

FAREWELL – MY HOME – YALLOURN

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As I walked through the streets of Yallourn for the final time, I felt extremely nostalgic. Our town was to be bulldozed! Many houses had already been transported to nearby towns and placed on blocks of land for people who had purchased blocks and the houses. They were preparing to mine rich deposits of brown coal under the surface of the town. We had never understood that this was to happen forty years previously. The Government planned this ideal country town to accommodate the workforce for the brown coal mining. People from countries all over the world would live in harmony in this valley township, with the best facilities for their families. It was to create work for many men who had been unemployed due to the depression. The State Electricity Commission of Victoria would build and rent out the houses and shops. Recreation facilities would also be built.

How could this town simply disappear when the original residents were ready to retire in their much loved Yallourn. Progress they called it! Progress for Whom!

I walked slowly around our town square, the pride of the residents. Neat lawns and rose garden beds, a monument of Sir John Monash, our founder, in central position. This is where we honoured our soldiers who had served in two World Wars, some who came home and others who didn't! As children we had stood around this square waving our Australian Flag, greeting our Queen in an open car with her Consort alongside her.

Our beautiful Yallourn Theatre built of cream bricks, two stories high. We would spend our interval at the pictures, greeting friends and enjoying refreshments on the open courtyard. Our theatre was the focal point of the town, not only for picture screenings, but concerts, pantomimes, musical comedies, plays, dance concerts and special school assemblies.

Our churches were located adjacent to the four corners of the square. All built in red brick, each one having a special identity. One had a bell suspended from a metal frame, being rung for services by a metal rope. Tennis courts were on the church grounds and gave many social hours of enjoyment to young and older players.

Our Yallourn General Store is spread quite a distance across one side of the square, supplying all types of products, including furniture on Time Payment to all new residents. I remember the small window at the front of the store, where during the Second World War, residents would queue for their cigarette ration. My Mother, on her own (Dad was overseas in New Guinea) would get me to stand in line to keep her place, while she shopped elsewhere.. It was boring as a child, to have to stand there for what seemed an age. The adults would jostle me for my place, but I stood firm.

The Cobblers was tucked away at the back of the store. As soon as you opened the door a tinkling bell would tell him you were waiting. A rich smell of leather would greet your nostrils. Shoes of all shapes and sizes were lined up on a rear wooden shelf with tags attached bearing the owner's name. The metal last intrigued me with four different shaped feet attached.

The Newsagents area was inside the store with daily papers from all over the world on display. Comics for some lucky children had colourful characters on the covers. My mother thought I was strange as I just had to smell her 'Women's Weekly.' A friendly greeting from the Store Manager dressed in shirt, braces and loose waistcoat, with his striped trousers appeared to me like a clown, as he had hair stuck in all directions, a moustache with a cigar held firmly in his lips, and great horn rimmed glasses. To me he appeared like Groucho Marx. The zing sound of the inter store change system moving along wires overhead, throughout the store, was a real thrill to watch.

Our Butcher's Shop was across the road. Women with children would crowd in early in the morning to get the best cuts of meat. The hum of gossip as women of various ages, sizes and nationalities waited to be served. Children swung from the metal bars of the counter giving a dragging sound as the children scuffed their shoes in the saw dust. The piece of long awaited Fritz children were offered as Mum paid her bill. Brown paper parcels of meat pushed into string bags. The cheery cashier on her stool in front of the cash register, would greet each customer as they entered through the heavy glass door, followed by the slam of an aged blue flywire door. Ice being lifted out of the freezer room with large metal hooks, then wrapped in hessian bags and onto usually a Billy Cart, wheelbarrow or pram, and pushed home to the Ice Box to keep food cold and fresh.

Our local chemist shop was housed alongside the Health Centre, on one side of the square. Miss Rose was a local identity, loved by all. Prescriptions were mixed on the spot by her. While we waited, we would look at perfumes, soaps and other luxury items, all beyond our means!

The Health Centre itself was an austere grey building, with a small verandah entrance, shelter for those wet days (which were many), then opening your umbrella ready to run for cover elsewhere. The boom of the doctor's voice was recognised by all, hadn't he brought most of we children into the world! The smell of antiseptic's in the dressing room, sending dread through the bravest of children. Long brown wooden benches worn with use, where we would sit and wait until the doctor called us into his room. Our dentist was in a small area on the left as we came in. Now this was fear, as the dentist was an ex army officer and he treated us like little soldiers and barked instructions at us.

The Public Library was adjacent to the Health Centre. I spent hours here finding books for myself and my mother. I had worked clerically in the library and adored every minute I spent there. Our old Fire Brigade Hall was next, and was used as a Public Hall, most familiar to me, as my parents and myself had played badminton here through the years. A bank stood on the corner and the opposite corner was our Post Office, where giant sized silver scales sat on the verandah with Private Boxes on the wall next to the Postal Slots. Many times I stood with my mother in a queue awaiting her Child Endowment payment at the tall, long wooden counter. I'd scuff their polished floor, as well as my shoes, as I hung monkey fashion from the counter.

Our local cafe was on the opposite corner where wonderful smells of 1d lollies in boxes tempted all children to at least look. The Cake and Bread counter also sent forth smells of freshly baked bread. The cakes were to die for, as we lived in a dairying area, and fresh cream covered or filled large and small cakes. Chips were sold hot, in our cold winter, what a delight to have a bag of them. Cool drinks such as Spider's and Milkshakes, a wonderful treat.

Looking down Broadway East you could see our grassed areas with swings, slide, maypole, followed by a shallow wading pool for those very hot days. A Rotunda of timber and a metal roof, brightly painted was where many a Brass Band concert was held in the summer. The Yallourn Hotel, known for its classy accommodation for visitors and of course the bar where the 'six o'clock swill', took place six nights a week. Our Railway Station handling goods and coal was backed by the Briquette Factory with chimney belching fine briquette dirt. Caught by the wind would shower the town, including washing with soot. If your washing was dry the women would shake the dirt off, but if still damp it stuck to the clothes leaving no alternative but to rewash everything. Dust in your eye was a common occurrence. Black smudges when writing on paper was unavoidable. But, it was all part of living in a coal mining area.

Our sporting facilities were second to none, with green playing fields catering for Basketball, Soccer, Football, Cricket and a Cycling Raceway. This area was adjoined by first class bitumen tennis courts.. I can't leave the swimming pool out, as every child was given the opportunity to learn to swim with Mr. Graham, gaining their 25 yards Dog Paddle Certificate. During summer saw all the teenagers flaunting their developing bodies to the opposite sex, as they either draped on their towels on the grass, or sauntered towards a jetty, leaping into the water with their best dive. Many belly whoppers were usually exhibited!

We boasted a kindergarten, Primary School, High School and Technical School. As a High School student there were 1,000 students attended, many travelling in buses and what we called 'cattle trucks' conjoined buses. 16 buses would arrive each morning with students from all the surrounding country areas and farms.

Yallourn had a population of over 10,000, so you can see it was a thriving community. Our young couples would fill any empty houses. Now where Yallourn once stood is a large brown hole. You ask me where I come from? That's right! A brown hole in the ground!