

WHITEHORSE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC



Name of Interviewees: Bob and Barb Gardiner

Name of Interviewers: Margaret Graham and Giselda Bannister

Date of Recording of Interview: 15th November 2019

Interview took place at the Gardiner's home in Nunawading

Focus of the Interview:

Living in the Nunawading area from the 1960s to the present day.

Interviewer: Tell us a little bit about where you grew up, if you wouldn't mind, for a bit of background.

Barb: Well I was born in Port Melbourne, the family had been there for quite a long time, then when I met Bob we came up here! (laughs).

I: What about you, Bob?

Bob: I grew up in Preston, [in] an athletic family. My dad was an Australian Walk Champion and good runner and my mum was a sprinter and my sister was also a sprinter, so---

I: -- you had a wonderful example! Feeling tired already! (laughter). So that begs the question: Port Melbourne and Preston – how did you meet?

Bob: We met in Bendigo. It was Easter there, a midnight dance that started at midnight because it was Good Friday it couldn't start earlier. It was supposed to go until three am but a fight broke out, I had a couple of dances with Barb and I asked her if I could take her home and she said, "No, sorry." As we were leaving, my mate was walking out with this young woman who turned out to be Barb's friend so we ended up all together.

Barb: And we stuck together.

Bob: We did.

I: And how did you get to go from Port Melbourne to Bendigo and ditto [to Bob], was it through church or, for the dance?

Barb: Oh, no, my friend used to live there and ---

I: So Easter Holidays---

Barb: Easter Holidays.

Bob: They had a parade and all that sort of stuff---

I: They still do – my sister in law lives in Bendigo so they still do, yes,---

Bob: My mates had a cousin there, so I stayed with them, so a similar thing [to Barb's situation].

I: And, Barb, if I can backtrack a little, what were your family doing in Port Melbourne? What did your father do?

Barb: Oh, he worked for Kitchen's [Kitchen & Sons Pty Ltd, manufacturers of soap and detergents], for a long, long time and then he went to the places on the wharf and so, he loved going onto the wharf. That was just at the end of the war---

I: Ah, yes, yes, there would have been a lot going on.

Barb: And for some reason, the boss, the man there was going to put him out, he'd been there for years [Bob clarifies, "that was at Kitchen's"], yes, Kitchen's, so it was the best thing that happened to him.

I: Yes, well, sometimes things are meant to be like that, aren't they?

Bob: He was the union shop steward at Kitchen's Box Factory and they had a bit of a blue with the boss and so Bill went and joined, became a foreman on the wharf-

Barb: He did everything there---

Bob: Got a lot of friends a job there.

Barb: Everyone he knew he put them on the wharf.

I: And a busy time at that time [1940s]

Barb: Yes, that was a good thing. We hadn't owned a house, and then once dad got that [job on the wharf], we got a house.

I: So it worked out for the best?

Barb: Yes, yes

I: So the previous boss not working out, worked out for the best afterwards.

Barb: Yes, yes, it was.

I: Oh, thank you for that. So we'll just ask a few other little background details about your schooling. Now you must have gone to school in Port Melbourne, did you?

Barb: No, I went to Middle Park Primary, so that was good and from there I went off to, what do they call that place, MacRob---

I: MacRobertson Girls High School – I know it well! (laughs) Excellent, a wonderful school.

Barb: Yes, especially for people like me, you know, from the Port Melbourne kids, it was good. It was excellent.

I: And what about you, Bob?

Bob: I went to East Preston Primary and which is still there, it's called something else now [Barb interjects: "We found it the ----"], and then onto Preston Tech and that was it for education.

I: And when you left school what paths did you take, what work did you take up once you left school?

Barb: Port was doing all sorts of things so I went around to quite a big place [Bob interjects: "Glazebrooks"], no, not that one, the one before that.

Bob: Glazebrooks was the first one.

Barb: No, (laughs). I used to catch the works bus, the people who worked for them, they'd take them up – it was quite a little way----

I: They had a bus or something?

Barb: Yes, so that was alright for a while, quite a few years then I went to Glazebrooks--

I: Oh, paint, Glazebrooks paints, I remember.

Barb: The other one, Camms Jams---

I: Oh, paint and jam--- (laughter)

Bob: Monbulk Preserves

I: Oh, right, yes, yes, I remember Monbulk---

Barb: Yes, they were nice people. I worked there [and] when I got married I still was with them. We were staying with mum and dad when we got married and so that was quite good.

I: And Bob, what were you doing?

Bob: Started off as a locksmith and then moved into the hardware side of things and worked for a small company that had a small hardware shop and did some locksmithing and gunsmithing and I went to New Zealand for a while to race and work and when I came back I sold motorbikes for a while, motorbikes and boats at Milledge Brothers and then things got a bit tough so I, they said, "the future's looking grim here, why don't you see what you can find out," so I started up with Yencken Hardware and Glass and I stayed there til I was about forty or so.

Barb: And they were very nice people---

Bob: They were, yeah. While I was away, travelling with Olympics, etc, they paid my fares, sorry, paid my wages, I should say, yes, so Barb had money come in—

I: Yes, wonderful. Yenckens were up in Ringwood, weren't they?

Bob: Yes, I worked at Ringwood for quite a while.

I: So was it working at Yencken then, that brought you into the area, this area?

Bob: No, no, Yencken were in South Melbourne at that stage and they hadn't opened that branch. No, we were just looking for a house and bought a speculation block in Thomastown for a while which we sold and got a deposit for a house and started looking round Doncaster, Mitcham, that area and then we found this Schwerkolt land. So the builder who bought some of this Schwerkolt land was Latch and Rippengale [Pty Ltd] and they built May Court and Irene Crescent and they were all their homes and some in Wattle [Valley] Road and so they built a really good house and we were very happy.

I: And, generally, what was the area like when you moved in - so this was a new area?

Bob: Yeah, lots of orchards around, cherries and there was a lemon orchard in Whitehorse Road until quite recently.

I: Yes, our land was Petty's Orchard, further down, so that would have been one of the ones [orchards] further down from Schwerkolt. And Barb, what was it like for you living in this new area, raising a family?

Barb: Oh, well, ---

I: Lots of other young mothers around you?

Barb: Oh, yes, there were. When Bob was at work and we'd just got things and mum and dad had come up and I had Kelly, our daughter, and I hadn't bought a spoon thing so that Kelly could be fed and I went to the lady on the corner and she gave it to me, well she's been a friend ever since. We don't see [each other] too much but we've always been close so that was lovely.

Bob: We were the second house in the court so—

I: What year was that, Bob?

Bob: Christmas of sixty one, sixty two, so Kelly was six months. We lived in Port [Melbourne] for three years when we first got married and the house was finished at Christmas sixty one and---

Barb: I had to go to Anglesea---

Bob: Barb said, "We've got to go to Anglesea before we move in", so---

I: For a holiday?

Barb: Yes.

Bob: Barb had been camping there since she was sixteen.

**I: Oh, really, you were a camper too?
And did you think with children coming along, those camping days
might have been over?**

Barb: Oh, no!

I: "Oh, no!" [she says], she's a stalwart camper, I can tell! (laughter)

Bob: They were well set up in the camp area, a massive tent, as big as this r room, partitioned off, beds everywhere, a kerosene fridge.

Barb: We still go to Anglesea but my sister and her husband have got a house so she's wonderful, oh, they're both wonderful, everybody comes at Christmas, we all ----

**I: Wonderful, you still get your fix of sea air. (laughter).
Now, you've both been involved with Whitehorse Historical Society for
some period of time, how did that come about?**

Barb: Oh, 'cos we lived near there.

I: And it was just general interest? You saw it and you---?

Bob: Yeah, what happened was that Brandenburg was going to fence the cottage [Schwerkolt Cottage], he was a city engineer with the City of

Nunawading it was then. He had this plan to fence the whole enclosed area and charge everybody to come in and out---

Barb: And there's lots of people used to get married at the cottage, yes---

Bob: Our next door neighbour, John Kirkman he went around with some lime and marked out the whole area where this fence was going to go and called all the neighbours up and said, "This is what they're going to do". So Barb and he and Wendy Harrison, she was a local painter who lived nearby and she was a member of the society and they started the Friends of Schwerkolt Cottage and the council plan got the flick in the finish because of these people---

I: Well done, well done (laughter)

Bob: And then Barb joined the society.

I: What sort of year are we talking about here?

Bob: Ninety four.

I: Oh, quite late [recently], that's in my time, I should remember this. Yes, because we've lived in the area a long time and I remember the pony club at Ringwood used to agist horses on Schwerkolt's land too up until the eighties. Oh, interesting- and politics! (laughter) And what sort of state was the cottage in at that time, 'cos there's been various repair works and things over the years---?

Bob: The council bought it in sixty five, I think it was. When we moved in, there were tenants in there and it was a bit of a mess and they [the council] condemned it and they were going to knock it down. The tenants were moved out and our kids used to go and play in the area and one of our neighbours, Bill Sewart, the city engineer, he lived up in Deep Creek Road, and was very involved in it. Anyway, the council bought it ----

I: And onward we go! And then Barb's role at the [Whitehorse] Historical Society – what did you do at the Historical Society?

Barb: Oh, I was a member and we started making nice things for the kids, when the garden comes out, it's beautiful, I suppose you've all seen that, it's gorgeous, yes, [everyone verbally agrees]. I've got photos of kids----

I: **-pottering in the garden.**

Barb: [The Historical Society] It was small at first but it keeps getting bigger and bigger ---

I: **-more people involved—**

Barb: Yes.

Bob: What happened about the same time, Barbara Rogalski, who's a painter as you know, one of her paintings up there, she proposed that first garden party and Barb sort of started with her organising the Wisteria, it became the Wisteria Day in October when the wisteria was out and then it got moved because the Council wanted it in September, (laughter), which was fine, but the wisteria had finished.

I: **So you were very fundamental, you were.
Did I understand that you were the secretary at one stage?**

Barb: Yes, I was.

Bob: Three years.

I: **Not an easy job, Barb.**

Barb: No! I can remember one time it must have been when I first started and our lady [the president], Valda, [Bob clarifies: Valda Arrowsmith], she said, "You shouldn't do that with- you change it because it had all been sold cos ---

Bob: The council had done something?

Barb: Yes, yes, and lots of people came in and said they'd do things, I mean it had been there for ages oh, well they weren't there for ages, I don't know what they did, anyway, sorry-----

I: **No, not at all. It sounds like you were being given orders how to tighten everything up.**

Barb: Yes, yes.

I: **As councils do--- (laughter). It sounds like you had a lot of people coming in who weren't actually very useful, would that be [correct]?**

Barb: Ah, no-

I: **No? oh, okay.. (laughs).**

Bob: The council were generally excellent, occasionally had their little bright ideas.

I: **Well, one does (laughs).. has an agenda.**

Bob: Valda was President at the time, Valda Arrowsmith, and then she, the rule was then you had to stand down after two or three years, I can't remember, so Barb Keen became the President and Barbara Rogalski became the Treasurer, so we had three Barbs.

I: **And Bob, we understand that you had some major part to play in the big bushfires, was it 1964 or thereabouts?**

Bob: No it was a week after we moved in---

I: **Oh, 1961!**

Bob: The first lot was sixty one/sixty two.

I: **The first lot, I gather that means there was more than one lot---**

Bob: Well, it came and went, oh, yeah, there were earlier bushfires of course in the eighteen hundreds, early nineteen hundreds, what have you but yeah, the sixty two bushfires, they started way up in Coldstream, sorry, further up than that, came through over Loughnan's Hill and it came and then died and then I went to work and then came home and [then the fire was] happening again, and we're up on Loughnan's Hill with wet bags. Fortunately, it pretty much stopped there so----

I: Pardon my ignorance but I'm not familiar with Loughnan's Hill, where are we talking about?

Bob: Okay, in the society [building], the hill you're looking at to the north is Loughnan's Hill- Deep Creek Road becomes Loughnan's Road.

I: Oh, does it. We don't know who Loughnan was, do we know?

Bob: I don't recall----

Barb: I think it might have been the owners.

I: It could have easily been, Barb, or the developer or something, 'cos my children went to school on Loughnan's Hill, Ringwood Heights, so yeah---

Okay, and so then there was another bushfire after that in sixty four that came from Eltham way, I think and crossed the highway [Maroondah]?

Bob: Mm, no, the sixty two one crossed the highway—

I: Oh, sorry, I'm confused

Bob: I don't think there was one in sixty four, yeah it sort of avoided us and burnt Antonio Park a little bit, it burnt Mr Antonio's building or at least one and then yeah, jumped the highway and then, yeah--- 'cos that side of the highway was just being established---

I: Well, when we moved in we still had burnt trees on our land down there. I think you've touched on this already but thinking about the Whitehorse Historical Society and all the things it's done over the years, what do you see as its main achievements, it's main highlights, achievements is a bit formal?

Bob: The garden party being ongoing---

Barb: The one that's also it's been wonderful, yes----

Bob: Because of the council's help and being accredited with Museums Victoria Australia, getting the implements shed and all the extra bits we've got, that made a big difference. All the stuff in the implements

shed was in that wired area at the back which is now the tile display so it was just jam packed, there was no laundry then, that came later, so it went back into that area and so all that went into the implements shed. I've just found my drawings with all the (sound of paper being unfolded) little bits of shelves, ploughs, whatever---

I: Oh, wow, well make sure there's a copy of those ---

Bob: I've just going to take 'em up to give them to Harley 'cos he's now doing that---

I: Yes, exactly, wonderful!

Bob: So that was the layout for the – we got two new showcases which was the wedding dress showcase and the one next to it and we had to fit them in so I had to relay all that showroom and then lay out the implements shed in the same way and work out the plans----

I: What a lot of work! (laughs)

Barb: Yes!

Bob: And then the laundry and all that which came later. And Maurie Wyatt and I were the two, because Harley wasn't there then, so we did most of the lifting and shifting and planning and -----

I: And one other thing that we're probably both a bit curious about and it's got absolutely nothing to do with Whitehorse Historical Society, and in a way you've already touched on it, because Bob you said your family was very involved in sport and your father was a walker and your mother was a sprinter and we believe that you have had a career in walking as well, as in a sporting career, can you tell us a bit about that?

Bob: Yes, we, look, Barb's pulling the medals out! (laughs)---

I: What a good idea! Oh, just one or three! Barb's just pointed out to us a glass topped table with all Bob's medals and ribbons it – what a good way to display them. Yes, go on, Bob.

Bob: Well, I started racing in fifty three and still going, sort of, (laughter), yes, so's my sixty seventh year coming up---

I: As a walker?

Bob: Yeah, running and walking, yes. Our son was born in sixty three and I was starting to get a bit serious by then and so in sixty four I went off to Tokyo for my first Olympics and tonight we're going to the Olympians' Dinner because Tokyo's coming up again, keen to go--- yeah then Mexico in sixty four and Edinburgh for the Commonwealth Games in nineteen seventy so, Mexico in sixty eight----

I: Wonderful, and I believe, I looked you up, I believe Percy Cerutti training techniques [were] used at times, (laughs) cos I remember Percy Cerutti.

Bob: Well, yeah, lots of people [did] and a New Zealand guy by the name of, oh, can't remember his name, anyway, I used his techniques too---

I: Percy Cerutti was famous for having young people run up and down sand dunes (laughs).

Bob: Yes, he was a funny man. He came to Mexico in sixty eight and Herb Elliot wasn't competing, he'd retired, but he came with Perce and went for a bit of a run and said, "Oh, the altitude means nothing, has no effect," he just went for a gentle run. If you went for a real serious [run, you'd be] seeing stars, falling over. Percy came into our rooms and said, "That's why they're winning medals and you're hopeless, you're lying on your beds there", we'd already been out training and [he] gave us a big serve and about an hour later out on the road, boring up the road, mad as a meat axe, you rat, Cerutti, you got me out doing a second session!

I: So that was his training technique, a stirrer!

Bob: Yeah.

I: Thank you very much, that is about the sum of our questions, is there anything else that you think we should have asked you or that you'd like to share with us?

Bob: Barb was newsletter editor for much of the time she was there [at the Whitehorse Historical Society] and organiser of the open days sort of there most of the time---

Barb: Oh, no, no-----

Bob: Well, we worked as a team as well, I took it over in, I don't know---

I: Definitely a long term contributor.

Bob: Yes, I mean it's years since we did it , still have a hand but other people have done it the last six or seven years or something----

I: More recently, Barb helped me knot all the poppies onto the board after Remembrance Day, apparently they were used again this year, Barb, I wasn't here, I was away but apparently the RSL used them – an ongoing thing!

Barb: Yeah, that's great isn't it?

Bob: I was Treasurer but after Barb, so---. I handed over to Eddie.

Interviewers thank Barb and Bob and interview is terminated.