

The 1950's

Disregard the title for a while as I can't resist putting in some prior history!!

As you know my siblings were brought up in the Mallee region and because of Dad's deteriorating health due to encephalitis and Parkinson's disease the family shifted to Dudley Rd Wonga Park around 1927. I arrived in 1932 - actually born at St Georges Hospital, Kew. The following year, for family schooling requirements we moved to Dandenong. This was to a farm on the east side of Gladstone Rd on what is now the start of Menzies Ave approximately 500 metres north of Heatherton Rd. The house was situated at the back of rows and rows of fowl pens - the remains of a failed American company venture and known as the Mammoth Egg Farm. I have no recollection of living in this place as we left there when I was 3 years old. Next door to this farm a very large house built in the 1920's was later tenanted by the Wilkinson family and we supplied them with milk from around 1937 until 1948. I took over the daily deliveries from Phyllis when she started work. That house is still standing at 151 Gladstone Rd and now known as Trenleigh Lodge.

The next move was to McPhee Rd (later named McFees Rd) which now goes through from Gladstone Rd to Stud Rd but when we were there it was an unmade road and cut off in the middle by farm paddocks. From the Gladstone Rd end there were only two houses. One about 200 metres from Gladstone Rd (near Effron St) and our place a further 200 metres down the road (close to Kallay St). The only other house in the street was a double storey house which had access only from the Stud Rd end. This was the home of Sir Harold Luxton who we never had the pleasure of even setting eyes on. My recollection is that he owned or was a major part of MacEwans hardware which then had only a Melbourne store. In the 70's or 80's that home was purchased and used as a retirement home run by a chap called Fletcher who had earlier purchased Triggs Langhorne St house for the same purpose.

At the commencement of the school year in 1938, aged 5, I started at the East School in Foster St. At that time to become a primary teacher the only requirement after completing High School was to attend Teachers College in Melbourne for one year but the minimum age for attending college was 18 years. Edna and many others completed High School at 16 or 17 and were required to bide their time as an assistant teacher under direction at a primary school until 18 years old. Edna was in this role at the East school in 1938 and would "dink" me 5 kms to school on her bike. On my second day at school I was shifted to Grade 2. Big mistake. The following year, because of overcrowding at the East School I was zoned to Dandenong West school for grades 3 - 6 and then to Dandy High in 1943.

In 1939 an opportunity arose for renting a farm closer to the town, church and schools and we moved to a 4 hectare place in Heatherton Rd near the end of James St. We also rented the 2 hectare paddock over the road where in your time St Luke's church had been relocated to that area and St James village built. This rental paddock adjoined the house which later became Pine Lodge. The Heatherton Rd place I remember well as I was there from the age of 6 to 20. Commencing work from this address with the SEC on 16th February 1948 at age 15.

In 1951 the large farm on the corner of Heatherton and Gladstone Rds which adjoined our property was purchased by the Housing Commission. This influenced our landlord to consider selling in the winter of 1952. At this time I was in National Service and Dad was very ill so he gave us until the end of the year to shift. The front half of the property was then subdivided, the main street for the subdivision named Brunet St which was the landlord's name. The back half of the farm he sold to the Education Dept. It became Greenslopes Primary school but is now named Emmerson School.

When the farm stock was sold late in 1952 we were able to buy a block of land at 155 Stud Rd and while the new house was being built we again shifted temporarily to Gladstone Rd. This time still on the north side of

Leatherton Rd but only about 100 metres from the corner. This property, on the west side of Gladstone Rd. was about 1 hectare being the remaining land of a larger farm. Our house name "Lyndale" later became the designated name for the substantial district which you would know of and which developed in that area in the mid fifties. By the end of 1953 we had occupied the new house in Stud Rd.

Going back now to my six months National Service at Point Cook in the winter of 1952. It was quite easy to hitch a ride to Melbourne on the Geelong Rd particularly when in uniform and I was able to get home on Saturday evening of one week and Friday evening every other week so did not miss out on going to many dances. Returning to Pt Cook every Sunday night was even easier. Train to Spencer St then a free Airboard bus back to camp at 10.30 pm.

One weekend in July after it had been raining for some days the roads in Dandenong were flooded and on the Sunday night returning to Point Cook we had to detour considerably to get to the Dandenong train station. In the Herald the following day I noticed a photo of a most attractive girl having been rescued by an Army duck and spending the night with her cat in the Dandy Town Hall. You have probably seen the photo. Because of the small Dandenong population at the time I figured that I knew by sight all the girls, so out of curiosity kept the photo and by coincidence Mum was a typist at the SEC when I returned to work there in September.

Our first date was 3rd January 1953 at Box Hill Town Hall. I had been going there usually monthly for the past 3 years and liked the style of the band. The guitarist and the bass player did a lot of vocal duets which was very unusual in those days and I later modelled my band on the same basis. Leader of the band at Box Hill was Ron Richards who to my mind was then an old fellow. Got to know him well over the years and you may remember he came to my 70th and played violin. He was 93 then so would have been only in his early 40's when I first saw him.

A few months into our relationship Pop Davis decided that he would go to Perth on his own where the wages were better. He would then buy a house and come back for Mum and Alan and they would all go to WA. At that time the Catholic / Protestant carry on was still quite evident and "mixed" marriages were to be avoided. Both sides were equally to blame for this. My mother had told me when I was 16 years to not get involved with Catholic girls and even frowned on me going to the monthly "New Australian" dances because it was run by the Catholic church! Mum copped it from Pop Davis telling her that if she continued life with me she would be bringing up little Methodist B's. Unbelievable, but true for that era and prior. Another example was that my drummer and his wife invited to our wedding had to abstain from entering the Methodist church for the ceremony. Later, of course, Alan married in the Anglican church and Pop remarried in the Russian Orthodox and there was never another word on religion from him after our engagement night.

Before Pop left for Perth mid 1953 he arranged for Mum and Alan to board with an old lady who lived almost opposite where they had been renting on the Princes Highway. We continued our relationship for the next year with unspoken future because of the religion situation and the pending shift by Mum to WA. But mid 1954 we discussed it thoroughly and became unofficially engaged. There were two reasons for not announcing our engagement. I had little money for a ring and I also wanted to ask permission from Pop as was the general procedure in those days.

Out of the blue as usual, Pop turned up unannounced late July 1954 ready to get things packed up and leave for WA in a couple of days. So I arranged to speak with him on the first night. Of course he had no objection until he asked the question as to which church we were to be married in and then he was less than happy. By the next day he was reconciled to the fact that Mum would be staying and when he came to say goodbye to Mum at the SEC she said to me that she did not expect to see him again.

Two years prior to this I had invested with a mate in tents which we hired out for camping or set them up for functions. I saw that as an opportunity to get some cash for the engagement ring and my friend bought out my

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share of the venture. Mum designed her engagement ring and we took the drawing to a small jeweller in Melbourne to make it. At that time Marion was living in a unit near the High School. Ian had just been born and Graeme was in residence at a Melbourne hospital for long periods at a time so Mum shifted in with Marion until the end of the year.

Following our engagement Mum secured a position as stenographer at Perkins Diesel Engines on Princes Highway Doveton. After cashing in her SEC Super and accumulated leave we were able to buy our first car, a 20 year old Vauxhall for \$400. Equivalent to ten weeks wages for me which demonstrates the extraordinary cost of cars at the time.

In the early 1950's due mainly to returned servicemen building houses and the big increase in migrants, keeping up the supply of building blocks was a problem. To make land available more quickly Councils were passing subdivisions on the basis of paddocks being surveyed only. No roads, no services and building permits were issued immediately. There were many so called "heartache" streets in the outer suburbs where at times in the winter the streets were impassable for any transport.

Going back to when I was 18, we heard of a land subdivision at Glen Waverley. My mother had never had the opportunity to own land and insisted that we purchase one block each (Mum, Edna and myself) in Home St which later had a name change to Bogong Ave. At least the road had been bulldozed and the following year electricity passed the blocks. Purchase price of each block was \$150 being approximately 4 weeks wages for me. Bought on the basis of 1/3 deposit and the balance payable over 2 or 3 years. What a contrast to now between these two assets. A second hand car costing 10 weeks salary and a block of land (even allowing that it was totally unserviced) equated to 4 weeks salary.

In 1954 I formed my first band "Arcadians" with Marion as pianist and by the latter part of the year we were getting regular work. However, as Marion was shifting to Port Melbourne the following year, the young trumpeter was starting at Melbourne Conservatorium and the drummer wishing to retire we made New Year Eve 1954 our last hurrah at Upper Beaconsfield. This was our wedding eve and Marion as Matron of Honour went home at midnight, her place as pianist being taken by the drummer's wife and we played on until 2 am arriving home an hour later. The wedding was at 3pm and a small reception was held at 155 Stud Rd for 20 people in total. Since leaving for WA we had not heard from Pop but Mum ensured that he was sent an invitation to the wedding even though she knew he would not come. After a week long honeymoon at Warburton we lived at 155 Stud Rd for eighteen months. As far as bandwork was concerned in 1955 I just did a few fill in gigs and in late 1956 teamed up with Laurie Davis, piano, and Colin Basset, drums, as "Night Owls" until the late 60's with Morings "Goldtones".

Just prior to our marriage I arranged to purchase my mother's block in Glen Waverley which then gave us a double frontage. Edna had by then resold her block. So began preparations for building a house later in the year. It was necessarily later in the year because not only did we have no money after the wedding but still owed the photographer \$90. So for the first half of 1955 we saved all we could and spent many weekends clearing the double block. Our land and adjoining blocks had at one time been covered with large gum trees which had been cut down about one metre above ground level. Over the years the suckers of the stumps had regrown to 5 - 10 metres. In between these trees acacia bushes and ti-tree well over head height covered every square metre. Removing the large stumps by digging down around them until I could get a swing with an axe was slow work but cost nothing. Chain saws were still to be invented commercially. Mum at that time changed jobs as a stenographer to Alex Scott a very old firm of Stock Agents in Lonsdale St Dandenong.

By mid year 1955 we had house plans approved. 12 squares, 2 bedroom with a passage to an outside door as a provision for a 3rd bedroom. At that time it was rare for banks to lend money to individual parties. Hence, Cooperative Housing schemes were formed in groups of say 30 or 40 people. A bank would then make a loan of say \$300000 to the Coop which would be responsible for the administration by an accountant and a Board

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of Directors made up mainly from local businessmen. There was a capped amount for borrowing - with our co op it was \$4800 and the members' equity had to be no less than 33%. Mortgage insurance was not in vogue then so we had to get the building to a value of \$1600 before we could get a drawdown. The estimated cost of our house was around \$6400 but the final figure was over \$7000.

From our own savings and by borrowing from every member of the family we were in a position to start building in July 1955. Early costs were not great. I had an arrangement with Maurie McLeish to do the carpentry work. Maurie lived in Heatherton Rd just down from Red Rooster and worked for a local builder. In those days builders employees were required to multi task - set out, dig and pour foundations, stumpholes etc as well as the carpentry work of framing and fixing. We worked every Saturday digging to be ready for a bricky to put in the foundation brickwork. Every bit was done by hand except for the foundation concrete when we hired a concrete mixer for the day. Apart from that occasion there was not one motorised tool used for the complete building. Not even an electric drill or electric saw.

I had planned for Maurie to work daily over his Christmas break when we could work continually on the house frame excluding the pitched roof. To pay for this I took my annual 3 weeks leave in November and worked at Gartsides Canning factory in Dingley. Plenty of work there in the pea season as well as tomatoes, asparagus etc. Backbreaking manual work for a clerk but I struck it lucky after a couple of days when the factory manager (one of the Gartsides) discovered that I knew the local area well. From then on I got breaks every day to drive his ute into Dandenong or beyond for spare parts or even personal errands for him.

There was no water service at the Glen Waverley block. We had three neighbours all building at the same time and the four of us decided to combine resources and bring up a private line of town water for our needs. This entailed digging a trench 400 metres alongside an unmade road and laying our galvanised pipe. The Authority (little Hitlers) stipulated that the pipe had to be laid 450 mm underground. We started digging a trench one Sunday and had dug only a few yards by lunch time. It was then that we made an executive decision to disregard the Authority and had the farmer next door come in with his tractor and dig a furrow deep enough to cover the pipe and we heard no more from the Board Of Works.

Because of the large numbers of dwellings being built, bricks were in short supply for non registered builders. The most popular kiln, Glen Iris bricks was not taking orders, Oakleigh brickworks were quoting 12 months delay and we were able to get an order in with a Brunswick yard with a 4 month delay but cash with the order. Bricks arrived around Easter 1956 and while they were being laid, by one bricky - no labourer - we had a break for about 5 weeks. After we laid the floor boards, the plasterers moved in and it was ready for fixing out - skirting, architraves and doors and Arthur Shimmen installed the kitchen cupboards - eventually. In those last few weeks I worked with Maurie both Saturday and Sunday and we had the place ready for occupation in July 1956, exactly one year from starting. The whole exercise was an invaluable learning experience for me.

We shifted in with not many creature comforts. Floorboards untreated, no inside painting, no fences, paths, garage or lawn. I had put together DIY wooden slats louver blinds throughout the house and of course Mum attended to the curtains. Furniture was meagre and basic. The dining room had the customary laminex & chrome setting. In the lounge room a 3 piece lightweight suite included a 2 seater couch. We used only Br 2 which had a built in robe with the only furniture being an iron bed base resting on bricks. BR1 was vacant still waiting on the wall of wardrobe which Arthur was making. We calculated that with both of us working for the next two years we could pay back the family loans, do basic finishing of the house and then be in a financial situation to begin a family.

Our first concern was to get the floors done in late 1956. Over a few nights I would be punching the nails while Mum followed up with the coloured putty mix. I then hired a floor sander and the whole house had to be sanded with three grades of sandpaper. Starting after work on one Friday until midnight, Saturday until time for cricket and resuming that night and most of Sunday. The belt sanders then were very heavy and awkward

but the worst part was doing the corners and edging of each room and passage with a smaller sander. No shaped sanders available as there are now. Just a circular disc sander which left score marks unless extra careful and no dust bag. I had a stocking over my face for protection. A contractor then came in to put on two coats of Estapol and we put lino down in the kitchen, laundry and bathroom.

By 1957 the Vauxhall succumbed to the hard work it had been put through. Firstly from the hauling of all the hardware for the house from Dandenong in a massive and heavy trailer which I had bought from a market gardener and secondly negotiating the last 400 metres to the block through great potholes. The car required major transmission repairs and tyres. We fixed these items in order to sell the car but lost most of our purchase price. Not having a car created a problem as we had been using it to travel to Dandy for work and there was no other way to get across to work. I transferred to the Melbourne office of the SEC and Mum got a typing position at an Insurance Co in the city and we commuted by train. Luckily our hours of work coincided. After 3 months Mum obtained work as a typist at an engineering works in Aristoc Rd Glen Waverley. It was less than a kilometre from our house to the factory and Mum was able to walk down an unmade road and across a paddock. She remained with that employer until late into her first pregnancy.

By mid 1957 we had received two letters from Pop, the second one questioning the arrival of grandchildren so we sent him a return airfare in advance to come over for Christmas. The main thing to do by Christmas was to paint the entire inside of the house (2 coats) and have Arthur complete the ongoing saga with the BR1 wardrobe and pelmets for all windows. Plastic paint as it was called at that time was a fairly recent innovation and the odour was very strong for some weeks after painting. This acrylic paint did not come in gloss so any woodwork was still done in oil paint (3 coats) which of course took much longer to apply because of the drying time. In December Mum had started her morning sickness and at any time of the day the paint smell set her off. Poor Mum had a system in the afternoons coming home from work. She would open the front door, hold her nose and rush through to the back door and be sick on the back lawn because of the paint odour after the house had been shut up for the day.

Pop was to arrive at Essendon airport very early on the Sunday before Christmas. The day before I called at Arthur's workshop after cricket and the pelmets still had not been finished so we worked on this for a couple of hours and arrived home at around 9 pm. We fitted the pelmets, Arthur did the last of the wardrobe which looked magnificent and he left at midnight. I got the first train in the morning to the airport to meet the plane but Pop suggested and paid for a taxi back to Glen Waverley. We had a great two weeks with Pop but unfortunately Mum's enjoyment was affected by her daily sickness. But it was all worthwhile when Lin arrived.

I was still travelling to Melbourne daily and would have preferred to work in Dandenong. We then had discussions as to the future. As I worked there, played sport there and our band jobs revolved around Dandy should we move back. Another consideration was the expense we would shortly incur to put on a 3rd bedroom and possibly a playroom. As a result, when in 1959 an estate was being auctioned near Stud Rd we decided to buy a block. I discovered 15 years later that it was a development of Mr Magid's brother-in-law. My mother and Mum went to the auction and purchased 2 blocks in Cornelius St, opposite each other and situated 3 blocks in from Heatherton Rd. We decided to hold the block on the high side of the road to build on and sold the second block within a year.

In 1958/59 we were able to complete a lot of our outstanding building matters. Fences, paths and garden and build a single garage attached to the house. With 6 weeks to go for Kep's birth and no car Marion kindly offered us her Mini Minor. This was a great help and then with the surety of regular band work we put a deposit on the red Hillman wagon and took delivery of it close to Kep's birth. Having transport meant that I could transfer back to Dandenong SEC.

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We put the house on the market I think around Easter 1960 and sold about mid year. Prior to this we calculated that we could not afford to build the house that we wanted in Cornelius St so we would build a smaller house in the interim. Some interim - 8 years at Lee St!! We retained the Cornelius St block until after we went to Perth. You may remember our Cornelius St neighbour coming to see us at Morley to buy the block for use as part of his garden. The money from that block went a long way to pay for the 2 blocks in Durham Crt.

After the sale of the Glen Waverley house in 1960 and Mum pregnant with Ash we rented a little weatherboard house right opposite the East School at 5 New St Dandenong. This is where Lin took little Kep for a crawl down the footpath towards the tuckshop. We had engaged a builder for the Lee St house and I only did the floor surfacing, painting, garage, driveway and fences. We moved there just before Ash was born.

For all of you Lee St would be your earliest recollections and you can continue on with your own history from that time.

Love Dad XXX

28/3/15.

Written
by Noel Dawson

(Cornelius St - in Dandenong)
(Lee St - in Noble Park)