A RINGWOOD CHILDHOOD

A RINGWOOD STATE SCHOOL BOY'S STORY

THE WORLD OF THE 1940s AND 1950s

THOMAS J GUEST

INTRODUCTION

My sister and I were born in the 1940s and attended Ringwood State School in the 1950s. Our residential address was East Ringwood. We were "on the border". It was the time of over-crowded class rooms. There needed to be rules. Our childhood had rules set from home as well as school but we still had a wonderful balance of trust and freedom. It was no doubt a safer world.

Our childhood play zone was the roughly triangular area, bounded by Mt Dandenong Road, Whitehorse Road and Dublin Road. At times we crossed over Mt Dandenong Road to visit the shops opposite Mines Road and the East Ringwood football ground. Mt Dandenong Road was a very basic carriageway and not unsafe for little kids to cross. Our play area included the old antimony mine area eventually to be cleared and occupied by the Ringwood Civic Centre.

Our dad was the local baker and we had land for the bread-cart horses. The paddock was also a play area for us and had tadpole catching areas and a tree from which a swing was suspended. A Tyre swing of course. Our side and back gates just led to an extension of our yard. Even the chook yard was outside the fenced area. Our mum worked from home as a dress-maker and we had relatives "across the paddock". We had a secure world but one that provided opportunities for exploration, adventure and discovery.

We were fortunate children. Our early childhood was captured on film. We just assumed that was the case with everyone. Our mother recorded our lives so that events could be shared with her own Father who lived in New South Wales. Two copies of photos were developed and both sets have survived.

My family history is personal but may trigger the memories of other childhoods lived in Ringwood. My sister's history is not mine but we shared so much. Ringwood State School and the Borough of Ringwood gave us wonderful foundations for life.

TJG

RED BRICK MEMORIES

Red bricks absorb more than heat
The walls are more than fired clay
So many memories through the years
The brick saves all the fragments of a day

Grammar rules and dictated lines
The learning of the times tables
Poems recited and stories read
Classic tales and ancient fables

Chanted poems in sing song voices
There's the sound of scratching pens
The hand-held bell is loud and clear
Our desks slam shut - the school day ends

'RITHMETIC

I had an appointment for an ECG the other day. Anything for a social engagement opportunity. The operator of the equipment asked my height and weight. I thought it was obvious that I would not be too tall (long) for the bench and not too heavy for it to carry the load. I had to give him his required answers in imperial measurement. I still don't think in terms of metric after all these years.

I could hear the amplified sound of my blood pumping into atria and ventricles. I guess my heart still pumps blood in imperial measurements too. I've not told it about litres.

We really were amazing kids in our generation. We had to conquer complex systems of measurement. Times tables and division methods were really important. Our sums really did have a purpose.

16 oz

14 lb.

12 inches

12p

22 yards

6 feet

100 links

20 shillings

8 pints

2000 lbs.

1760 yards

My walk from home to school in Ringwood was over a mile. I still think in miles to the gallon. It doesn't seem that long ago when I was using 3d to buy broken biscuits or 6d for chips. My first pay packer (after school job) was a guinea. Coles opened next to the post office. Nothing over 2/6d had been the slogan.

WARTS AND ALL

My fingers are stained with ink

There's a wart on the heel of my hand

My blotting paper does not last long

I blame the nibs and the powdery ink

Perhaps I press too hard

Perhaps I write too fast

No-one sees the wart

There's another on my knee

My knees are often grazed

I trip myself up easily

The playground is a war zone

The classroom is set with traps

It's question time

Eager hands are in the air

Pick me Sir, pick me - NOT

I know the answers too

I won't raise my hand

I'm not a "show off"

I don't want to be noticed

But I don't want to be invisible

I like quiet reading time best

There's no pressure

I'm happy to read aloud

No-one watches you at your desk

RINGWOOD STATE SCHOOL (BUTTONS AND BOWS)

The first classes were not held in the new Building in Greenwood Avenue until July 24, 1922. The foundation stone says 1921 so to celebrate IN 2021 would have been jumping the gun.

I would have heard my parents use the term "jump the gun" and I've no doubt used it myself. I'd never really thought about is obvious origin.

My Dad would have certainly used "Son of a Gun" as an expression. It has an interesting origin. It's not entirely complementary yet has a friendliness to it. It's could have been a logical extension of "shotgun wedding" in my world of connections - but it wasn't and isn't. I doubt I would even have really understood the concept of "shotgun wedding" at primary school age.

At least "you look like the wreck of the Hesperus" had some meaning when the poem appeared in our reader at School. I was not a little boy that was careful with my appearance of my clothing and my shoes were scuffed. "giddy giddy gout - Your shirt's hanging out" was more me. I certainly did not like "dressing up" for Sunday school and visits to relatives. A look at my class photos suggests that most of were just happy to be clothed. Fashion was not part of our lives in the 1950s. When I think of the surface of the playgrounds at Ringwood State School it's no surprise that my knees would be so often dirty and scabby. I was quite happy to run around in "chasey games". Falling over did not bother us. I guess we may have washed a little grime and blood from our knees but you'd have been a sook if you went to the teacher in tears. Sook may not even be used these days. It seems to have been a word more common in the "colonies". I remember hankies being tied around knees. "You've been in the wars again" would have been my mother's reaction to the dried blood and hanky. No big deal.

For how long can you kick the same stone on the way to school? My dad always put those little metal plates on my new shoes but they were never going to protect the front of the shoe. I was supposed to clean my own shoes. I doubt it was done each day for school. I probably thought gumboots were invented so that you could play in puddles and walk along the gutters. I don't think I ever wore my gumboots to school. Some kids had galoshes. The word has changed its meaning a little now. They were just rubber "over-shoes" and not really meant to be worn independently. I would have lost them within the first day or two. I had a "history" with raincoats and sou'westers. Did I look like "something the cat dragged in" or worse. I don't remember my mother admonishing me for my appearance at the end of the walk home from school. I guess it was just seen as "normal". My mother was not a "what would the neighbours think" parent.

In school photos of classes in the 1950s I am aware of the cardigans and the wearing of braces. I'd forgotten that so many us had braces and buttons on our shorts. There were none of those clip-on braces and there were no zip fasteners. We were a button generation. My mum had tins of buttons. They were never size or colour coded. I would have lost cardigan buttons often. I don't know about buttons for my braces or fly buttons. I do remember the not-so-subtle hint of "your medals are showing" if the fly buttons were either exposed or not fastened properly. If I was in a world of buttons, I guess my sister was in a world of press studs and hooks and eyes. The boys may have had medals on display but the girls sometime had petticoats hanging lower than their dresses. It was "snowing".

It's strange that older men go back to cardigans and sometimes even braces. I do have a cardigan. I'm so fashion conscious that I've had it for 25 years! I do have a few pairs of braces too but I rarely wear them. I'm at the age of draw-string trousers of course! I'm wondering if I'll have reached the age of slip-on shoes soon. Tying shoe laces requires not only effort but a rest break.

Do up your shoe-laces Tommy - you'll trip!

Enjoy the trip. The nostalgia journey is one of the few trips we can make these days.

Grade 4B Ringwood State School 1955

GRADE TWO - 1953

I don't remember many specific class lessons at Primary school but one has somehow planted itself in my memory in detail.

My grade two class was held in one of the rooms of the Western Wing of the brick building. There were two rooms divided by wooden folding doors. It may have been a regular occurrence for Miss Paddock to address the combined classes. I remember her telling us the story of the squirrel who found a place to hide his acorns. Miss Paddock brought an acorn in her basket to show us. From inside a bag, she produced a little "tree" that has sprouted from the acorn. I suspect the lesson was really about the seasons rather than squirrels. It was not the same story as the Field Mouse and the Acorn which was in the" Second Reader".

We were taught a song at the time. I remember some of the lyrics:

"There's a rustling heard in the yellow sheaves

And it seems to sadly say

Sweet Summer

Sweet Summer

Sweet Summer's gone away"

I doubt I knew anything about sheaves.

I think my interest in the Seasons may have been due my reading of my sister's book "Pookie Puts The World Right". It would be another decade before I knew about Frankie Valli and Vivaldi.

At one such combined class meeting I was called to the front of the class. Anxiety time.

I had been seen by a member of staff as I crossed the road under the Pitt Street viaduct. I had been sensible and not run across when cars came from both directions and stranded me in the middle. For me it was just the logical decision and certainly not worth the embarrassment of public praise.

It's my grade two classroom that I remember as having slates stacked beneath the blackboard. My teacher that year was Miss Downing. She organised a classroom pageant to celebrate the coronation. I don't have a photo of my class of 1953 but I do have photos of the "Coronation". I was the archbishop. Crepe paper was an important part of "dressing up". The crown is being held by Dawn R. The Queen was Fay M. I know the names of some of the others in the photo too: Kevin, Ian, Sten and Terry.

WHEN WORDS REMAIN

My earliest memories of days at Ringwood State School include the saluting the flag and hand on heart "King & Country" words. Now I confuse then with the Scouting promise. Ringwood was just another little outpost of the Empire. As kids we knew nothing else. The curriculum was prescribed and given the size of classes, I imagine there was little room for our teachers to be creative or to extend content. We were taught from books that were about a world viewed by British eyes.

I remember the Wally, the Angela and the Sten from my own grade. I assume now that they were probably from refugee families. They were just supposed to fit in and accept this new world as it was. I knew Italian families that lived near us but the children went to Our Lady's Catholic School. The adult me now is aware of the battle that they had had - they were not just learning to read but to read in a language that was not spoken at home and to read from stories without a cultural connection. They were amazing kids.

Our story books in class contained tales that rarely reflected other cultures. I doubt we were even aware that "Three Billy Goats Gruff" was a Norwegian tale. We would have read the J H Gurney William Tell poem ".... a tale of what befell, a famous man of Switzerland his name was William Tell" and can probably still remember lines about divided apples and angels guiding arrows. The only other non-English story I can remember was "Hans Brinker and The Silver Skates" and that was written by an American who had not even been to Holland. I'm sure we all thought it was authentic. I do remember "Diana and the Golden Apples" so I guess we were at least introduced to classic legends. Somewhere along the line we read about "Ulysses and the Sirens". My at home reading during Primary School at least introduced me to Aesop. I am of course of the generation who read "Little Black Sambo" and we did have a B'rer Rabbit story at School. I don't think I have been unduly influenced. I still find it enjoyable to watch Disney's "Song of The South" and can't really see why it has not been allowed an official DVD release. It would be a wonderful teaching tool.

Our knowledge of Asia was so limited. I guess that would also have been due to the negative views that, not surprisingly, were held by the post war community. The only Asian story I remember was that of The Willow Pattern which has its story roots in both China and Japan and was a marketing tool for Minton's China plates. I don't remember any mention of India of South East Asia. I've not checked the old readers and I have no memory of stories read to us by our teachers just for listening pleasure and attention training. I do remember stories being read but not what they were. We were too early for Dahl and I doubt that Enid Blyton stories would have been read to us. My memory is selective but I assume the selection is based on what I found interesting.

I remember being so impressed with my dad as he recited "Bellbirds" and "Pioneers". Now I think of "Back in the early fifties, dim through the mists of years" as being my own childhood. Some years ago, I visited the memorial placed near Natimuk to honour the memory of Jane Duff (Cooper) and the aboriginal tracker Dick-a-Dick. "Lost In The Bush" is probably one of these stories that has stayed with many of us. The other Australian stories I remember from primary school are those by Henry Lawson. The Banjo Patterson poems are also still carried around in my memory bank. I preferred ballad poems and still have a preference for pop songs that tell a story in their few minutes. Again, I would go home from Ringwood State School and find that my dad could recite the poems that I had just discovered in my "Reader". My Dad was not a reader of novels. He read magazines and newspapers only. I would have been less surprised if my mother recited the poems.

We read "The Little Black Princess" from "We Of The Never Never". As a kid in Ringwood, I think that stories of Aborigines would have been as far away from my reality as those about Ali Baba. A couple of years ago I was asked to do the English narration for a French documentary about Aboriginal WWI Digger, Douglas Grant. I was really proud to help take his story to a wide audience. I've read that the "Lost In the Bush" story is now told with emphasis on the skills of Dick-a-Dick rather than maternal instincts of Jane as she covered the boys with her own clothing. Time changes our perspectives.

When we left Primary school, we all took "My Country" with us. It may be only the second and third verses that we've managed to hang on to but perhaps it was our first awareness of patriotism. We were more attuned to lithe lianas then to fields and coppice. Secondary School arrived and "literature" replaced stories!

THE BEST YEARS

School days are often referred to as the best years of our lives. Perhaps they were. It may be that we forget the negatives of childhood and it is the freedom from care that comes into focus.

I remember my years at Primary School with fondness. There were negative experiences but they were learning experiences - even If I did not understand the lessons until later.

Ringwood State School is a place of warm memories for me. I started there in bubs grade in 1951. My Grade six year was 1957. My sister Trish joined me at the school in 1952. She started there in Grade four. My sister still has contact from fellow students of the time. She has fond memories of State School 2997 as well.

I remember visiting the school in 1989. I was surprised at how narrow the teacher's "platform" was. It seemed so wide when we were called up to "do sums" on the board. I was never in a class with under 40 students. Some years there were more than 50. It was a different way of teaching and a different way of learning. It needed to be. Our world at school had the discipline of rows and routines.

Truancy was certainly not part of my primary school world. I don't remember ever not wanting to be at School. I didn't ever wish to be a Primary School teacher but it was not because I lacked respect for them. I'm still amazed at how they cope with children on windy days. I find it sad that teachers now have to think twice before they comfort a distressed child. Ringwood Primary School had remarkable teachers. I've still kept those building blocks they provided. I read and write each day. Sometimes I even write with a pen! I probably use arithmetic more than I think I do. I doubt I use the more complex mathematics of secondary school. Many of the books I read have allusions to knowledge I gained from stories listened to at primary school.

Thank you 2997.

RINGWOOD PRIMARY SCHOOL 1955

The playground during lesson time

Oh no - not folk dancing again.

I wonder if I even knew what a paw paw was.

Where, oh, where is sweet little Betty?

Where, oh, where is sweet little Betty?

Where, oh, where is sweet little Betty?

Way down yonder in the paw paw patch

Come on, boys and let's go find her

Come on, boys and let's go find her

Come on, boys and let's go find her

Way down yonder in the paw paw patch

Pickin' up paw paws, put 'em in your basket

Pickin' up paw paws, put 'em in your basket

Pickin' up paw paws, put 'em in your basket

Way down yonder in the paw paw patch

The only other folk dance I remember by name is "O Sussanah". There must have been others.

I guess it was just what boys were expected to think at the time. We loathed it because every other boy did. (At High school there was an expectation that French lessons would be intolerable so boys tend to make every effort to make the perception a reality)

I remember the music coming over the school speaker system. I have a better appreciation now of the connection between dancing and cultural backgrounds. I think that Australians harbour a little cultural envy.

I was certainly one of those "un-co" kids at primary school. Even tunnel ball was a challenge. Folk dancing would have given a new meaning to "tripping the light fantastic".

In those early years of the 1950s Square Dancing was in vogue. I can still remember the Jim Vickers-Willis name. I remember listening to "Oh Johnny Oh", "Sioux City Sue" and the calls being played on the wireless. I didn't ever go square dancing. It was for adults and older kids.

I'm blessed. I'm half way through my eighth decade and have never square danced or line danced.

(With thanks to my fellow Ringwood State School classmate Ian Mccleave)

WALKING CAREFULLY

From the age of 5 - and from my second day at School, I walked there and back. With the measures available from the wonders of the internet I know it was two kilometres from home to Ringwood State School. I had the complex crossings of roads under the viaduct where the clocktower was, and then the crossing to and from Blood's Corner store and the stages necessary to cross to the Methodist church corner before walking along Greenwood Avenue to School. There were no designated School crossings and we knew our road rules. I remember the school bag with its cross straps on my back. We had our reader, our arithmetic book and our exercise books, lunch and pencils. Sometimes the walk was in the rain and a plastic raincoat was worn and a sou'wester. The biggest challenge for me was to bring my raincoat home again when there was no rain in the afternoon to remind me. I failed the challenge on many occasions!

Sometimes I walked to school - or at least as far as Bedford Road with my neighbours who attended Our Lady's School. More often I was walking by myself. Certainly, I was walking by myself on the way home. I knew no-one else from the grade or even the school who walked the same route. My sister was going to a different school (Winnington) and I really don't remember walking with her - even part of the way.

These days I walk for about 45 minutes before breakfast most mornings. I take different routes - sometimes along gravel paths and sometimes along paved laneways. I walk through a couple of parks and say hello to the magpies - it pays to be known by them. I remember being swooped on as a kid when I walked along the path that took me from Mt Dandenong Road to Ringwood Lake

I guess the magpies of Ringwood saw all kids as a threat. Kids threw stones and stole eggs!

When I was a primary school kid Mt Dandenong Road was just a very average road. Between our house and the road there was a large area of land that was used as a car park for the Club Hotel. It was dusty in the summer and a play area of puddles in the winter. From Braeside Avenue to Mines Road there were access roads. Each morning I walked across the empty parking area and then down the path that led eventually to the highway at the Eastern corner of Ringwood Park Lake. The path was bitumen and had a collection of tripping traps from the roots of trees that had broken through. The walk to the clock tower was along a mixture of gravel paths and remnants of bitumen. I remember the decision-making process necessary at some time in the rainy months. The path next to the poplar trees was flooded and the grass within the park itself was almost drowned. I was not allowed to cross the highway. The safest route was along the raised bank of the lake itself and then to use the exit gate on the far side. I don't remember wearing gum boots to school. I would have been leaving them behind with my raincoat anyway.

(I have a vague memory of galoshes being used by some kids at School).

At some stage during the fifties the path opposite Coffey Motors was paved. I remember the presence of the paving and the avoidance of stepping on the cracks. (Step on a crack, break your mother's back I'm not superstitious but I do remember playing the rationalisation blame games of a child. If I step on crack, I'll fail the spelling test.

I remember A A Milne's poem "Lines and Squares".

THE TIME OF A CHILD (1952)

The big hand is at the bottom

The small hand is half way up

A clock looks over Ringwood

It casts no shadow on my day

My walk is over a mile

There are few roads to cross

I cross with care as the clock watches

There are no adults to help

Our class lesson has cardboard clocks

But Ringwood's clock is already my friend

I don't need to play and turn the hands

How many minutes until playtime?

A rich boy has his own watch

He rings the school bell on time

I'd be unreliable and forget

Time ticks differently in daydreams

The big hand is just past the top

The little hand is half way down

My walk home becomes a dawdle

Ringwood's clock watches my back

THE MARK OF CANE

Even before the years of teenage angst and surviving Ringwood High School's non-elective classes in and craft, I was fumbling my way through similar times at Ringwood State School. The Yiddish work "Klutz" certainly described me and my "un-co" life. There is more to life than learning left and right. In either grade four or five we had the "pleasure" of being introduced to cane "weaving". I guess it was to prepare for our basket case years to come. I elected to make a container for a thermos flask. A simple task with the creation of a cylinder to contain the thermos. Not. My finished article had "waves". I don't anyone confused my inability to build straight walls with creativity. Other remembered craft and art lessons resulted in a poorly executed plaster map of Australia's topography where my attempts at painting the surrounding sea looked more like waves breaking, and a slightly more successful attempt stitching on some sort of tapestry cloth. I also remember learning "book binding" and know that I bou a collection of my Mother's English Women's Weekly magazines. I was klutz with plasticine and hopeless with those useless school scissors. I remember us all sitting around at the end of grade one a creating paper chains with which to decorate the classroom for Christmas. I imagine I had more clag paste than I had paper.

I attempted an escape to the choir when I was in grade six. Anything was better than art. I was soon to be shattered by that experience as my voice broke before I was 12. I do remember us all learning to sin an unpublished song version of "My Country". I can still remember the tune. The song started at the second verse and skipped quite a few of the others. It ended with a loud "my homing thoughts will fly"

The Choir in 1954 (Perhaps my sister was escaping as I did)

MY FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS

My Father and his brother were bakers, as was their father before them. My Dad said that he would be happy with whatever career I chose as long as it wasn't baking bread. He was aware of the price he'd paid for his loaves - lack of family time and health issues. My paternal great grandfather had been a train driver and so too were two of his sons. One of his daughters married a baker - there were now other career paths.

I was the Baker's son and some of the flour stuck - if not the dough. I've never had an issue with showing an enjoyment for making biscuits and cakes - rolling dough and pastry. It's was a natural part of my life as a child. Dad didn't bake that often at home but he certainly would when the desire was there. It's the time of the year when I think of the smell and taste of my dad's hot cross buns.

I wonder if I would have developed more interest in carpentry if I'd been a carpenter's son. That wasn't meant to be another Easter connection!

My school years were without any input at all from career counsellors. We just decided for ourselves or our parents had expectations which we followed. After grade six our life paths had often been chosen. I don't really know if the kids who went to Tech school were more likely to follow their dads into particular trades. I do know of kids I knew at primary school who followed their father's steps into the family retail business. It was just our lot. Maybe we had dreams that were never to be fulfilled. We were the children of parents who had not had the luxury of choice of careers themselves.

In the 1940s and 1950s it seemed that someone in the adult world, wherever we were and whatever we were doing, would know us. We were not known by name but by the occupation of our dad. That's the fuel merchant's daughter, the milkman's daughter or the plumber's son. I look at my grade five photo and I can identify the kids by the occupations of their fathers - even though my fellow class mates were not close friends at all. I can't mention the occupations of the Mums of the time - they were just mums as far as I knew. I doubt my sister was known as the dressmaker's daughter.

For the Ringwood Historians: I was at school with a Bomford, a Bangay, a White, a Hill, a Burden, a Wilkins, a Pavey, an Allsop and a Leviston. The neighbourhood kids were Pratts, Cassidys and the Reddish sisters. The Hunts, Hardidges and Gridleys lived nearby. Ringwood was a Village. Everyone knew our dads.

THE BAKER'S SON

Do you need a poet's soul to dream?
Memories intertwine with wishes
That float away with day's first light
Other lives are viewed and lived
Just their shadows remain

The past mingles with forsaken dreams
A child remains but hides in today's disguise
We reconstruct the past
Our childhood viewed through coloured glass
Shafts of unfocused light remain

Secret lives and public lives
Clothing not always ours to choose
We played the games and knew the rules
Our imaginations set us free
But still the chains of love remain

Chance and choice decide our path

Other roads imagined

"I could have would have should have"

Are fleeting thoughts dismissed

The Ringwood Baker's son remains

FIRST DAYS OF SCHOOL

I would have known a few kids in my bubs grade at Ringwood State School. Some of us had been at St Paul's kinder. I guess just a familiarity with faces helped. I remember little about the content of lessons back then but I can see the classrooms quite clearly.

I wonder now if those rows of beads on rods ever helped me to count. There was a large "rack" of beads in the corner of one of our classrooms. I can still picture those cards with big and little letters of the alphabet. I don't remember ever learning the alphabet as a task. I think it was just something we di when we were ready to set ourselves the challenge. The alphabet was there in front of us always - at th top of the blackboard.

People often remark now on the size of the grades. I know there was discipline but I don't remember my days at Ringwood Primary as being trials in any way. Of course, we are not aware of the feelings of others in our grades. I do know that listening was an essential skill. In Bubs' grade we had rest breaks on mats on the floor. In later years we were sometimes given rests where we placed our heads on our folded arms on those desks. 70 years ago, in Ringwood and some memories are really quite clear.

I wonder if I ever had the honour of wearing a birthday badge. As a December kid perhaps, I missed out because we would have been making paper chains to decorate the room. I can remember in one year where we used some sort of spray on Santa snow using cut out silhouettes to decorate the windows. Girls always seen to have better motor skills for colouring in, sticking paper chains together and of course using those useless scissors.

I don't envy those little tykes starting school this week. I think parents put more pressure on them than was the case in 1951. We just went to School and that was life. I don't think our every move was recorded and analysed and used for one-up-man-ship comparisons (in subtle ways of course). I know our every day was not recorded on photographic equipment. Can you imagine all the Mums on the first day, all carrying their Brownie Box cameras to record the event for posterity. How lucky we Ringwood kids were not to be under a twenty-four seven surveillance of "care".

I have the notion that nowadays it is almost expected that kids should feel stressed with the weight of expectations - even at primary school. Our Ringwood childhoods lasted longer.

DICTATION

Dictation, dictation, dictation,

Three sausages went to the station,

One got crushed, one got killed,

And one got a huge operation.

It's difficult to recall my own attitudes etc. in primary school classes. I didn't mind reading aloud from my desk. I didn't really like "mental arithmetic" much but I don't know that I detested dictation as some did. My greatest anxiety in class was when it was to be my turn to use the tuning fork and to conduct the class singing a song of my choice. I do remember that I chose "The Skye Boat song". (That suggests it was Grade 5 in Mr Reid's class).

I still don't really like public speaking which may be a surprise to some! I actually put myself in another zone to do it.

I've been on Radio and TV shows but there are ways to cope with our demons and anxieties. I know some very insecure public media people. Acting is more than just for the stage. Most teachers are actors!

The little Ringwood State School kid still walks beside me at times but at least no-one says "spelling test" or suddenly asks me how many yards in a chain or to complete a long division sum at the blackboard. The writing with the chalk was more of a problem than the actual sum.

Now no-one gives me dictation and checks my spelling and my writing. (I need someone to proof read though). I remember one of my High School teachers as "The Great Dictator" and he had nothing in common with Charlie Chaplin.

I think many of carry little scars from incidents at Primary School. We don't forget being made to look foolish - even though the rest of the world has forgotten. We remember the really naughty kids and sometimes even partly steal their stories. We remember the kids who were good at everything. Most of us were in between. We were taking dictation and trying to avoid smudging the ink.

I can remember the groans when the word Dictation came from the teacher. I guess it was a way to make us listen. "Hands on Heads" didn't work for every situation.

Grade 5. Ringwood Primary School – 1956

PAPER BAGS

How many lunches in a primary school year? Paper bags and sandwiches wrapped in greaseproof paper. There would also be an apple or banana - and a couple of biscuits for play lunch. I don't remember if people had lunch boxes. Perhaps the girls did.

I sat on the wall at the eastern end of the boy's playground. Sometimes I had a bread roll rather than a sandwich. There were advantages to being a baker's son. On some days, not often, I purchased my lunch from the tuck shop at the top of Kendall Street. I remember that there were different shaped tokens for pasties and pies! I don't even remember if the shop provided sandwiches. I would not have had them. They would not have had my fillings of choice.

My sandwiches had the tried-and-true fillings of the time. There were no exotic sliced meats. I wouldn't eat tomato sandwiches, not because I wouldn't eat tomato, but because the sandwiches ended up "soggy". There was certainly a contradiction apparent. My favourite sandwiches were banana, and they became soggy if the banana was over-ripe. Bananas were not available all year round. My other choices were jam and cheese - and of course vegemite. I had no taste for peanut butter and still don't.

There were important rules about lunches and sandwiches. Boys did not have their sandwiches cut diagonally.

Sometimes I left the school ground and went home with friends for lunch. They lived near the school - Haig Street and Kendall Street. I remember having crumpets at my Aunty Kit Sjogren's house when I went home with Doug.

By grades five and six children were a little more daring. I remember walking all the way down to the fish and chip shop a little west of what would become the S.E.C. Building on the corner of Ringwood Street. We must have been quite brave as it was certainly a rule breaking activity. I don't remember ever having bottles of cordial but I may have done so in the summer. I certainly didn't have bottles of juice and definitely not fizzy drinks. My memory of drinks at school is too tainted by the 1/3 bottles of milk. Not even flavoured straws would help.

I remember the encouraging of the Oslo lunch. I was already addicted to Kraft Cheddar. I would very happily cut slices and spread them with jam or vegemite. Maybe my school lunches were "suitable" anyway. (I was also fond of buttered vita-brits or weet-bix as an after-school snack).

All those paper bags and greased proof papers did not make it home at times. I'll blame windy weather. I do remember the Emu parades. I also remember the enforced eating of lunches in classroom before you could go out and play. I have a feeling there were monitors (always girls) who took great delight in telling! I do have a memory of eating lunches in the shelter sheds on some rainy days. At least the sheds were facing to the East which was unlikely to bring wind and rain.

Who would have thought that 70 years later I'd still be eating weet-bix (but with yoghurt) but it now not as a snack. I still have the equivalent of play lunch. I don't think I'm in a second or third childhood - I've not left the first.

I still love to have an ice cream in a cone when the opportunity arises. I've given up on the likes of Eskimo pies - they're just not the same. Frozen iced confection is not ice-cream! At least Chocolate Teddy Bears have survived - I must organise some for next week's play lunch.

I still have a supply of grease proof paper and save paper bags.

A WINDOW SEAT

My primary school days are much clearer in my memory than those of High School. One of the reasons is the ability to recall a classroom that was used for all classes and a teacher that was always there teaching everything! Four rows of six double desks. My grade five and six classes were held in the same room. I wonder now of there was some degree of "streaming" in our grade six classes. There certainly was when we reached High School or we as kids perceived it as such.

For years I thought girls were much cleverer than boys. They were more focused and probably worked harder. Nowadays the world is full of gifted children. The days of wide scale delusion are with us.

One of our teachers had a system where the supposedly clever kids sat in the same row of desks - next to the window. Of the six double desks, four or five would have been occupied by girls. It may have been that the "good" kids were less likely to be distracted by the view from the window. It was almost a feeling of shame when test result came out and you were shifted out of the "top row".

It was the girls that bothered to learn the "times tables" first. For some reason they needed to display this knowledge. I wonder now if we thought it was a "girlie" thing to do. We may well have learned the tables, but there was no reason to have it marked off on the specially prepared board! I'm reminded now of my embarrassment and conflicting pressures when I was the only boy in my form one class who knew his French irregular verbs by heart. I lived through the trauma. I still know my être and avoir.

I admire the work of my primary school teachers in coping with such large classes. Now I recognise the method as being concrete sequential. We learned rules for everything. I suspect that the students who excelled were concrete sequential learners. There's substantial evidence out there that those learners who did so well in the controlled environment of rules and organisation, tended not succeed in later life - often not socially either. Of course, I'm one of those who equates an untidy desk with a creative mind. Actually, I'm just disorganised.

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PLAYING FAVOURITES

I sometimes see kids playing at being Harry Potter. I know some kids that really seem quite obsessed. I've known of kids who played at being superman and jumped from roofs. I don't remember attempting to emulate the persona and deeds of comic strip characters etc. when I was a primary school kid. Our play was more "generic". I don't remember anyone "being" Hopalong or Roy Rogers. I grew up in a childhood of playing with guns. I had a pop gun (like that belonging to Peter in "Peter and the Wolf). I had cap guns and I had water pistols. I've never owned or fired a real gun. A few years ago, the youngest child of a friend was running around his house using his "bite out of" sandwich as a gun. His older sisters only saw a sandwich. At Ringwood state school we ran around with guns. The North Eastern corner of the boys' playground had some trees and a small embankment. It was the area for cowboys and Indians or cops and robbers. It was really just gang chasey. We loved it. Our guns were sticks or our fingers! I don't think Mrs Proudly over the fence would have been worried!

The upper playground belonged to the Girls and the infants! Girls had their games too. I remember a specific group of girls (I could give names!) who had their own special area to the south of the shelter shed where the school yard backed on to the lane that ran to Haig Street. This group played at being the Famous Five. They called each other by the names of the Blyton characters - even outside playtime. One was Timmy - the dog. I think all of the group members were in my grade six class.

MY TEACHER SAID

It again is that time of the year when five year olds start school. Suddenly there is a world of inform that does not come from Mum and Dad. When I started school in prep (bubs) there were some chil not yet five and some that were approaching six - having been born in the middle of the year. I know there are now some parents who keep their children back until they are six. I wonder if it is more a of separation anxiety on the part of the parent rather than any lack of "readiness" in the child. There fashions that influence decision making.

In a recent conversation I mentioned that I could recall the names of all my primary school teachers the 1950s. I didn't think that was unusual. Each of those teachers would have had some influence o education and my ability to adapt to circumstances and to overcome those little obstacles in a child' life. I remember Miss Barnett. I remember Miss Washursen, Miss Downie and Miss McFarlane. I wa Miss McFarlane's class in grades three and four. I remember some of the other teachers of the paral classes. Mr Stewart took the other grade four. Miss Treloar took the other bubs grade. I remember being worried that we would end up in Miss Canty's class in Grade 2. She had a reputation for being Crabby. I didn't have male teachers until Grades five and six (Mr Reid and Mr Anderson). It's now difficult to find any male teachers in primary schools. I hope the situation will change. In Europe it is unusual to find Male teachers even for prep grades and pre-school. We have almost a tradition here not valuing education as a career option. I see references to the Finish education system at times. It praised for its apparent success and its value placed upon the profession. Our leaders seem to look a but never learn from other countries. Perhaps the enforced relook at teaching and learning models these past few years will have opened the doors to more creative approaches in education.

Seventy years on and I am hopeful that those teachers in the 1950s received some positive feedback from their work. Classes of 50 kids probably needed that "concrete sequential" model of learning an certainly some kids fell through the cracks. We also had a system where kids could be "held back" or advanced according to their individual development. It was not a discipline choice. I started teaching 1968. I know in 1970 I still had classes with more than 40 students. I still remember a few names. I st remember a few "incidents" too.

I don't remember all of the teachers on the Staff at Ringwood State. I can't even remember the teac of the parallel five and six grades. I know Miss Corr was on the staff when I was in Grade one and two but I can't remember her. We all seem to remember Miss Paddock as Infant Mistress of the time and remember the Head Masters.

Actually, a Prep or "bubs" grade. My First year. The background is the Methodist Church.

SUGAR AND SPICE

My childhood in Ringwood was not as polished as a Norman Rockwell view of the world. It wasn't Dickensian either. I thought all mothers stayed at home and made biscuits and cakes and were ready with a band-aid. Dads wore overalls, cleaned your shoes and wore suits and hats when they visited people. Boys played in the puddles and dug holes. Girls kept their clothes clean and coloured within the lines. I knew the rules.

The school yard was a place divided. The classrooms sometimes had divisions as well. I found out that when I talked too much I was made to sit next to a girl for an eternity. I hope Margaret has recovered. Of course, she was being punished for a similar offence. Girls played different games. They didn't climb things. They didn't get dirty. Even at Sport they had different games. They were not in the football relay or the tunnel ball team. They played cross ball and skip ball. Girls were usually better at learning their times tables. They were chosen as monitors and could do the washing up for the teachers. They played recorders and fifes. They were unsuited to drum playing or being the bell monitor. I don't think they needed to use blotting paper. They probably drank the school milk without a fuss. I understood it all. My views were reinforced by books. Books didn't lie. I thought the world was much like Enid Blyton's story books except that Pavey's dairy didn't sell ice-creams and we didn't have castle ruins to explore.

Do girls still make those paper folded "chatter box" devices? Do they still communicate in secret pig-Latin? I've never known a boy to bother with either.

GOOD GRIEF

I am looking back at Ringwood with the memories of a child who was oblivious to the undercurrents of t stream of life. Not all the days were sunny and we tended to muddle through and just ignore some thing We were often cruel and lacking in empathy. It's easy to excuse that because we were yet to develop our emotional core. A child doesn't suddenly develop an awareness of others. We were often just little mirro our parent's views. Sometimes the mirrors may have been a little askew. We all knew people who were "different" and we also knew people who others whispered about. We were probably careless in our comments and tended to put an emphasis on the physical appearance of others. I sailed through primary school without any memory of bullying. Name calling was evident but forgotten by the next day. Short te memory loss will no doubt return soon. My solution to most problems or confrontational anxieties was t hide from them. Some of us probably tried to run away from home. We were of course unprepared and possibly not even brave enough to cross the road. I'm remembered as running away a few times but my perception of events (unquestionably correct) was that I was hiding from some possible punishment or consequences.

We certainly didn't know how to handle grief. Our lives were touched by illness, deaths and divorces. No gave us maps to find our way through. I remember fellow students who died or had siblings who died. W felt sorrow but we didn't know how to react so we didn't. We coped in whatever way worked for us. Nowadays we would have a batch of counsellors talking us through stages of grief and giving us a day or t away from school. I'm cynical enough to picture that the "support team" would be wearing dangling earr or at least have an ear stud. You cannot get kids to suddenly develop into little adults and see the world through adult eyes. Empathy will arrive in its own time if at all.

Perhaps our cruelty and the cruelty shown to us made us stronger people. We learned how to deal with a unjust world. Emotional survival skills are not really derived from a textbook. These were days when we were stood in the corner. Girls huddled together when a friend was crying. Sometimes we fell over and h ourselves or had abrasions that were quite nasty. They hurt more after school or after play time. We had priorities. We also knew how to play for sympathy. Some of us even learned how to play power games an guilt games with adults. I wonder now if kids wearing glasses or kids with red hair really had issues. I didn't really like being short and neither did my sister. There was not much we could do about it. Many of us learned strategies that allowed to cope. "I'll tell my father on you" as a retort was not that powerful as a stand against perceived or real attacks. I even remember someone in my class threatening the teacher wi an "I'll tell my father" line. My sister and I were both the subject of taunts at times. We knew how to respond. We were adopted but we knew we had the advantage of being "chosen" by our parents. It was a powerful retort. Kids will always look for a weakness to exploit. The secret was for you to not let it matter

I'm reminded of the injustices of the world when I remember "getting the strap" for not standing straight i line before class. Parental support was not really forthcoming. "Just look at is as punishment for something that you didn't get caught for yesterday or last week". Some of us will no doubt remember the injustice of the whole class being kept in because of a few talkative kids. I'm not sure that it taught us about communa responsibility. As much as we may have been seen as a job lot, we really were a collection of individuals. N when we look back at the photographs of 40+ kids in a grade we wonder that any teacher survived the distance. Teaching must have been a vocation.

As resilient kids growing up in Ringwood, we moved on. If we lost the coin that had been carefully tied in the corner of our handkerchief, we just had to accept the situation. Life was a game of snakes and ladders and you kept yourself in the game even you didn't get the opportunity to climb many ladders.

Some people carried burdens of which were not really aware. Others were given a stonier road because they because they didn't fit in through no fault of their own. My sister had a ruler smacked across her knuckles as teachers at her school attempted to force her to give up her "molly dook ways. I wasn't aware of it happening at our State School. Her two closest friends through School and life were left-handed as well. Of course, it may well be that they are children of the Devil as was suggested by some representatives of the Church of "compassion".

My thoughts just went to rainy day games in shelter sheds. I now remember times when none of was allowed to leave our classroom until our lunch had been finished. I wonder if anyone remembers the introduction of the "Oslo lunch". I remember having an absence from school for a few days and my mother going to School to get my books. My desk was filled with half eaten lunches. Mum was not impressed. Perhaps she had gone to collect homework for me. I really have no recollection of homework other than projects that were done the night before they were due to be handed in. I remember the project aids that we sent away for and were excited by the arrival of pieces of wool or whatever. I remember the egg shell igloos. I remember the dozen rule and the list of conversion tables and measurements on the back of our exercise books. Rod and perches, bushels and pecks: there were 40 perches to the rod but I can't remember how many rods to the acre. Four pecks made a bushel. Those measurements have helped me through life's journey. How many of us still think of our height in feet and inches? I still think of my weight in stones! I still think of depth in fathoms. I seemed to have lost the need for links and chains in my daily life.

I sometimes read that people think the world went to the dogs when corporal punishment was removed. As a teacher for over 30 years, I certainly had experiences with "problem" kids. I can't see that on any occasion a physical punishment would ever been of help to me or the child. I grew up in a house where we were not hit. Oddly enough there was strap hanging on the kitchen door. Perhaps it was the method of "last resort". Our views on discipline are probably formed by our own experiences. I lived in a world of trust and implied responsibility. I do not remember fear. In our world we were allowed to speak at the table (not with our mouths full). We learned the rules and more importantly, knew when to apply them. Elbows off the table at home may have not been enforced with but it was certainly not accepted behaviour when we were out. If we wished to leave the table, we asked permission. We said grace. We were supposed to eat everything on our plates.

It's all general in nature but to me it is specific and it was all about a childhood in Ringwood. I remember the incidents and my memory places them in specific locations in Ringwood. Our memories are place centred. Our place was Ringwood.

TEA TIME

The kitchen table was the centre of life when I was lived in Ringwood as a child. It was much more th an object or piece of furniture.

We had a large kitchen and our meals were nearly always eaten in the kitchen. There was no shift to lounge room when TV arrived.

Language changes. Lunch was often called dinner and our evening meal was "tea". Be home by tea t - or more often "when the street lights come on". It was not be home in time for your dinner - it wa Tea.

Coffee was a rarity in our house. We were a teapot house. Friends would sit at the kitchen table with pot of tea at hand. The cups and saucers of formal afternoons teas were really not used often at all. kitchen has an atmosphere that was special. The warmth from the woodfire stove was also importan

We had a large kitchen table. I think we had a wooden one when I was a toddler. The baby bath was placed on the kitchen table. Mum used the table as her "cutting" table as a dress maker. We played board games and card games at the kitchen table. I remember the mincer being screwed to the kitch table. I remember sitting there and being ever so helpful, stoning cherries for bottling. I can even remember Dad (the Baker) using the whole table to prepare a supply of monkey face biscuits. He didn bake that often at home.

I also remember grace being said, serviettes and individual (and personal) serviette (table napkin) rin We asked permission to leave the table. Table manners were expected but there was not a rule about "talking" except of course "not when your mouth is full". I remember happy meals before happy meal became something quite different. I do remember some times when we had to finish the meal or..... also remember our introduction to tripe. It was a very short-lived relationship. I can see my Mum preparing crumbed brains. I wouldn't eat them but fortunately neither would my mother so they wer prepared for Dad and my sister. In those days I liked lambs' fry. Not now.

I'm still a tea drinker. Still leaf tea and teapots! I don't know when I started to drink tea but it was certainly some years before I even tried coffee. I had certainly well after I left school.

I grew up in the tea culture. A cup of tea was always offered. It seemed that the tea was a problem solver as much as a relaxation and socialisation beverage. I think it was as much about the tea ritual as much as the drinking. Teabags just don't do that. "I'll make a fresh pot" is still heard in this house. I like big cups - and not mugs for tea. Maybe it's that return to the comfort zone of an East Ringwood kitchen that I'm seeking. I still eat my meals at a table.

I was trying to remember if I did my homework at the kitchen table. I guess so - but if I'm honest I rarely did homework. I didn't learn to study until I suddenly couldn't cope with school work. I'd found early school work so easy - and that was really a disadvantage by the time of my first attempt at Leaving Certificate. I remember those dreadful formula we were supposed to know. It was quite a relief when at university we were just provided with the sheets of formula - it was the application that was important and not the derivation nor the memorising of them. (I did not study maths - just statistical method). I'm not a tick and cross person.

The only photo I have of our kitchen table of one of a children's birthday party. Instead, I've opted for a table at my sister's house in the 1960s. It's all about the atmosphere it represents. My mother has the ever-present tape measure. My Dad and grandpa just have the wonderful look of happiness that now seems to belong to a world that has disappeared (along with the smokes).

NEIGHBOURS

I've lived in only four houses in my lifetime. I think that's way below average. I'm not counting temporary residences of three of six months etc.

I've been fortunate in nearly all my years to have had wonderful neighbours. I've not been plagu neighbour disputes. Of course, I've not really lived in a typical suburban street for most of my ye my current house there is a shared fence with six neighbours. In my childhood we had a commo with only one neighbour. I can't remember there ever being any sort of dispute or friction betwe adults or kids.

In my own childhood years Ringwood and district was still divided by a fence between Catholic a Catholic. It is probable that fence line was breached often - and not just by kids. Our neighbours members of the Catholic church yet we had an excellent relationship. The Guest kids and the Ca kids played together and even walked most of the way to school together. We parted ways at Sin Grocery store - the intersection of Bedford Road which led to Our Lady's School and Greenwood Avenue, which let to Ringwood State. I remember our school holidays and even wet days when w played board games. (Test cricket of course). It was from the Cassidy's pianola that I developed a familiarity with so many "sing-along" tunes. Our mums did not have a gossiping over the fence relationship but they kept an eye on each other's kids and were there when there was a need.

Gordon and Katie Cassidy were fine neighbours.

Some would remember Greenwood Park as being a war zone at times. The residents of 7 and 5 M Dandenong Road were never going to be involved. I don't remember there ever being a cross wor spoken between the families. I remember Gordon and my dad fishing together on Jack Milner's bo The oldest of the Cassidy Kids was Shirley. She attended my Mum's 80th birthday in 1996.

Perhaps my own relationships with neighbours is built upon lessons and memories from my childh There's no problem with looking after pets here or with keeping an eye on houses during holiday absences. There's also food sharing! There are offers to help given freely with garden tasks etc. Ev lawn mowing is done when people are away.

I've not had to borrow a cup of sugar but I've been offered eggs this week.

I hope there are still pockets of Ringwood that are still "neighbourly." Maybe we are all rediscoveri this special type of friendship.

SIMPLE PLEASURES

I've always liked butter.

I guess we had "Western Star" butter back then. Sometimes it was "Peters" Butter. I'd butter my weet-bix. I still love hot buttered toast and prefer hot butter scones to the jam and cream ones.

I knew I liked butter because my sister held a buttercup beneath my chin. I trusted nature - if not my older sister.

I remember there being buttercups in the now lost area between the Ringwood Lake and Daisy's Hotel. (Down towards the little bridge).

I remember that area as also having dandelion clocks. I hope little kids still enjoy such things.

My sister and I were fortunate in that we had our own paddock as a play area. There were wild snowdrops and even wild daffodils (I remember them as being stunted but double blooms). The paddock has arum lilies that my dad loathed and would not allow in the house - funeral lilies. My sister and I would place a lily in a jar and then colour the water in an attempt to change the colour of the flower. We probably expected it to happen as we watched. The Lily jars would have been outside in the playhouse. No doubt our interests were soon focused in another direction. We were left with smelly dead flowers

The track (certainly not path) along the side of our property was bordered with weeds and "flowers". There were snow drops there too. There was also a profusion of morning glory and clumps of onion weed. Near the front of my aunt's house (now #19 Mt Dandenong Road) there was a very small stream to cross. There were convenient stones and bricks to use in the wetter months. It was really just a spring but we could still slip into the water. I hope my memory is not romanticising a drain. We did have a few small dams on our property which were fed by springs.

Our horse paddocks had areas covered in cape weed. To us kids they were patches of daisies. I remember sitting in the paddock and constructing daisy chains. No photos exist of my creations. Photos of my sister in her chains have survived. Prometheus would have no problem with such chains and the closest we had to an eagle would have been a rooster.

The photo of "chains" worn by my sister and myself is in fact one of paper leis. The leis had come from showbags and had been donated to us by visiting adults. I wonder if I received chocolate as well. My chocolates or lollies would have lasted for minutes. My sister would have saved hers.

Ringwood in the 1940s was a wonderland for children.

Tadpoles and yabbies.

Pine needles houses

Tree climbing

Jumping puddles

I played with make believe boats and with floating sticks.

I didn't know about Pooh sticks. Poo was a word that created giggles.

I remember the aeroplane hoppy grid drawn in the dirt opposite the pub. I think Judy Reddish and Lesley Courtenay (sister of ERFC's Brian) would play there at times. I remember the skipping ropes but I probably dismissed that as a girl thing. (I was incapable of doing something that needed such co-ordination but I may have been asked to turn the rope)

I remember the freedom of my Ringwood childhood.

Even the smell of onion weed can take me back.

THE ROADS OUT OF CHILDHOOD

Cypress trees link my present and my past. My memories should be smelling of gum trees but it is the sap from pine tree and cypress trees that lingers and sticks recollections in my Ringwood scrapbook. I have no particular fondness for pine and cypress but they have had a significance.

I guess I've always tended to see my world in terms of reference points. The clocktower at it crossroads location was the obvious one in my childhood. On the journeys we made from home we would be most likely to go through Ringwood. We didn't have a family car in my primary school days. We relied on the business van if were visiting my dad's family or going further afield. Mum was an only child and her parents lived in NSW. There were no cousins and "real" Uncle and Aunts on the Hansen side of the family. There were occasional visits with Mum to her friends from her childhood days. These visits were usually by train or train and bus connections if we went as far as East Kew.

When Dad took us for a day out or a weekend away, we sometimes went to Trentham via Woodend. They were great days and my sister and I were usually tired enough from "exploring" to sleep on most of the way home. For some reason we seemed to be awake again to see the wonderful reference point that said we would soon be home. We were still quite a way from the Ringwood clock tower but there was the welcoming sight of the large Cypress trees that were on the hillside where Doncaster Shopping complex now stands. It was the same sense of being near to home that was present on our journeys home from Arthurs Seat and the peninsula. We came home along Stud Road and on the hill there, near the police paddocks, was a stand of Cyprus trees. If we travelled east from Ringwood there were Cypress markers as well. It's now Chirnside Park bit for me it is still a stand of Cypress trees that acted as a windbreak for the property where we picked mushrooms. Lilydale might have registered with me if we had been on the Healesville or Warburton roads but it was coming up and over the hill to the Cypress trees that made me sense home.

My world gradually expanded as I became familiar with the roads taken. We got to know Studly Park Road and Barkers Road. We knew Stud Road. We knew our own road led to Mount Dandenong. That should have obvious once we knew our own address. I went that way to Croydon and to Montrose and Mt Evelyn.

We also knew the roads that went towards the Yarra River. I'm not going to claim memories of pine trees and cypress trees in that direction but they would have been there as wind breaks - just not significant markers. I remember being with my cousin on his bread delivery round in the van. Clifford Park was then the end of the line for bread deliveries. Wonga Park and Park Orchards were names that suggested quite different worlds to me. I remember going out to Warrandyte and to Pound Bend. There may have even been picnics by the river but they have not stayed in my memory bank. I do remember the exciting tunnel off Gold Memorial Drive - closer to South Warrandyte than Warrandyte.

I have other memories of car journeys with the family but they won't take shape and I can't join the dot to bring back knowledge of destinations and reasons for travel. I have a memory of the Berwick Hill and the need to stop in the gardens for cuppa to allow time for the car to cool before the climb. Other than passing through Officer I remember nothing. Perhaps it was the way to Western Port or perhaps we were visiting Dad's friends near Lang Lang and Koo-Wee-Rup. I remember that I wasn't car sick as I was on the Black Spur drive with all its turns and twists. The good thing was that all roads would eventually lead home to familiar trees and the clock tower.

One of my other vague memories involves Geelong and the Bellarine Peninsula. I can think of no reason why we would have been there. There were no family members nor were there friends of the family or connections to my dad's childhood in the region. Dad would never drive along the Great Ocean Road so that does not a framework for my recollections. My recollections are of the "salt pans". I found the concept fascinating. For years I wasn't sure if it was a real memory at all. No-one knew what I was talking about. Now I can find a history of the Salt works. Memories of the Geelong side of town also bring back the childhood glee of going across the Yarra on the punt. I think to me it was close to one of the wonders of the world.

Ringwood was still the centre of my world and the clock was symbol of familiarity as it stood at the crossroads to roads to new places. I understand all the very logical reasons for tearing it down and building a replica but Ringwood was become unraveled.

None of "my" stands of cypress trees remain now. The local ones were special for play. Their branches interlocked and created barriers that swept the ground. They were barriers for grown-ups who could not get below the branches. They belonged to kids.

My Ringwood - especially at the lake and the school yard - was a town where conifers provided an opportunity for adventure and daring. The corner of our backyard was protected by a huge pine tree on the neighbour's property. I didn't ever climb it but it was part of home. My favourite climbing tree was near the current civic centre building at the top of Braeside Avenue. It was a pine tree and the branches were the perfect distance apart for climbing.

When I moved to this current house there were cypress trees along the driveway. One of the first decisions made was to remove them. Irony perhaps.

Cypress trees are symbolic of mourning. You see them at country graveyards. They are effective wind breaks but they meant more when they were planted.

I suspect that I'm far from being the only person who grew up in the Ringwood of the 1950s who chose to live their adult lives in a smaller community that has both a sense of place and a centre - be it be the General Store, Post Office or even a Clock Tower.

Ringwood Park Lake Cypress Trees

HOME

It's not so uncommon these days but I did not leave home on a permanent basis until I was 31. I was of the lucky generation who had my tertiary education paid by the State Government. I had been granted entrance to university with commonwealth funding but the living allowance did not have the attraction of a studentship with the State Education Department. I was bonded (indentured labour?) to the department to teach for three years in whatever school they chose. We were allowed to submit a list of preferences (probably ignored) and most graduates were sent to country schools. There had to an important reason for you to be sent to a Melbourne school. League footballers could of course no be sent to the country. I put in the usual list of places that I thought would be pleasant. Had I been se to the Latrobe Valley I may well have taught brothers I was yet to meet. Had I been sent to the Wimmera I may have taught my half-brother's children without knowing a connection. My country School was Upwey! A short drive or a short train ride was not really an incentive to leave the comfort of home as I had expected.

Home was #7 Mt Dandenong Road. Eventually it was to be numbered as #11. For my childhood years had been #7. I guess we all face returning home to find that "our" room is suddenly not ours anymore We even find that the home has changed hands or torn down. For years I've seen the family home be only represented by a reduced size block of vacant land. I take some comfort in the fact that the old # (19) where I spent many pleasant hours is still there and still occupied by "Guests".

Our family home was altered by the addition of two rooms in the fifties. The front veranda was altered to accommodate an extension of the living room. Unlike many other homes of the period. We didn't n have a front parlour that seemed to be never used. We had a room that was lived in every day of the week (or at least every evening). This was the room with the open fire, the wireless in the corner and comfortable chairs that I ignored in favour of the floor. The house alterations now made it a three-bedroom home - plus a sewing room for my mother.

Looking back, I can see both versions of the family home. I remember the old and new locations of the linen press where Christmas presents were hidden! I remember other alterations as well. There was th reconfiguration of the bathroom to allow for the building a shower recess rather than a shower placed over the bath. I remember the indoor toilet being installed. (It was always a lavatory when it was outside).

I've been provided with photographs of the old version of our house. I remember it well but certainly do not remember pushing my sister's doll's pram over the edge of the veranda. Of course, I also don't remember pulling out the keys of the toy piano either. Memories are selective. I do remember the recess in the chimney space under the house. It was the best place to hide from injustices and possible punishments.

#7 was more than a house. A sense of place is important. A home gives us that. In about 1990 I drove my mother to see her childhood home in Williamstown. It was one of the better decisions of my life. It was as if I had given her a very special gift. Most of our attic treasures are in our minds. What Australian house has an attic? A visit to the past can be a in a physical setting but for me it is difficult to find any of the Ringwood I remember. We don't need to throw out the old to embrace the new. My dad used to love taking us for trips to Trentham. As a youngster I didn't understand why it was so important. He was visiting his childhood.

7 Mt Dandenong Road East Ringwood

SPOKESPEOPLE

Children in the late forties and early fifties were the children of parents who had experienced the hardship years of Economic depression followed by deprivations created by war time.

Our parents were not assaulted by commercialism and were "thrifty.

As kids we lived in a world of "hand-me-downs". If you did not have older siblings there were the children of your parent's friends who were the source of clothing and bicycles. I didn't ever have a new tricycle or bicycle.

I would not have expected one. I don't remember any of my childhood friends having new bicycles. The bikes may have been repainted and adorned with new stickers but they were not new. My bicycles were initially paid for by my father but then I was to reimburse him from own earned pocket money (stacking wood!).

We learned the ways of thrift.

Bicycles were freedom.

I remember my first attempt at riding a two-wheeler. I had no idea how to steer or stop - I just concentrated on balance. I ended up in a ditch on the other side of Mt Dandenong Road.

Our own local race track was provided by the path around Ringwood Lake. I doubt I ever won a race but my Bike was better at dealing with the slight inclines. I wonder now that there were no falls off the bridge at the far end of the lake. I also remembering the daring behaviour of attempts to ride along the pipe!

As a sixth grader I remember riding to Warrandyte and to Dandenong (about where the Monash crosses Stud Road). It was a world of freedom - and of an implied trust from our parents. It was a world of adventure.

Bicycles were also a means to a financial reward as a delivery boy. Not for me the early morning paper rounds, I had the classy job of being a delivery boy for one of the local pharmacies. I also have memories of orders needing be delivered as far away as Felix Crescent. This was not on a bicycle with gears to change. Before long, my school friend was working for the competition. We had our own earned pocket money (A guinea a week for 8 hours work!) and for me it was the start of a lifetime hobby of buying pop music records. At 9/3d or 10/- a disc I was able to buy one each week and still have the money for going to the movies at Ringwood Town Hall or to a local dance.

The early wheels!

THE SAFETY OF THE BOROUGH

I've long been interested in the nature versus nurture studies. The most informative studies are probably those of twins that have been raised in different circumstances. Siblings can grow up with different values and attitudes too. We've also seen marked differences between children from the san parents. Of course, there is often a difference in the child rearing of the first child and of those that follow.

My sister and I don't share any blood ties. We both were to meet "natural" siblings later on. Sometime we see what we wish to see but I think I am very like my half-brother and my sister very like her half-brother. It a likeness in attitude as much a anything else thought I certainly look like my genetic family and can see similarities on both maternal and paternal sides.

I think in some ways though my sister and I were influenced by the environment that was Ringwood in the 1940s and 1950s. We were the children of parents who have navigated the depression years and th war years. We were not demanding of "Things" and probably not of their time. We made do with what our world of Ringwood provided. There was simple joy in a mullock heap or a puddle. I don't think we even had thoughts about "new" anything. We knew the value of money and if we were fortunate enough to have a few pennies we knew how to maximise the buying power with our careful selection o lollies. In most cases, if we had pocket money, we had earned it. I knew about the concept of "opportunity cost" long before I studied economics. Choices had to be made at the expense of other opportunities. Did we spend now or save until we had a shilling for the pencil or comic we wanted? We were making these decisions as little kids.

The safety of Ringwood as a village also allowed us to experience a world where we learned about consequences and took responsibilities. We were given the gift of trust. I think we were also aware tha the Ringwood watched us. Everyone might not have known everyone else but there would always be someone who knew someone who did.

I walked to school by myself. I didn't remember that my older sister went by bus to Ringwood station and then walked to Winnington Grammar School as a four-year-old. She would have known the road rules. Our parents were just as caring as the other Ringwood parent. They'd be seen as criminally irresponsible these days. I wonder now how kids ever learn about decision making and consequences of poor choices. We no doubt cried when we fell over or scratched ourselves with blackberry thorns. A few minutes later we playing in a puddle. We had survived the trauma - and without a prolonged fuss. Sometimes experience did teach us "not to do it again". Growing up in the Ringwood District in the mid twentieth century was probably not as perfect as we remember but we had a village that had borders and rules. Even if we couldn't tell the time there were street lights that came on to tell us it was tea time. I do remember those clocks at primary school where we learned to tell the time. Cardboard clocks I think I probably leaned to read the clock face at home and had the help of an older sister who knew how the world worked.

My sister was surprised that I have no memory or walking to school with her. There were not many years where we would have done so anyway. I do remember the walks from out home at the beginning of Mt Dandenong Road to new Anglican church in Patterson Street East Ringwood.

I also remember the decisions not to actually arrive there. We could have walked up Dublin Road but if we walked along the unmade Federal Road there may have been opportunities to step in puddles and thus be unsuitable to arrive at Sunday School. We could make rational decisions. We also made decisions about the use of "collection money" as well. We would have been quite conscious of weighing up the consequences. The milk bar opposite the East Ringwood footy ground was a favourite place of my early years. The footy ground and it scrub bushland on the Mines Road side was also a wonderful adventure area. If we fell over or ended up sitting in a puddle, we were too far from home to seek aid. We just lived with the consequences of our actions. I think there was also the knowledge that if there had been a real problem, we could have gone to almost any home for help. No-one was a stranger. We certainly would not have been phoning home because it had started raining. (We didn't have a home phone anyway). I'm sure there must have been quite a few times when I trudged home in the rain - without my raincoat and sou'wester. I was wet but I was responsible for my own decision to be without my coat. There were no cars that came to collect children. We survived. We learned.

Maybe growing up in another suburb closer to Melbourne would have taught us different lessons. Growing up further out into the country likewise. Ringwood may have been just a passive set of buildings, lanes, parklands and gutters but Ringwood itself helped form who we are.

I am thankful to have grown up in the area - and in the time.

Dressed for Sunday School

TASTE

I am really a family joke as to my "taste" in some things. I have no degree of colour blindness and ca appreciate the subtle differences in shades. I sometimes can have disagreements as to the particula hue when it is blue or green but testing by my friendly optician indicates that perhaps it is not the inability to distinguish colours but what our minds label them.

For the most part I would not have chosen my clothing as a child. I may have been asked my prefere when a cardigan was to be knitted by my mother but I suspect my choices would have been "directe I think the clothing worn in my primary school years would really have been based on what was available and practical. I was sometimes to wear the hand-me-downs from the older children of frier of my parents. I was certainly not dressed according to fashion. I doubt that any of us were. As a bat boom child my clothing was dictated by the availability of post war materials and I think, to some ext by the left-over drabness of wartime and lessons of making do with little.

My favourite shirt as a nine-year-old (or roundabout that age) was one purchased at London Stores. My Uncle Stan worked there and I thought it was a bit liking working at Buckingham Palace. It was "London" so I knew it was important. All the salesmen were dressed in suits - and it was not their special clothing reserved for Sundays. My Uncle was a "Floor Walker" and thus very important!

The wonderful shirt was ORANGE.

I'm sure they didn't sell such a wonderful colour at Gillespie's in Ringwood.

My clothing 'sense" has never been influenced to any great extent by fashion. I didn't ever wear built up shoes. I Didn't like wide ties and loathed anything paisley. These days it is usually a choice of what will fit me. I don't think I have ever dressed to impress. Some old photographs (in their original colours) have created some mirth for others. I still don't have a problem with the choices.

I look at the photographs of Ringwood in the 1950s. My memory paints the buildings with character rather than colour. We did live in rather a drab time. It must have been so special for women who could "dress up " to go to the Mayoral Ball or to a wedding. I wonder now if there were still decisions made to avoid bold colours. I'm reminded of the red dresses and patent leather shoes of the wicked!

I went to a birthday party at the home of one my Ringwood class mates. I think it may have been one of those invitations arranged by parents. I knew the boy but it was not as if we had that much in common other than our age and the same classroom. Sixty years later I can still remember that I wore my orange shirt. I teemed it with a sleeveless yellow jumper (vest) and a zippered home knitted cardigan which was RED. I hope his birthday was in the winter months. As the wonderful Anna Russell would have said,"I'm not making this up".

The rock and roll years and the time of Rockers (and indeed Bodgies) was a wonderful time for me. At last, there was a willingness to wear bold colours. Even the boldness of Black. I didn't dress like a "Rocker" but then I didn't buy my own clothes. I think many younger readers probably see "Grease" as being representative of the era. The original stage musical was a delightful valentine to the time and fashions and behaviours were stylised to be almost a parody. The film really created a world that never was by enhancing the colours and exaggerating behaviours even more. Some of the songs added to the original score have been amazingly popular but really have no place in the fifties. The title song itself screams as not belonging! But then - our past is always being rewritten.

My early teenage years were lived in a world of conscious fashion choices by many who needed to belong to subcultures. Dark clothing, turtle neck sweaters and medallions were taking over. Folk n cafes and Trad Jazz clubs for some reason wanted to echo the earlier Beatnik era. Colour was being buried. Did girls really iron their hair? Were so many boys really unaware that they looked like mini Frank Thrings. Mary Travers and Peter Yarrow were somehow the fashion setters. School children going from one uniform to another. The instinctive Tribal need manifests itself in different ways. Al sub cultures built on music and fashion were not as harmful and as the intimidating as ones that w follow.

I still like to see bold colours. Even going to Tozers in Ringwood (later it was to be Dimmeys) was interesting for me as a toddler. There were so many colours in the cotton reels. The bolts of materi probably became more colourful as we moved towards the sixties. I used to go with my mother to Camberwell where there were more shops to buy material and more colourful options for the satin silks and whatever she would use in her dressmaking. My favourite shop was even further away fro Ringwood - Balls in Richmond with its uneven floors and money canisters on zip lines was a delight.

I love seeing the colourful clothing choices made by our newer immigrants from Africa and I admir colours in the clothing from the Subcontinent. I don't have an orange shirt these days. I still wear br coloured socks but not the electric pinks and greens of the late 1950s. I've purchased and worn "Hawaiian" shirts as a joke but inside me I think there is still the little boy who loves colour. I'm not to sit on a piano and sing about Rio. I am more likely to remembering seeing the real Danny Zukos a Betty Rizzos of Ringwood's All-night Cafe. I'm more likely to be thinking of a simple world or Archie, Veronica, Betty and Jughead.

Fashion in the 1940s

I started pub crawling at a young age. Of course, my pub crawling was on the stairs at the Club Hotel (Later to be known as Daisy's). I remember the stairs but in my memory that are high and deep. I can invoke the smell of polished wood rather than any smells of the bar. For me the residents of the Club hotel were just neighbours. The stairs were just part of the wider world of playgrounds.

Until this present address I've never lived in a home with stairs. One of the "No" criteria in the search for a residence after more than three decades In a more rural environment was "No Stairs". In your seventies you do not need to navigate stairs. Other factors led to a "with stairs" decision. I don't use them often!

Stairways were not common in the Ringwood of my childhood. I can visualise only a few. There were certainly no elevators or escalators. A journey into Melbourne had the excitement of rides on escalators. Ringwood Town Hall had a stairway and there was a feeling of importance if you went up the stairs. We wore our best clothes to go the "pictures" with Mum and Dad. Upstairs was special.

The only other stairs I remember in Ringwood were the one at the Coffee Palace building and at the Fire Station. The Coffee Palace stairs were steep and narrow. The Fire Station stairs were not as daunting for a little fellow. Of course, I remember the Railway station steps but they were not stairs. Even the Midway Arcade was not really stairs to the upper level - just steps to me. The Arcade was built well after I found stairs of interest. Stairs were a feature in so many books I read but they didn't belong in the word of 1940's and 1950's Ringwood.

My most vivid memory of playing on stairs is not in Ringwood but in Franklin Street Melbourne. Mac's Hotel is, I think, the oldest continually licensed premise in Melbourne. My Father's sister was the Licensee in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. My father would take us kids along to visit his sister - usually on a Sunday. I didn't really enjoy visiting my Aunty Myrtle but I loved the old pub. It still had a courtyard left over from its "Coaching Inn" days. It was a residential hotel and there were permanent residents who lived up the stairs where my aunt and cousin had their rooms. I remember the staircase though I'm sure the stairs are smaller and less steep that I see in my childhood memories. We could play out in the courtyard but if it rained, we played on the stairs. I can still see the glass windows on one side of the staircase and the storage area behind which contained empty boxes. I was certainly more excited by a visit to the building (and my raspberry lemonade) than I was to see my aunt who so often was to be "unwell" and propped up in her bed on a Sunday morning. My Aunt died in 1964 but I really only have memories of her from before I reached my teens.

It's no doubt odd for people born after 1960s to read of people excited by being on an escalator. I live in a time when clockwork toys were exciting. We had clockwork trains and clockwork animals. Escalat were futuristic. I had mixed feelings about lifts. (I still have). I don't like the confined space. I've only been in one that was stuck - and then I was not alone and it was only for a few minutes. My early memories of lifts are associated with going to a Specialist Doctor in Collins Street. I also remember th Manchester Unity building lifts. The favourite lifts of my childhood were the ones where there was an operator inside, sitting on a high stool. The operator would push the buttons and announce the departments on each floor. I worked in the Buckley & Nunn store in Bourke Street for a few weeks in 1980 or thereabouts. The Lift Ladies were still employed. The disembodied voice through a speaker ju doesn't "cut it". I think the last lift operator was in the M U Building. It was not just my past that was being set aside but really a piece of magic and, in its own way, an art form.

My knees object now when I walk up stairs. I wish now I had walked up and down the spiral staircase i the building on the corner of Elizabeth Street and Grattan Street. I guess it's gone now. The longest staircase I have climbed is at Hampstead Tube station London but it was worth the experience (there wasn't a choice!) There are 320 steps. I think Ringwood Town Hall had less than twenty.

A A Milne knew all about the importance of stairs.

APPLES AND CHERRIES

My view of the 1950s is always in a Ringwood context. The young Tommy that still exists is almost disappointed when adults from places far away from Ringwood have similar memories. It's almost a feeling of intrusion into a past that belonged to world that radiated from the clock tower.

A few days ago, I was listening to Peggy Lee singing "Apples, Peaches and Cherries". It was a song that had been buried in my memory and hidden behind a jumble of songs of my childhood. It's a song from 1953 but perhaps it caught my attention back then because I did live in a land or orchards. On my morning walk today I found the tune had become an "earworm" and my memory was hearing it played on a piano. My thoughts went to musical chairs. Perhaps it is just the rhythm of the tune that took me back there. It seems a real memory.

I didn't grow up in a home where there was a musical instrument and neither of my parents played piano. My Uncle Roy had a piano which I played on (rather than played). I know he could play the piano and he also played the harmonica. I don't ever remember him every playing either but I have remembered conversations. My next-door neighbours had a pianola. I loved it. I found it difficult to reach the pedal but the effort brought magic to my world. I can still see the words written on the rolls as they turned. I think we had to read "backwards' as the words appeared from the bottom. My Dad's friend Arthur Schultz (just to get another orchard connection into the narrative) could play piano by ear. I thought it was a wonderful "gift".

My best mate at primary school learned to play the mandolin. I had no interest in it myself and I do not remember hearing him ever play. He was of course one of many of my generation who belonged to the Victoria Banjo Club. I don't even play a Ukulele. I don't go any further than finding middle C on a piano keyboard.

Banjo playing was a fashion or fad, I guess. Now I associate it with images of a world of little kids (May Downs and Olive Wallace) being drilled to perform for an audience of proud Mums and Dads. I'm not sure how people became involved as members of the City Bands of the time. As a kid they were just "there". I didn't ever think about people having to have learned to play the instrument. The City Band was just part of the fabric of the town. I have a cousin who plays the bagpipes. Her daughter does also. They grew up in Ararat and the Band was part of the community - just as would have been the C.W.A and the football team. I used the film "Brassed Off" as a teaching aid years ago. I think it was an attempt to explain the concept of a work culture and sense of belonging to a community. It's a concept that is almost lost.

There were obvious sporting seasons of the school year but I have never really understood seasons of other activities. Perhaps alleys (marbles) were only brought out when the ground was dry. I think swap cards came out in the winter months when kids were huddled in shelter sheds for warmth. I don't know when Yo-Yos were popular. Perhaps that was more related to advertising.

Fashions and fads usually made their way into the lyrics of popular songs. From the introduction of the transistor radio to streaking, song writers attempted to cash in. Perhaps the biggest fad in my primary school years (though not for boys) was hula hoops. For a change the Americans followed us so that song lyrics were late arriving. Teresa Brewer had missed her opportunity with the Hula Hoop Song. Some readers may remember that Alvin (or perhaps it was Theodore or Simon) wanted a Hula Hoop in "The Chipmunk Song (Christmas Don't Be Late)". I can visualise the upper playground (for the Girls of Ringwood State School) being a tableau of Hoops!

I checked to find the year of hoop introduction but you cannot trust the internet! My first reference was 1958 but then you can find photographs from 1957. That's the problem with American references! Toltoy sold thousands here in 1957. Perhaps I remember them because it was my last year at State School. It was about this time that "Limbo" dancing was making an appearance at kid's parties. That too was soon to be incorporated into popular song lyrics within a year or two and became a would-be competitor to "The Twist" as a gimmick dance.

One song can take me back to a world of memories and the blue skies of a Ringwood childhood. I go back to school games and indeed to Orchards. My childhood memories live in Ringwood but even today, within five minutes' drive I am in orchards. And yes, there are Apples, Peaches and Cherries.

SOUNDS OF SUMMER

My early East Ringwood childhood memories seemed to be of almost endless summers. There were nights of convectional rain and thunderstorms but the days seemed to be filled with play and explori

We were lucky enough to have tadpole ponds on our property and nearby, where the old civic centre stands, there were other ponds which were enticing - frogs and dragonflies.

Yesterday I was halfway between Berwick and Ringwood. I drove along the Lysterfield Road which I remember as being not much more than a dirt track. I also remember the area of what is now Cardin Reservoir - it was scrubland and you needed to be wary of kangaroos on the roads. (You still do in the area around Cardinia - but deer are more of a worry) The cypress trees along Lysterfield Road are still there. . They're pruned to allow better vision for drivers but at least they've remained. It was no dou the forecasting of rain by the insect population but I was aware of the sound of cicadas. It's a sound o summer.

I also have memories of flywire screens, mosquito netting and pump action fly spray cans. Is there an sound more annoying than a mosquito? The "bark" did seem worse than the bite - but not in the morning when itching took over. Mosquitos could always find that small gap in the flywire or in the netting. I'm one of those people that mosquitos are attracted to - and it's certainly not because of manufactured scents (which give me headaches). I can be sitting comfortably and then am aware that my wrists have been bitten by the tiniest little monsters. As a child I had severe reactions to the bites from sand flies. My nights were horrific. I do remember the application of TPC liquid in later years. I don't know if we had any insect repellent in the 1940s. I remember the years we had those repellent coils lit at night. They were times of fly papers hanging from ceilings and inside tents. I'm pleased we had high ceilings and the fly papers could be attached to the light fixtures (which were somewhat rudimentary).

I was reminded yesterday of childhood journeys home from the city and the sound of cicadas along Barkers Road. I have memories of grasshoppers in our paddock and of the excitement when we discovered a stick insect - or the magic of a chrysalis and the hope that it would be an Emperor Gum Moth that emerged. Many of us kept caterpillars in boxes of gum leaves. Remember the "spitfires"?

Butterflies are not what they used to be.

Neither are summer days

Sounds take us back.

The flywire sleepout door slams shut.

(We had flywire doors not security doors)

The flyswat swings through its arc.

There's the sound of the pump action on the fly spray can

There's no buzz of an air conditioner.

There's no sound of a fan rotating.

We hope for a breeze though the flywire doors and screens

Summer days in the 1940s

BIBS

The years of our awareness of self are those we are granted without the need for wearing a bib. Of course, there are accidents in between. "Many a slip twixt the cup and the lip". There is a law which restricts these events to when we are wearing our "going out" clothes, with people who are not within our circle of close friends, and when we are on aeroplanes. I think Bibs were also referred to as feeders when I was a toddler but I really don't remember wearing a bib. I don't remember that "aeroplane" feeding technique either.

My images of my dad are of him in Bib and Brace overalls. He was wearing overalls in my earliest memories of him and in his final years he was wearing his bib and brace overalls in the garden.

My dad was not a suit and tie man.

Many of my childhood photos show me wearing some adaptation of the "bib and Brace" garment. I think the clothing would all have been home made. Perhaps it was the usual fashion in those times which in fact had no fashion. A look at group photos of children in the 1940s and 1950s suggests that we wore whatever we had. There was no sense of fashion display or competition. Often we were in clothes that we had outgrown or that we would "grow into".

My Ringwood was a Ringwood of Bib and Brace.

At some stage there is the realisation that we become our parents. I was never going to be the height of my dad. I did learn from his view of the world though. Nearly everything has a funny side! You really can laugh at your troubles and it helps. Of course, there needs to be sense of timing so that empathy is not absent in the eyes and ears of the beholder.

I remember being tickled as a child so that I would giggle and forget my discomfort and stress. There seems to be distortion of fact when people remember my dad. He was quite strong (lifting bags of flour) but he really was not a giant of a man. I only remember him as being gentle.

I've never really been able to even pretend I've lost my temper. Anger is such a waste. I probably learned that from my parents. As a school teacher I often found it difficult not to laugh at some naughty behaviour. I look back and now see that as a strength rather than a weakness. I loved my years as a classroom teacher. The children were never the enemy.

I don't think my dad would ever have held a grudge. A new day was a new day. I may well have learned that from Jack Guest too.

At times I now wear Bib and Brace overalls. There is sense of freedom in not "dressing up". I'm not really a gardener but I do like the garden. I wonder if my dad felt the same sense of freedom from care in his chosen clothing. Dad liked to potter in his shed. He seemed to be able to "play" with his fishing equipment for hours on end. Even when he went fishing, he wore his bib and brace overalls.

The Guest's Biscuit man was "Thomas Bibby Guest" as was his son. The "Bibby name is from the North of England. My dad's grandfather came from the north of England too. The families may have been connected. Apparently "Bibby" is now a term given to a bloke with anger issues! That was so not my father.

My sister probably remembers me as having anger issues when I was a Bib wearer. I've forgotten the high chair years.

An argument brewing. The Bib and Brace years.

THE BACKYARD AND THE SHED

My dad had a shed. Didn't everyone's Dad have a shed in the 1940's and 1950s?

Dad would repair things in the shed. It may have been the toaster of the jug that needed new elem or it may have been the spade or the axe that needed new handles. Dad also seemed to spend ma hours doing "whatever" with his fishing rods. I liked the vise. It's not quite the same as liking vice.

The shed in the photo is our "old shed". Inside on the left of the photo - and in the back corner wa outdoor lav. With it' trapdoor for access by the night cart man. The shed was the storage area for that had been chopped by Dad and carted and stacked by me. We had an open fire place and a wo stove. Briquettes were also stored in the shed and transferred as necessary to a container in our w house. (It was eventually to be termed a laundry as Ringwood gentrified). The carting of barrow loa wood was my way of earning pocket money. By the time I was old enough to swing an axe with an force (usually getting in stuck in the chopping block) we were ready to switch to electric cooking an oil heating.

The smaller shed on the right was Dad's work shed until a larger one was constructed behind the existing sheds. This smaller shed at times became a playhouse, a kennel, a storage area for chook food and the bike shed!

Alongside the wall (where the cat sits) was the bottle stack. Beer bottles. I think Dad drank Vic Bitter. There were of course no canned beers until 1958.

Eventually the beer bottles would be collected by the Bottle-O. They were placed into hessian bag.

With smaller backyards the "shed" is now just a storage area and not a work space. I like the concept of the "Men's Shed" and the provision of social interaction. It doesn't really replace the need for a space to be alone with your thoughts though. I guess my "study" is a better equivalent. I don't have fishing rods - I have computers, printers, CDs, books - and of course, boxes of old photographs to take me on journeys. I also have paper and a fountain pen.

7 Mt Dandenong Road – the back of the house in the 1950s

UNLOCKED RINGWOOD

The key to our back door was on a nail in our woodshed. I don't recall that the back door was locked very often at all. I'd probably have left a note saying to look for the key in the woodshed. It was a tim where people just called out "are you home?" and entered a comfort zone of friend or neighbour.

I'd never heard of dead locks. (I'd not heard of dreadlocks either). I think we were a "Yale" rather tha "Lockwood" household. If I went to visit my neighbours it would not be to the front door.

I remember the side door to the family bakery business was just a simple latch device operated by a string hanging through a hole in the door. I lived in a very security conscious world (NOT). Trust was everywhere. Maybe it was symptomatic of a time when people did not have so many possessions. Th "new" was unusual. Usually, it was the old and the repaired. By the 1960s life had changed. Bicycles were stolen. Maybe transistor radios were also stolen. The consumer society had arrived and even teenagers were a new market.

I don't remember any rush to change our locks or indeed to turn the keys as the world changed. My mother had never encountered theft until her purse was stolen from her shopping basket when she in her mid 70s. The theft weighed upon her - not for the money lost but for the action of theft itself. world changed. Suddenly there was a lack of security in her life.

My neighbours have a coded lock on their front door. It requires 8 numbers. I still have a "dogs on premises" sign on the side gate. I sometimes forget to lock doors and even leave the garage open at times. There's a balance between due caution and a prison. I still have a yard that is large enough to enjoy. So many of the neighbouring houses have traded in that freedom for a fortress.

Such is progress.

THE LEMON TREE

I was an East Ringwood child of the late 1940s. My world until school was very much that of home and the immediate neighbours. I was fortunate. My closest neighbours to the East were family. My neighbours the other side had children close to my age. Over the road was the Club Hotel and sometimes my sister and I would play with Aunty Daisy's grand-niece Judith. I remember the enclosed verands up the stairs.

Home gardens at the time usually included a vegetable patch. We didn't need to grow much in the way of fruit. If you lived in the Ringwood district you were surrounded by orchards. I know Dad had a not particularly successful nectarine tree growing near the back fence. Nectarines are my favourite stone fruit. Our tree would not have provided much eating pleasure. Peaches, pears, plums and apricots were bottled each year. They were not from our home garden. There was small plum tree outside our back gate. I loved the sour green plums and probably gave myself a few tummy aches from indulging.

In the backyard we had a mandarin tree and a lemon tree. The mandarin tree was not a success in terms of its yield. On the other hand, the lemon tree was prolific. It must have reached quite an old age. It also must have had a few stories to tell. I think nearly every home in Ringwood had a lemon tree. It was just part of life to have a lemon tree. I still have a lemon tree and have never lived in a home without one. There wasn't one when I moved in here but the situation was soon rectified. My neighbours came to the rescue and provided fresh lemons for the first year. I still live in a neighbourhood where people share produce and prepared food.

In the 1940s toilets were lavatories and Laundries were known as the "Wash house" and were often outside' just as was the lav. The "Night Cart" was part of life. For some reason the fifties brought a gentrification of terminology. It can't have been the influence of television as we certainly did not adopt 'bathroom" as a euphemism.

I'm not alone in having a childhood where I was told to "use the lemon tree'. The capacity of pans was limited. The far side of the lemon tree was useful. I wonder if the lemon trees learned to appreciate an acidic soil. I guess to people these days our lives seem primitive and uncouth. There was sometimes a danger in making use of the lemon tree at night. Prickles in the lawn were bound to seek out bare feet.

Our lemon tree also provided a backdrop for some of the childhood photographs. It was a change from the Fernery which was also a common feature of Ringwood gardens of the time.

At times in my Mum's final years, I would ask about the location of the family fortune. She'd always answer - "under the lemon tree". Our real family fortune is the wealth of memories that were preserved on film.

The mandarin tree.

The lemon tree.

THE SAME BUT DIFFERENT

I came to Ringwood at Christmas 1945. I was quite near to a stable but I suspect "he's just a naughty boy" might have been more appropriate than the sounds of cattle lowing and Angels chatting to shepherds as I demanded to be fed. My sister says I was always hungry and bawling as a baby. Before long I was to dislike the taste of milk - even before the days of 1/3 pint at State school. I wasn't one of the chosen people but was a chosen child. I was told that I broke many a glass bottle but I don't know if it was in anger, frustration or my reaction to the taste of milk.

Some events of my early years are quite vivid and have recalled, with the prompting of old photographs, memories of people and places not even in the photos. My memory has always been of the associative kind. A song on the wireless can take me to a time and place.

No matter what you are told or not told, adopted kids are different. We may be loved more or loved less but there is always the presence of what now would be called an elephant in the room. (I didn't have a toy elephant but a had a small one given to me when my aunt returned home from a trip to England via Ceylon)

People ask when we first knew we were adopted. The simple answer is usually - we always knew. I remember a specific conversation with and explanation from my mum and dad in the weeks before I was to start School. It was an attempt at "protection" from a world that could be quite cruel to those who are seen as "different". It's difficult to know if the decision was wise or not. I do know the decision was based on love. I also remember the names of children who used the fact of my adoption as a point scorer. They will have forgotten as to them it was insignificant. Sadly, there were adults - even relatives - who went along the same path and with more malice. Our parents had prepared us best they could and probably would have been horrified by some comments that we hoped were seen as being brushed off with nonchalance.

Sometimes I think it is the present that allows us to see the past with such warmth. Lives were not perfect. We saw the other kids and imagine their home lives were much the same as our own. Ringwood was just a world where we were safe and had a freedom that's been lost. Kids played. They learned lessons from experience and they had a happiness in the world that encouraged make believe and carried an acceptance of "making do" with what we had. I honestly don't remember rich kids or that I envied the lives of others. I am encouraged by the fondness that others have for those times and for what seems to be a shared loved of a special freedom that was Ringwood. I've read the reminiscences of others of my age and the experiences were so similar - even though our paths didn't cross.

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Our personalities really are set by the time we are five. All that we learn and experience from ther filtered by what is, to some extent, determined in our first few years. It's not until we are about fi years of age that we develop the ability to empathise and to see events and actions through the perspectives of others. We don't really understand the consequences of behaviour on others - we egocentric. It's not really possible for a child to understand how a parent would feel to relinquish - only how the child feels about been given away. We were told that we were special because our and Dad chose us. Unfortunately, we also carried with us the opposite side of the equation (at lea us) that we were not worth keeping. As our abilities to reason grow so do our abilities to rationali "invent" scenarios. My sister and I would joke about our past but underneath there was always a questioning present. It perhaps a strange confession given that we had a wonderful childhood wi loving parents and we had a childhood growing up in a time and place that, for the most part, was and secure. I mentioned in early writings that two of the significant factors present in our Ringwo childhood were trust and responsibility.

I can't think of a single situation where my Mum and Dad would not have shown kindness. It was wonderful lesson. They were also not judgmental. There were people in Ringwood who would be a wide berth by others - not so by our parents and, as a result we had no problem saying hello, ev when not in the company of our parents. It's probably difficult for younger generations to imagin stigma attached to single parents and divorcees and others who may have earned income in "less acceptable" ways. It was not such a rosy time for some people. There was much I didn't see or understand until I was older. We were fortunate to grow up in Ringwood. My sister and I were ble to have the unspoken teaching of my parents. We lived without fear. We understood tolerance a compassion - even if we did not know the words for the concepts.

It seems that it is human nature to have touch of xenophobia and a need to belong to a group by creating a reason for the exclusion of others. We like to put people in boxes. I was fortunate in my chosen career in that I was to be teaching in areas where the school population was a wonderful m religion, cultures and ethnicities. Looking back though it would be nice to hear someone say - "wh you expect - he is from Ringwood after all". It's really quite a lovely box (I guess a fruit box given th area). I suspect the date stamp on it to be somewhere around 1950 and the box contents were no expected to have uniformity but rather a collection seen as a whole.

When you next read or hear the words "get over it" think of them saying more about the speaker. People do not usually use their past as a crutch nor as an excuse. It's others who really carry the baggage. We didn't choose to be red headed, left-handed, or different.

My sister and I had lives filled with love. We did get to meet member of our birth families. Kids lea mechanisms for coping. Other kids in Ringwood were different in other ways. We all have stories t set us apart but we had a wonderful commonality in a Ringwood and district childhood. Ringwood shaped us as people in subtle ways. I'll always think of myself as a Ringwood kid - proudly.

THE SCENT OF RINGWOOD PAST

Who'd have thought I would be a street walker in my eighth decade. Of course, I need very subdu filtered lighting.

I was assaulted and transported this morning.

I take my early morning walks about 7.00 am. I chose a different path for part of the stroll this mo I was assaulted by a perfume. It was a lilac tree and I was transported back to 1950.

I remember more about than my childhood than I would have realised a few years ago. I can pictu garden on Mt Dandenong Road but until the sensual experience of today, I'd forgotten we had a li tree. It was in the corner of the front garden - close to where there would be a liquid amber tree. liquid amber tree was always a bit of a disappointment. I preferred the scarlet oak that could be se from our kitchen window.

One whiff of a natural perfume and my memory cells go into overdrive. I associate violets with m mother. I think of the smell of Daphne and of Brown Boronia. My dad took pride in his climbing ro They were a very deep red and perfumed. A rose devoid of a perfume is a bit like docking a dog's t know the name of the rose, (there's a good title), but now wonder if it has been changed so as not offend.

I can and do enjoy the smell of gardens (perhaps not blood and bone), but I do not like perfumes a colognes at all. Headache material. Migraine triggers. Thank you for the old spice soaps on ropes b gave them away! The smells of the garden can open a doorway to the past.

I don't hold much sway with aromatherapy nor with homeopathy. Sometimes belief and self-delusi work. I don't sneer at the believers. I watched a little "stand up" routine on the subject by the late Lock the other day. I wonder now if aromas might be useful in unlocking past memories rather tha the purposes or relaxation. If I smell incense sticks, I'm taken back to hazy memories of Amsterdam the 1970s. If I smell the mustiness of chestnut flowers, I'm taken back to a garden of the 1980s.

The night my mother died, one of the nursing staff placed an aromatic candle next to her bed and a deck with the softness of flutes and chimes. Mum had lost her sense of smell long before. The kind from the nurse was not an action that was "routine". I wasn't present when my mother died but I w appreciative of the presence of staff who cared. My mum is still present when I smell violets. Whe hear windchimes and flutes I am more inclined to think of Karumba market than of Donwood Nursi home. Aural memories differ from olfactory.

My favourite flowered bush in our childhood East Ringwood garden was the Japonica. I loved the bright red flowers on their woody stems. There was no scent.

Now when I see Gladioli I don't think of Dame Edna but of my dad and of my cousin Brian Guest. Brian would take the first gladies of the season to my mother. Daphne reminds me of the Burns Brothers of Ringwood. I can't remember much about Gibby's garden but his brothers all had Daphne bushes. Brown Boronia reminds me of Rose and Tom Hall who lived in Braeside Avenue when I was little.

I'll resist linking "flour" to my dad. I can remember the smell of yeast and the sweetness of molasses and malt.

Lilac has an association with Angels. It's also a symbolic of mourning. This morning I'm perhaps mourning for a childhood.

the roses climbed behind our lemon tree,

Tommy, Judy Reddish and Patricia 1949

POSING FOR CAMERA

I grew up in a Ringwood that didn't know about daylight savings fading curtains. There were not da photographs being taken of children and grandchildren and then the memory being stored in a clo was no doubt accused of having my head in the clouds at times - now I'd have troubling finding roo

On special days (new clothes or outings), my mother brought out the Brownie box camera and cap our childhood. I doubt there would have been a whole roll of film taken in a year. Films, and the processing of them, were luxuries. My Mum's father had also taken films of her childhood. There w such history of my father. My Dad's childhood days were not captured. I have only one photo my fa as a child, and that was found only this year. It was not in family archives but in a book published a his school.

I guess the use of studio photography has fallen in demand. Even wedding photography is now mo informal, and often, taken outdoors. I know there are still Wedding Albums priced out of the reach many. I am also aware of weddings where it is all about the event - and not about the marriage. It's one-upmanship world.

Perhaps the closest some families get to the world of studio photography is the access to a photo t in a shopping centre - at times with Father Christmas.

I love that I have found portrait photos of relatives, taken at the beginning of last century. The form of poses reflects more than the subject matter. There is a sense of time captured. Even the fake backgrounds tell a story of fashion.

Some of us in the Ringwood area had the good fortune to have photographs taken by the Geoffrey Baker or by the Peter Payne studio. I think that the photographs, at least in the case of the Guest fa were taken with the purpose of providing a Christmas gift for grandparents. By the time my sister a were reaching "double figures", the posing for a photographer may have been more problematic. N every little kid seems to learn the art of posing so that the smile is captured and the profile correct. cheese" is not required - it is now a learned and practised view of self that is presented. Are any kid these days "camera shy"?

The surprise and embarrassing disclosure of a childhood photo at a 21st birthday would now be replaced with 1000s of childhood photos taken before the selfie stick became the child's accessory c choice.

A different world had developed.

Formal and Informal photos

NO VICTA AND NO HILLS

Did our family dare to be different or was it just choices based on the advice from retailers know parents?

I only have a vague recollection of the installation of our clothes hoist in the backyard. It was rais lowered with a lever rather that with a turning ratcheted handle. There was some sort of "seal" that would be damaged if we swung on the line - which of course we did. I knew nothing about hydraulics.

I remember visiting a home in Main Street Blackburn with my cousin Brian. It may have been the of a relative on his mother's side of the family rather than a Guest. The rotary hoist was operated pressure from water taps in the garden.

My memories of our old pre rotary hoist clothes line are very vague indeed. I try to picture it and instead see the one belonging to the neighbours. I remember sheets hanging and of course the moveable pole (with its forked top), used to raise the line and compensate for the weight of the w sheets.

There'd not be room for a rotary clothes line in backyards of today. There's hardly a backyard. My residence was on a hectare of land so there was Hills Hoist. Now there is a line attached to the br wall. Washing day is not just Monday as it was in my childhood. I don't use blue bags and I don't h wring clothes with a mangle and lift the sheets with a "copper stick". I still like to use the energy s wind and sun method of drying clothes. I remember those wooden pegs before the "spring" versi were introduced. Some may remember peg dolls! There was not a problem with matching peg col Wood was wood. I don't have OCD. I can live with a blue and red peg supporting a green shirt on line.

CHRISTMAS IN RINGWOOD

Most families have traditional ways that they spend and organise Christmas eve and Christmas mornings. For some it will involve going to Church. For some it will be the watching of a particular movie. Some families will attend a Carols by Candlelight event. My Ringwood childhood years did not seem to have a defined Christmas pattern. I know I attended St Paul's on at least one occasion. Most Christmas mornings we went across the paddock and visited my aunt. I do remember that there were other times that we left early to visit another aunt in the city. We didn't ever attend a Carol Service at Ringwood Park Lake though we only two minutes' walk away.

Some families wait until after Christmas lunch for the opening of presents. We didn't. I think we probably had roast chicken and ham for our meal. It certainly was a meal with baked vegetables. I was probably eating camp pie. (I'm not making that up). I loved Christmas pudding though and still do. I love Christmas cake too. My Dad made our fruit cakes.

Our usual Christmas Eve visit was to the Falconer family (Warrandyte Road and then Hobart Street). Marjory (Palmer from Campbell Street) had known my mother since before they were both married. She was my mother's bridesmaid. Marj and Keith were my sister's godparents - and by default really, mine as well. I remember the visit for the mince tarts and the shortbread.

For the last ten years (perhaps more) I've watched the same film each Christmas Eve. It's not "White Christmas" or "It's A Wonderful life".

I watch "Joyeaux Noel". It's a bitter sweet film. I don't watch it to hear "Adeste Fidelis". For me it's really a film of humanity.

I have no photograph of any of my Christmas Days in Ringwood other than my first. There is no photo of a Christmas tree. They've been no cards kept. There are just memories. There were certainly a few times that we had a family portrait made for Christmas but I guess it would have been taken a month or so earlier.

Other December born people will empathise. It was difficult not to have our birthdays submerged beneath Christmas preparations. "This a combined Birthday/Christmas present". My parents certainly didn't do that. How lucky was I. At least two new books each December. I outgrew the Bobbsy Twins. I just checked - there were 72 books! I probably had the first dozen. With so many American books and English books in my early reading years I should be comfortable with this present cold weather and be preparing for snow.

I'm more comfortable remembering Christmas Eve's of the 1940s and 1950s in Ringwood than of being totally in the present. It's easy to edit the past.

The magpies are caroling. They've been practising all year.

Party Season – 1948 Mt Dandenong Road East Ringwood.

STILL WATERS

When you're a toddler a pond is a world of a wonder. A lake is an ocean of adventure. Those of who lived at the Ringwood end of Mt Dandenong Road, or had homes in Suda Avenue or Junction Street and Georges Road, had a world at our front door. Once we were of an age where we were allowed to cross the road, we entered an adventure playground that did not need much in the way of "structures". We had our imaginations. Ringwood Park Lake is now a "civilized and tamed" area. I like to remember it as being unkempt and slightly wild. We didn't need a train. We had the pipe! I don't even like the bridge across the lake. It's like cheating!

I graduated from a backyard fishpond, to tadpole dams in our horse paddocks and on to yabbies and Ringwood Lake.

There's a new playground near my current home. There's a castle and a sword in the stone. There's no lake to provide an Excalibur. Ringwood had a place of magic and imagination. There was also a sense of danger. We had heard stories of drownings there. We also had the rules to break. (All of us would have climbed down that little ladder - just because it was there). I remember morning mists on the water, flooding up to the road, snagged sailing boats in the inaccessible reeds and swans and their cygnets.

Our fish pond at #7 Mt Dandenong Road. Wire protecting the fish and children.

RINGWOOD PARK LAKE

An early love of reading. A gift from my sister.

THE INNER CHILD

I kicked my friend to school today
We met near the Ringwood Lake
My friend's a little stone
It's a journey we both take

I avoid the footpath lines
There'll be consequences paid
My spelling test's this morning
I hope that it's delayed

I read my Enid Blyton book
And forgot the spelling list
I can't organise my homework
Just have not learned the gist

I've stepped upon a line
That's one mistake I'll make
I'll avoid all the others
If more care I take

I hope all the words are simple
The girls will get them right
I'd still rather read my books
Than learn to spell each night

My writing's not quite neat enough

I'm not good with heads and tails

I try to keep the slope correct

Another of my fails

My sister uses pen and ink

She takes more care than I

Next year I get to use the nibs

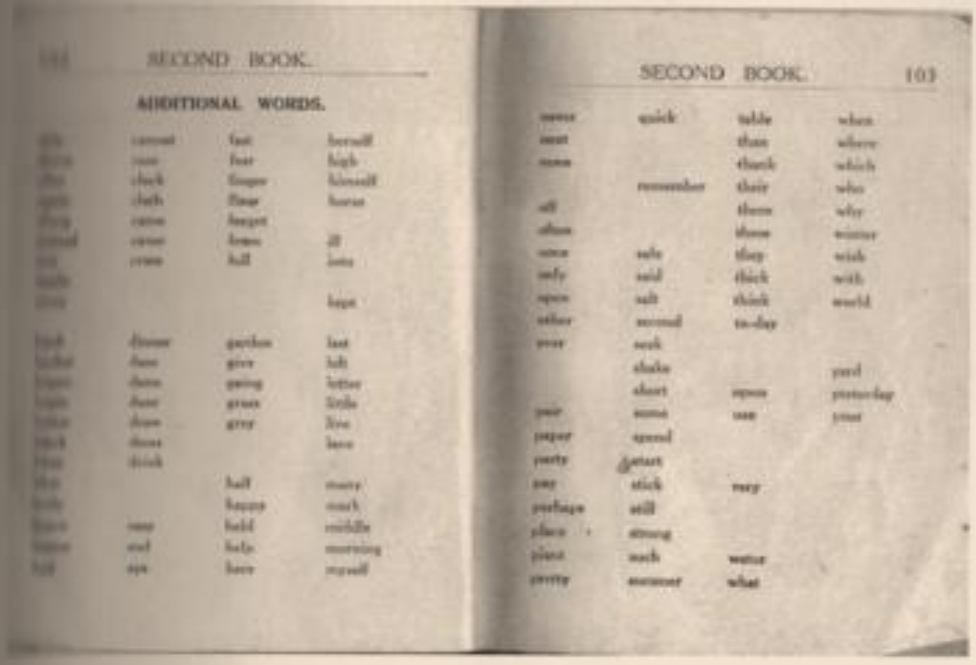
Another skill to try

I hope to find my friend again

Outside the little gate

I'll kick him almost to my home

He's had all day to wait



102 SECOND BOOK.

ADDITIONAL WORDS.

			herself
			high
			himself
			horse
			ill
			into
			kept
			last
			left
			letter
			little
			live
			love
			many
			much
			middle
			morning
			myself

SECOND BOOK. 103

			when
			where
			which
			who
			why
			winter
			wish
			with
			world
			yard
			yesterday
			your
			very
			water
			what

THE DRESSING-UP YEARS

I guess all children like to dress-up and pretend. Sometimes my sister and I were in concerts and costumes had been made for purpose. More often we "made do" with old clothes and even crepe paper. "Pretend" is a wonderful part of childhood.

All the photos are taken at our home at #7 Mt Dandenong Road in the 1940s and 1950s

PLAY ON

The wireless in our East Ringwood home stood in the corner of the lounge room. It was certainly taller than me for my first few years. There was extra speaker wired to it so that the programmes could be heard in the kitchen if mum wished to listen as she prepared meals or cut dress materials on our large table. I don't remember my Mum listening to serials - not even "Blue Hills". On Sunday nights we would listen to D24 (if the content matter was deemed suitable). I think 3DB was probably the station of choice for most of the day. The wireless was turned to other stations though I did get to listen to Superman, Hop Harrigan and the like. As a little tyke my favourite was radio personality was Smokey Dawson.

Music was just in the background but I do remember "Doggie In The Window", "Sweet Violets", "
round the Corner" and "Goodnight Irene". A favourite was "Bimbo" by Jim Reeves.

In 1956 my "Uncle" Harry and his wife Leslie parted ways. As is often the case, friendships disapp
Auntie Les. asked my mother to look after her radiogram and records (78 rpm) which we kept in
front hallway. It was the beginning of a lifetime of listening to records. I was introduced to the so
Paul Robeson, Freddy Gardner, Perry Como, Guy Mitchell, Richard Tauber, Joseph Locke and Jan
who was to keep looking for his bluebird of happiness.

I bought my first record in early 1958. Once again it was a 78-rpm disc so that I could play it on t
radiogram. The record was Pat Boone singing "April Love". Tragedy struck in the middle of the ye
came to collect her radiogram and records! I didn't Miss Auntie Les at all. I did miss the radiogram
missed my Uncle Harry but was not see either of them again.

1957 was my last year at Ringwood State School. It was a year of a little more freedom too. It wa
time of sleepovers at the homes of friends with reciprocity. Friendship between our parents allow
a feeling of extended comfort zones. I spent time at the homes of the Stuchbury and Fry families.
at the Stuchbury home that I was to listen to the cast recording of a Broadway show for the first
Ken had brought home a copy of "My Fair Lady" from the USA

It was not until Christmas 1958 that songs from the show had a clearance for radio play in Austra
was strange system that operated!

Visits to the Fry's house introduced me to more pop music. I think they were probably Jeanette's
records - Everly Brothers, Perry Como and that Elvis bloke who was not really to my taste at all. I
quite happy to listen to Buddy Holly but I would not go that step further.

A record player became part of our lives at home. My sister 's first purchase was "Oh Boy" by the
Crickets. Mine was "Chances Are" by Johnny Mathis. Choices were made on value for money line
sides were great songs as well. I would think this would be mid 1958. I was suddenly replacing M
Ward's store (with its comics) as my favourite browsing shop with Stoney's and its Record Bar. Pe
money really had a purpose! I remember checking out all the cheap records that Mr Gadge had
at the other end of Ringwood. I became a follower of Top 40 programming on the radio. There w
be very few purchases though. I still had a stack of 78 rpm that gave me pleasure - I think they h
originally belonged to Neville Burns or his sisters and came to me by way of Auntie Rose and Unc
Clarrie. I remember one of them was an Everly Brothers recording. On March 24 1960 I started
after school job. Suddenly I was wealthy! One Guinea a week and I was able to afford to buy one
a week and still have money to go the Ringwood pictures etc. It was also the time of the transist
Pop music was everywhere. My dad even gave me the money to buy a top 40 song he liked. It w
Brothers Four singing "Greenfields". 60 years later when I hear the song it is a connection to Dad
decade or so later and Dad had another favourite "Old Dogs and Children and Watermelon wine
didn't rush into things. He did love his transistor radio though and it was his constant companion
shed when he retired. I doubt he listened to talk back radio that much but he certainly tuned int
football at weekends. Dad was a St Kilda supporter.

I've avoided writing my teenage years. It's a difficult balance between truths and perceptions. I was not unhappy but perhaps to the surprise of some, I did not like being at School. Mum knew that! I went home at every lunch time and sometimes not often) didn't return. I retreated into a world of pop music really. I even hid under my bed with a transistor radio so that I wasn't around when people visited.

Even as a university student I was following top 40 music. I had an allowance and certainly bought many records. Interest in popular music gave me a connection to my future students just as sport can do. I even made use of pop music in my lessons. It was useful in legal studies, economics and in shorthand classes.

My interest was eventually to lead to the publication of what was really just listing of Melbourne's top 40 history. Nothing else was out there so my publisher certainly more than covered his costs. I also was to write for a few years for a record collectors' magazine. I was a paid columnist for a magazine that was international in distribution. Life wasn't just about teaching.

I'd lost interest in popular music by 1990. It's not music if you can't find a melody. Music was hijacked by producers and mixers. Pop writing as an art form - a little story told in 2.5 minutes was now a thing of the past. The early 1990s brought the end of the 45 rpm as well. I'd been following pop almost through its history on 7" records. I still have thousands of the discs!

I can understand the new interest in vinyl records. Holding a physical product is way better than a download. I do think people are being conned though. The new pressings are often not really of high quality, the original recording was often digital anyway and the price is kept high by a supply that has been limited to make sure that it does not meet demand. Buyers are happy. I won't knock their joy because I experienced something similar when I first heard a journey into stereophonic sound or something similar.

I still listen to pop music from my childhood years. In my retirement I've been able to provide music for many people searching for that elusive musical memory. I've provided special songs for funerals - often in advance and chosen by the soon to be departed. I've had people want to plan their own funerals so as to avoid conflicts within the family. I've heard sad stories and funny stories. Just one song can mean so much to a person and to their family. A song can be a gift and a message. A pop song can contain more love and personal connection than a hymn or a classical dirge. Sometimes the effect can linger for the wrong reason. I can't listen to "Up Where Be Belong". It was played at the funeral of the son of a friend.

I can take myself back to the music room at Ringwood High. (Room 22). I remember pop records played and I remember other recordings that really were part of the course. I don't listen to only pop music! I'm a grumpy old man who is dismissive of much popular music of the past thirty years or so. I can also be dismissive of classical music. (Does anyone really like Philip Glass?).

There was "a little white duck sitting on the water". I can remember adults (probably those courtes Uncles and Aunts) amusing me with little fishies that swam and swam right over the dam.

I guess all us of that that generation were tickled as the little piggy went to market. Now it is proba child abuse and we certainly would see the piggy and the trip to the market as being inappropriate. Maybe there are vegan nursery rhymes.

I hope people don't see it as patronising when they sing these little rhymes and songs to an elderly relative. The songs stay with us and usually will take us back to a time of happiness.

I'm not quite ready to finger paint on the walls but I can listen to Burl Ives singing about lollipop tre and froggies who went a-courtin'. I didn't know what Goober peas were and I had no idea why Jim cracked corn for that matter. But as a little fellow, I loved the songs.

Can you imagine anyone in our childhood years having a nursery? Shared bedrooms and sleepouts (closed-in verandas) were all we knew. We may not have had a 100-acre wood in Ringwood but we certainly had room for exploration and adventure. Of course, the best country for exploration was t one that we carried in our imaginations. I didn't have an imaginary friend in the 1940s. I don't think time for one. They probably would have left Ringwood and found some other little kid in need. Who would have thought we would miss open drain-ways, holes in paling fences, overgrown laneways a culverts.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

Some thirty Years ago I had a discussion with an acquaintance about writing life stories. He had been working on his own, not for publication, but to hand down to his son. Rather than to take the obvious chronological approach he chose to "hang" his memories on events. There were world events, local events and of course the usual family events- holidays, births marriages and deaths. I have no desire to write my own story and if I were to do so, I suspect I would have difficulty avoiding distortions of the truth to colour my narrative.

The last year has given me access to photographs which have opened the doors to memories. I could certainly find out dates of marriages and deaths etc. and with a little searching, could access the appropriate Ringwood events that I recall as significant because I was a resident at the time. I remember the opening of the Drive-In shopping centre, The opening of the Midway arcade and of the Bowling Alley. I remember Ringwood becoming a city (but not taking part in the celebrations). I remember Jubilee Park opening and of course the opening of Eastland.

I've attempted to look back at Historical events that I remember rather than was I told about or taught about. I was certainly aware of some news reports about which I had minimal understanding. I probably had more interest in the wedding of Grace Kelly and the death of Buddy Holly than in the political climate of my childhood. I do remember but probably didn't understand, the "Petrov" affair. I was old enough to enjoy the salacious reporting of the Profumo affair.

I was only six at the time of the Death of King George VI. I remember that suddenly it was "Long Live the Queen". I was excited about coronation but the conquering of Everest by Tenzing and Hillary was the stuff of boys' adventures stories. I guess then it was the seven-year-old me that was becoming aware of a wider world.

Others may well list sporting events and achievements.

SUMMER IN THE 1940s

Rosebud's summer storms

Lightning cuts the skies

It's Ringwood at the beach

Mosquitoes and sand-flies

The stretcher is my bed
Lotion on my arms and legs
It's just a canvas tent for us
Held by sturdy ropes and pegs

I love to be upon the sand
Despite the sand-fly bites
I'm safe within the playpen
But not from biting mites

It's salad for the lunch and tea
For me it'll be camp pie
I'll not eat the cold chicken
Though I did not see this one die

We'll have Christmas cake to follow
It's been made by our dad
It's much better than the salad
That my mum and sister had

Our meat safe hangs upon a branch
The washing from the trees
A hurricane hangs in the tent
Mum hopes there'll be a breeze

It's days of summer friends
Of splashing in the sea
I'm not old enough to be alone
But have a growing sense of "me"

I can see through wooden bars
My sister's free to play
She tries to build a castle
The sun burns her every day

She's protected by her hat
To some extent at least
Sand flies don't bother her
It's on my legs they feast

I'm not allowed to scratch
My hands are bound and tied
Itchy nights upon the stretcher
A burned sister at my side

Dad joins us at the weekends
Mum surely needs a break
They're the summers I remember
Fly bites, sand and cake

When work is play.

SIBLINGS – Tommy and Trish

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My history is personal but it also shared by the people in Ringwood who grew up in the area and loved our Borough in the 1940s and 1950s.

Thanks Jessie and Jack Guest

TJG

BAKER'S SON