

Graham Peters YHS 1970 wrote about:

“Dogs in Yallourn”



Bob Peters with Candy at Narracan Falls

At a distance of fifty years, dogs seemed to play a big part in Yallourn life. My earliest memories include frequent dogs. Two small, friendly terriers constantly attended Mrs Ethel Hill, a kindly old lady living at 9 Latrobe Avenue, opposite the High School, as she poked apparently permanent bonfires of autumn leaves with her walking stick.

We had a regrettably short-lived Border Collie / Kelpie cross beloved by my mother and critically injured when hit by a passing SEC truck. He was dispatched with a bullet from a policeman's revolver and buried by a kind neighbour, under a pine tree by the Latrobe River.

Some time later, a stray Corgi appeared at the hospital, eventually being enticed with a cold sausage and brought home by mum. Anyone who has ever owned a deceptively cute Corgi will tell you that they are really German Shepherds with Short Man Syndrome; fiercely determined to prove that they

are real cattle dogs with short tempers. All visitors were treated with suspicion.

Candy acquired a lengthy list of victims including the religious visitor who cleared the short Yallourn style front fence, after she took a nip at their heels. Her opinion of men in overalls was more problematic; obviously some tradesman had kicked her and she bore a grudge. This was no great issue when she bit an SEC painter who unwisely tried to kick her. However, she mistook dad and took a swing on his overalls before realizing her mistake. Dogs can look embarrassed!

The Corgi was a great success, fiercely protective of her family. Initially doubtful, dad was won over when she swam out to rescue us children on our regular Lakes Entrance holiday (where you could meet everyone from the Latrobe Valley, if you stood at the footbridge long enough). The dog suddenly spotted us, standing on a shallow sandbar in Lake Reeves, ran back and forth before plunging in to 'rescue' us. It was only after she reached us that she remembered that she loathed water and could not swim. We had to swim to shore supporting the would-be rescuer who scabbled desperately leaving all with deep scratches. Dad decided that any dog that would overcome her fears to "rescue" her family was okay.

She quickly adapted to our family patterns. If caught out by a storm when adventuring, she would wait patiently on the steps of the library or the Heather Grove shop, certain in the knowledge that we would eventually call and collect her. In latter years, she became friendly with Sam, the Holt's Samoyed from 24 Hazelwood Crescent. Sam was an inveterate womanizer, able to detect a bitch on heat in Hernes Oak, Newborough or further afield. The neighbours would be pressed into action, searching nearby towns for the amorous Sam. It remains a mystery why the ubiquitous "Moe Dog" a small, determined breed of vaguely kelpie origin, does not carry more of Sam's distinctively white Samoyed genes – maybe the performance did not match the passion!

In Tanjil Crescent, the McIntosh's Labrador (Dasher) from 10 Tanjil Crescent was a villain, but chose to move in with the Williams at number 14 (apparently the dog's choice). He had an absolute passion for lemons, which he would carry for long hours for later pleasure. My father, Bob Peters, had lovingly nurtured a Meyer Lemon tree that seemed destined never to fruit. Frequently fertilized and carefully watered, dad even applied some arcane practice of slitting the trunk to promote growth. Eventually it set a single fruit, low on the tree which dad carefully monitored. Just when ready to pick, the Labrador whipped in, stole the lemon (caught in the act) and bolted. Much distress!

Spike, the Gordon's black Labrador from 28 Tanjil, had "form" having bitten several neighbourhood kids. We all carefully avoided him. We used to feed our corgi in a heavy porcelain (Royal Doulton) children's bowl of the variety which used to be used for feeding babies (could not be tipped over easily and too heavy for baby to overturn). After passing down through three kids, the dog scored it. Spike was an inveterate scrounger and stole the heavy bowl, still filled with dog food. Dad caught up with him as he attempted a get-away. As he cleared the low front fence, the bowl hit the ground and shattered, leaving him with a quandary; the dish or the food. He made off with half the bowl still firmly gripped in his mouth. Joe Gordon claimed that it could not have been Spike but the evidence (a half bowl that he had carried

triumphantly home) was a bit obvious.

the Virtual Yallourn pages, Richard Clarke has mentioned Sandy, the Betts' golden (well sandy coloured) Labrador (possibly retriever) who was a frequent guest in their home. He must have had multiple visiting places. He spent much time in our kitchen under foot or stretched in front of a radiator. Mrs Betts was not impressed, suspecting that mum was feeding him. There were several "discussions". He was probably just sociable and keen to be around people and other dogs.

Nicky, the Lynch's beagle at 32 Tanjil Crescent was a howler, serenading the full moon mournfully immediately opposite Rod LeLievre's bedroom window.

Martin Francis had a constant companion in our bushland explorations, a Border Collie / Kelpie cross called Cindy who seemed ever present and watchful.

Richard Clarke has also mentioned their own shepherd collie cross, Red. He was genteel in comparison. He was very much the boss's dog, shadowing Richard's dad at every step.

Looking back, dogs seemed to be a continuing feature of the Reservoir Hill neighbourhood, sometimes with kids, but often just going about their own business. I suspect that the low front fences were an inducement, for all but the smallest animals, to get out and about. I can recall looking out of a classroom window, when in Form 2 at YHS, to see our corgi, the Holt's Samoyed, Sam and a couple of other dogs, returning home from an adventure, possibly downtown. Given that this was first period, I did wonder what they got up to for the rest of the day.

Today, I worry if my dog strays as far as the tree out the front of our suburban home, to read her P-Mail. Like our kids, she expects to travel everywhere by car. She would no more dream of venturing into town, than flying.

...Graham Peters