

Tim Harvey YHS 1971

We have reached the last of the classical elements and the second-to-last of these essays. And this time the theme is **Air**.

Running, and sucking in air. I think that I might have mentioned that physical fitness was not high on most people's agenda when I was a kid. Yes, in High School they did send us on cross-country runs, but that seemed to me to have little to do with fitness and was more a crude attempt to reduce the pupil-to-teacher ratio. With the exception of a very few individuals, running – running for one's health – was not widely practiced. Later – mid Form 4? – I actually started running myself, just to get some exercise after studying. First time out I ran for nearly four miles without stopping, which was surprised me. So I tried it again the next night. I quite enjoyed it. The air was cooler and cleaner at night and, with a couple of exceptions, it was very pleasant. Those exceptions including dogs chasing you in the dark, slipping on near-invisible piles of damp autumn leaves, low tree branches spiking you in the head, and once, when I was zoned out and thinking of other things, I got the fright of my life when, at the last second, I had to leap over a middle-aged gentleman who had curled up asleep on the footpath.

Magic pictures from the ether. Also known as TV. Although I missed a lot of the glory days of Yallourn, there are things I look back on now with some affection because they were so pivotal. One of them was the arrival of television. Somehow, when I was young, I got wind of someone down the end of our street getting a TV. I bowled up there and somehow I ended up watching TV at a complete stranger's house. The fact that that they would take pity on a technologically-deprived waif who wandered in off the street was the height of kindness. Mind you, I don't think I was exceedingly grateful. I wanted to watch *Mighty Mouse* cartoons and their kids (who were a bit older) wanted to watch *Rin-Tin-Tin*. I think I left. We got a TV eventually, although it needed an extraordinarily high TV antennae to work. The fact that we were nestled in the shadow of Coach Rd did it I think (yet *another* reason why Yallourn shouldn't have been on that side of the hill – location, location, **location!**). So I grew up on snowy, fuzzy, glorious black 'n' white. But as much as I enjoyed telly in those days, I have been warned by colleagues of the same generation as me that it is best to bask in the dim distant glow of the memory of old TV programs enjoyed as a child and not to try to re-live them as an adult. You do not re-capture the days of your youth by re-watching those old programs in the digitally re-mastered, re-issued boxed set on DVD. You just become painfully aware of how the memories of those by-gone days were coloured by youthful innocence, chronological distance and once-bright eyes.

Magic sounds from the ether. When I started listening to the radio in Form 1, I had a little transistor radio, with a reception range of about a foot-and-a-half. So rather than listening to the super-cool city stations (3AK (“Where No Wrinklies Fly”) or its arch-nemesis, 3XY), I could really only pick up the two local stations, 3UL (Warragul, now 3GG) and 3TR (Sale, now 3TR FM/Gold 1242). Radio 3TR played more music, including the “Top Eight: The Great”, which was a bizarrely cut down top 10, which was in turn a ridiculously reduced Top 40. But 3UL, on the other hand, played some rarely-heard gems I still love today. Unfortunately it played them in between commercials for sheep-dip and advice on worming, which made for heavy going. But all the music that was played on the city stations that was super-cool, hip, groovy, radical and rebellious then, is just Golden Oldies now. Mum can't understand why they ever thought the Beatles were untidy, with their suits and their beautifully combed hair. And all the super-cool, hip, groovy, radical and rebellious types are now old, fat and bald and can't stand the loud music of the younger generation. I know because I'm one of them!

Fog. When I was young, fogs around Yallourn were quite common. And certainly fog was responsible for one of the more memorable sights I have ever come across. It was in 1973, quite early one morning and we had been on a quick trip over to Moe station and we returned over Coach Rd. It was stunning. The sky was a clear, unblemished blue. But the valley was full of fog, right across to the JeeraJeeralangs and out in both directions, as far as you could see. The power station chimneys (including Morwell and Hazelwood) were hidden beneath the fog and discharged their contents from below its surface in vertical white plumes. It was like sitting on an island in a sea of wet cotton wool. It really was quite extraordinary to look at, and I haven't seen anything like it since.

The View from Coach Rd Hill. I think I mentioned in an earlier essay that, in High School, it seemed to be taken for granted that we would undertake hikes that I would not even consider today without motorised transport or a team of Sherpas and a sedan-chair. One such hike occurred early in Form 1, when our class – all seventy of us, plus teachers – went for a hike up Coach Road. Not so memorable in itself, except that was the first time I deliberately disobeyed a teacher. You see, having made it comfortably up Coach Rd hill, I would have happily walked to Mt Erica if they had pointed it out and told me there were house points involved. But having walked up the hill, there was no way I was actually going to climb up any further **vertically** if it wasn't strictly hill-related. Specifically, I was **not** going to climb up the lookout tower and look around at landmarks, which was the whole point of the trip. From memory, I think that there were three of us with the same problem – a paralysing and (more importantly) non-negotiable, fear of heights. It wasn't that I didn't want to go up - I just **couldn't** go up there. It took a while to convince the teacher I was serious. (It was that sort of day, as you will see.) So, it was a nice little walk, but since I couldn't climb the tower, it was – in an academic sense - rather ... er academic. It was, however, eventful in at least one other respect. A few of the chaps had prevailed on the teachers to let them walk up via the bush between the hills. However, one lad showed up at the lookout tower with his blazer rolled up under his arm, which was almost unheard of. (We were just out of Grade 6 and the school dress code was quite rigidly held.) He was grilled as to why he was out of uniform. He replied, completely straight-faced, that he had found a snake while walking through the bush and – having no other means of collecting it – threw his blazer over it and bundled it up so he could bring it with him. I think he was let off for the ingenuity of this tale and the utter sincerity of its delivery. It wasn't until he got back to school and emptied the snake out of his blazer that his sincerity became easier to understand – he actually meant it. The snake was only a foot or so long, but it was dead cross, as I suppose you would be too if you'd been stuck under someone's armpit for several hours on a hot day in a scratchy high school blazer. Eventually, I think it was returned to the bush from whence it came. But the incident marked the lad involved as one to watch

Steam, in the pictures of the Yallourn W Cooling Towers. I remember the first time I saw those beautifully curved cooling towers, in an artist's impression of the yet-to-be-built Yallourn West power station, with great imaginary clouds of white water vapour misting up into the imaginary air. It was all shiny and futuristic and imaginary and it was to be completed in 1973, which seemed so far off that the artist's impression could well have included flying cars and cities on the moon as well and they would not have seemed to me to be out of place. [sigh]

Going to the tip. This is something now lost to the generations, because wandering around the tip was one of life's adventures. There were two tips. The one just outside Yallourn, near the old Ampol service station. Or the bigger, better one (with newer, improved rubbish!) on the Haunted Hills road. And, looking back, it was probably not all that safe or hygienic, but the *things* that people threw out! The only thing vaguely similar now is the hard waste collection, when you can see all this great gear being pitched out for almost *no* good reason at all (so much of which was, only months ago, advertised on late-night TV as revolutionising exercise, learning, clothing, and life as we know it!). But it's not centralised like the tip was. And not nearly as much fun. Going with dad to the tip was like entering another world. And what, you may ask, has this to do with the topic of "Air"? It was the smell of the place, or of both places, really. They both smelled the same, with a particular and characteristic *tip-ish* smell. Not wholly unpleasant, just typically and unmistakably *tip-ish*.

Smoking. As I said, I grew up at a time before either running or good health generally became fashionable. In fact, it was a time when most blokes would've finished off footy training with a beer and a smoke. And certainly those were the rites of passage that many teenagers seemed to aspire to as well. Smoking was everywhere. I remember coming down the steps from the balcony of Yallourn Theatre to the mezzanine floor where everyone had ducked out at the first opportunity to light up. As you went down the stairs to buy a choc-top, you met with a thick Los Angeles-like layer of smoke you practically had to swim through. (I *think* I can even vaguely remember people smoking in the Theatre during films - can that be right??) Trains to and from Melbourne were much the same. Non-smoking compartments always seemed to have one person who lit up, with or without asking anyone else. And if they did ask if you minded them lighting up in a Non-Smoking compartment, they seemed terribly surprised and even a little put

out if you said you would rather they didn't. There were, of course, the ruder ones who didn't ask, didn't care and just made the air unbreathable. Jerks.

Castles in the Air. I did my HSC at Yallourn High School in 1976. When I finished, the year behind us went to Newborough to do their HSC. That is, they left YHS. So the kids who made it to the following "final year" of YHS – 1977 - were in fact only in Form 5 and the following year **they** had to go to Newborough to do their HSC too. So the HSC of 1976 included the last students to make it right through their secondary schooling at Yallourn. And if a man's home is his castle then, in that final school year, we had to deal with Castles in the Air, because by then several of us had moved out of town and that's what we met on the way to school. A man's castle, suspended in the air on the back of a semi-trailer, and smack in the middle of the road. Usually, this was just a nuisance although one classmate was late to an HSC exam because of one such castle, which can't have done his nerves any good at all. (*"Late because of house on road"*.) Anyway, I found a single picture of that HSC year in a YOGA publication from 1986, but the photo wasn't very clear. And it was a long time ago. So I re-present, for your edification, a picture of the final HSC class (1976) of Yallourn High School. I have only kept contact with two people from this photo - one by marriage - although I know the approximate whereabouts of a few others. But of this group, I think I am the only member of YOGA, so most will never know you are looking at their happy faces. Some of you may know them as relatives, as neighbours, or through friends. Tell them I said hi.



Form 6, Yallourn High School 1976 - the final HSC Class

Back: Ian Jardine, Michael Clarke, Gary Suckling, Tim Harvey, Victor Howard, Lorraine Swindon, Dennis Minster

Front: Wendy Foley, Sue Cairns, Graeme Rooney, Kaye McInnes, Julie Lacey, Jenny Terrill, Brenda Long.