

Peter Wallace YHS 1949 - shares some great recollections with us.....



Dad's father, Thomas Wallace from Newcastle-on-Tyne (Iron Ship's Plater) came to Yallourn in about 1923 to build the first power station coal handling gear (telpher gear) and lived in tent houses as per Colin Harvey's magnificent Power Station History book.

I was born in Carnegie in 1937. Mum (Eva) and Dad (Bill [William]) moved to Yallourn in 1938/1939 with Dad initially staying in the West Camp till the family came. Dad being also a ship builder worked in the open-cut maintenance during the war and until he retired.

I attended Yallourn Primary School from 1942 - 1948, Y.H.S. from 1949 - 1954, Yallourn Tech from 1955 - 1963 and moved to Mount Isa Mines in 1969. Have since been involved in most of the mining sites around Australia, and now call myself the mad pensioner inventor. Brother David (Jimmy) recently checked some brain scans I sent him to see whether I had the inventor's disease (which is now a recognized medical syndrome), but he said that my Yallourn upbringing had kept me in good stead.

PARENTS

Dad was one of those selfless community minded active people who also flourished in the local environment. He became - A JP and SM; President of the Yallourn Medical and Hospital Board; Chairman of the local ALP branch and stood for pre-selection for parliament; Elected to the town Advisory Council in 1949; A Church Warden and Vestryman at St John's Church; President of Yallourn RSL; Hon. Secretary of Yallourn War Memorial Committee; Hon. Secretary of Yallourn Trades & Labour Council; President of Yallourn Fountains Appeal; Executive President of Yallourn Boilermakers Society; On the Yallourn High School Advisory Council; On the Advance Latrobe Valley Association; Yallourn Safety Town Committee; Back to Yallourn Celebration President; Orana Old Peoples Home Founder, president and life member; Aboriginal Advancement League; Yallourn Cemetery Trust, and ABC Regional Committee.

Apart from the above, Dad was helping Mum to raise 6 close together offspring. I can remember one occasion when 5 of the 6 of us were in Mum's bed stricken with some deadly whooping cough, WARTIME MEMORIES

We lived in No.6 East Cross, opposite Win & Phil Ashmead and next door to the Frosts (the big girl Frost used to beat me up when she could catch me). Early on, we billeted two American girl exchange students from Maine. Then there was a dreadful drought in Gippsland and the cattle were allowed to roam around the town getting such grass as was there. We then billeted two American Airforce people from the RAAF base at Sale. They brought Polly Waffles (when we were on ration coupons and I could occasionally access one pennyworth of broken biscuits), which are still my favourite sweet some 60 years on.

At Yallourn primary, we kids were taught how to knit socks and make camouflage nets for the war effort. My 5th grade teacher was Sheila Brooker whom I used to fall in love with. The whole township was bricked up and sandbagged because of the strategic nature of the power stations. There were several 3.7inch Bofors anti-aircraft gun installations around the town and Dad used to work in one of these. He also had been a soldier settler in the Mallee (Robinvale) during the depression years. On many afternoons, the sky was full of explosions as the guns practised on barrage balloons, which were towed across the sky for the practice. The next day there could be skies full of red dust from Mallee dust storms, the next day spectacular displays from the Southern Lights.

Most of the houses had dugouts as also noted by Sheila Brooker. These were cavities in the backyard dug out of clay, lined with timbers with wooden steps down, with the clay

piled on top and wet blankets across the inlet. These were an absolute godsend during the disastrous bushfires of February, 1944. We got sent home from school in the afternoon because there was some smoke from Newborough. We camped in the dugout while Dad came home for three days covered black from fighting the fires, which set the open cut on fire and which had to be flooded. Nearby Cyprus hedges, full of coal dust, would suddenly burst into flames some miles from the fire front.

YALLOURN HIGH SCHOOL

A wonderful school. Midway through, a dreadful poliomyelitis epidemic closed the school for many months. Most of the teachers had been re-trained after the war and were exceedingly mature and competent people. They would always coach us in the various sports and other activities after school. The whole 600 girls and boys took part in every sport imaginable. Matches were always going on between the student sexes and between the staff and students. We were all also taught to sing and learn to dance with each other.

I remember best Nell Wynd (who at that time was not married to the history teacher, "Woggie" Young). Nell used to get us each year in a classroom and teach us the Gilbert & Sullivan operetta that was to be performed at that year's speech night in the magnificent Yallourn Theatre. Long before Val Pyres and others, I played one of the lead roles in three operettas' as one of the longest serving boy sopranos that ever lived. The final one was "Trial By Jury" with Noelle Rust, from Morwell, (Judith's elder sister), who was quite beautiful and went on to be an opera singer.

(The wonderful thing about all that stuff was that the kids, parents, teachers, etc., seemed to get a lot of fun out of it.)



SPORTS

Five ovals, women's basketball courts, 8 + 3 tennis courts, swimming pools 1 and 2, badminton courts, men's basketball courts, a soccer ground; I do not believe that any town of 5000 people in the world ever had it so good. Not only that, there were, in the town, top exponents of all of these sports. For myself, I started playing soccer with the Anglican Church team at about 11 years old.

SOCCKER - In one match, I remember we Anglicans juniors got beaten 20-0. It was on the same ground, that in the afternoon, heaps of buses would pull up with people from Melbourne, Juventas, Hoaka and other European countries. They would all line up on the sidelines and get very involved and vociferous. (This just after the war when many of these groups thought that they still had scores to settle!) Our champion, at that time, was Stan Ostlund, who used to do these magnificent corner kicks in the mud. Some time later, my Dad was umpiring a cricket match against the Australian and the MCG touring side on No.5 oval and the cricket ball went flat and Dad asked me to go home and get a new one. I jumped on my bike and tore off across No.4 oval, onto the soccer ground and with

my head down, crashed into the soccer ground goal post. (This smashed my elbow and kept me off delivering papers for 6 months.) Nevertheless, I took the new ball back. The Australian captain was Lindsey Hasset, whose cousin lived in Yallourn opposite Dr Andrew's house.

That evening, Dad invited Hasset and the others to our house in 12 Green Street to show them a game that we used to play. This was a steel pole, with a swivel top and a rope attached to a sock-covered tennis ball, which we used to bang backwards and forwards. They seemed duly impressed but years later, another "so-called" inventor made a lot of money from my Dad's concept.

AUSSIE RULES - The Latrobe Valley had very strong Aussie rules teams. Some memories are:-

As full back in the seconds team trying to kick the ball uphill and upwind with ice on the ball.

An Irish Hurley team came to No.5 oval to play the locals. In the first half they played Aussie rules, in the second Hurley. This consists of hitting a round hard ball with sticks like a shortened hockey stick, mainly up in the air and above your head. The amazing thing was that the Aussies took to the game like a duck to water, which was quite astounding, and nobody lost their head.

The Yallourn team had a small wiry winger, Bill White, with feet bigger than Ian Thorpe. In one match, I saw him kick, on the run on the wing, a left-footed goal on the biggest ground in Australia.

TENNIS - More wonderful memories. Apart from the bitumen courts in 3 of the church grounds, the main courts opposite the swimming pool originally had 8 en-tou-cas red brick dust courts, which the coal dust finally blocked up. Some of the best country tennis players in country Victoria played there and they won many country week and local tournaments. Names like Keith Lawton, Jim Hill, Bob Dinsdale, Leon Melbourne, Austin Lynch, Bob Crookston and wife, Dick Wilson, Dot & Jack Carlyle, Mrs & Max Williams, Mavis & Tom McAllister, Norm Meadows, Blondie Nicholson, George & Sonia Bates, Murray "Muscles" French, Norma & John Hutchinson, John Sundquist, Bill Graham, Bruce King, Val McGoldrick and so many others. (Norma Davey was also the recipient of my first childhood sweetheart crush before she met Big John.)

The annual 3 day New Year tournament attracted, not only Davis Cup players every year but also the best of the Melbourne and other country players (Beth Ruffin was beautiful and many years later, I played squash at her cousin Kent Ruffin's courts in Jindalee, Brisbane).

Bob Crookston often, after having worked nightshift and having had a few settling ales, walked onto the court and blitzed some top player with his beautiful effortless style. Of great chagrin and disappointment to a young up and comer like myself, was the humiliating fact that blokes like Jim Hill and Austin Lynch, who appeared to be fairly old to me, could wipe me off the court almost pointless, anytime.

BADMINTON - Yallourn also had top country badminton players and teams. Again the McAllisters, the Bates, Norma Hutchinson, Leon Melbourne, Dick Wilson, The Harvey, Angove, Bingham and Collins tribes and most particularly Brian and his lovely wife, Langdon. We played in country halls, Church halls and the curved Quonsett huts at the back of the swimming pool (also that Yankee basketball game; imagine 5ft 2in Bob Scott playing basketball.)

I used to organise the Fire Brigade group (we lived opposite at 12 Green Street by that time) and each season knocked on the doors of our 6 women players for our 3-lady team. When somebody came to their door, I would always look upwards into their eyes so that I didn't see whether they were pregnant that year.

Our country farmer mates always used to put on lovely fresh cream cakes and suppers and we often used to finish up with cream all over us from various hi-jinks.

SQUASH - Four squash courts opened up in Morwell about 1964. Jimmy McArthur and his Dad, "Muscles" French, Tom and many others. Tom was a turbine fitter with Parsons at Hazelwood Power Station and was single. He used to pester me night and day to play squash, which I used to do and would even sometimes let him win a game for encouragement. (Shades of Austin Lynch.) Tom then went to Newcastle NSW and had coaching from one of Australia's best squash players.

One hot day in the middle of summer and not having played squash for months, I got this phone call from Tom, who insisted that we play squash. The little bastard ran me around the court ragged until I could hardly stand (with a big grin over his Geordie face). Tom subsequently ran squash courts in Aspley, Brisbane, as an A1 player and I sometimes played in his teams.

THE COOKES - The recent note by David Cooke shows the only photo of Harry Bailey's choir, which does not show myself. I recognise many of the people in the photo but Marg Scott (Evans) would probably know them all. I knew Robin, David and his parents quite well and was often in their house in Maiden Street. His Dad was an ex RAF bomber or fighter pilot with a big appropriate moustache. He once took me for a drive in his lovely English car (Wolsley?). I am sure Robin and I were in St John's choir until he went to college.

RE-UNION - Some 20 years ago, I organised an impromptu re-union (I think in Melbourne) mainly to catch up with Alec (Hoagy) Carmichael, who had been chairman of Deli Petroleum, Santos, the NSW Rail Authority, the NSW Darling Harbour Redevelopment and the QLD Cultural Centre. Alec was always in the financial reports and used to play tennis with John Howard whom he lived opposite. Other attendees were Bob & Marg Scott, Don Munro and John Sunquist (both latter ex YHS and now deceased).

EPILOGUE - I have since attended the two wonderful functions arranged by Y.O.G.A. at the Moe RSL and the Anglican Church at Newborough. I was totally astounded at the delightful procession of my old friends and acquaintances who kept re-introducing themselves and amazing me with their knowledge of the Wallace family, St. John's Church history, choir members etc. People like Bruce King, Billy White, Ian Stanger, Sonja Ostlund, Betty Daddo, Bob Garvin, Mavis McAllister, the Harvey tribe, Ann Lovison and many others. (Before I came, I was having some apprehensions that I would feel like an outsider but those thoughts disappeared when Bruce King met me at the door.) My humble apologies to the many other attendees that I did not renew acquaintances with.