Dandenong West primary School, and later to Dandenong High School.

Les began teaching again at Springvale High School, Mentone Girls Grammar and finally St Margaret's in Berwick.

I stayed in the Floor Coverings Manufacturing business for some time, and when the children were independent, we moved to Upper Beaconsfield where we both retired.

Our children are all happily married and have given us six wonderful grandsons, and one absolutely gorgeous granddaughter.

One afternoon Susan visited us with the news that she had breast cancer. She was to go through months of chemotherapy, and radiation treatment – all to no avail.

With her husband, Colin, we nursed her with the help of District and Palliative care nurses until we lost her on January 10<sup>th</sup> 2009.

After twenty seven years in Upper Beaconsfield – we were in Jones Road for about the same time – we decided we needed to move.

After some time we found a small gated community in Berwick with the added bonus of having friends we grew up with in the same area.

Graeme and Jan Thomson; Ian and Dawn Wilson.

We are totally settled there and will stay there until our kids decide to move us!

And we have just been blessed with a Great Grandson – James Cameron!