A

COUNTRY

CHILDHOOD

IN

WEST BRUNSWICK

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I must have been born somewhere.

I don't remember ever hearing the name of the hospital, but the best guess I can make is Epworth, then a Methodist hospital in Erin Street, Richmond.

In August 1927 Mum, Dad and Nancy aged 17 months, were living in Punt Road (East Melbourne according to Mum; Richmond according to Dad using reverse snobbery). The Melway directory agrees with Mum. They were renting the upper floor of a 2-storey terrace house. It was one of about fifteen matching terraces which stretched south from the Yarra Park State School at Bridge Road, down to the open parkland called Yarra Park to the east of the MCG.

The terraces were pulled down in the 1970's and replaced by a large red brick residential development named Yarra Mews.

I was born on 7th August 1927. Apparently when Dad first saw me he said "Hell! it's Billy Edwards".

Billy Edwards was a well-known prize fighter at the time and he had long black 'sideboards' (Americans call them sideburns) on his face. It seems that I was well-endowed with black hair right from the start.

Dad never called me anything but 'Bill' until the day he died.

The reason I think Mum could have gone to Epworth is that she came from a strong Wesleyan family and Epworth was only a hop, step and two jumps from where they were living.

A year or so after I joined them in Punt Road our parents decided the time had come to buy a house and settle down to suburban life. They could not have guessed that they would spend the rest of their lives in the chosen house – 55 years in Mum's case, 59 years for Dad.

The house was at 15 Wales Street, West Brunswick. In later years the Council changed the number to 37.

The suburb of Brunswick was one of Melbourne's earliest. It straddled Sydney Road, the main road heading directly north from the city.

Sydney Road started at the top end of Elizabeth Street and extended in a straight line through Parkville, Brunswick, Coburg and Fawkner heading eventually to Albury as the Hume Highway.

The name Brunswick was given by a land speculator, W. F. A. Rucker to his property, after George Brunswick Smyth, officer-in-charge of Port Phillp Military Police in 1839. This was only four years after John Batman and then John Pascoe Fawkner first sailed up the Yarra River.

There would have been grog shanties on Sydney Road from the early days catering to thirsty travellers.

The first permanent hotel was built on the corner of Sydney Road and Park Street in 1852. It was named the Sarah Sands after the sailing ship which brought out its builder and owner, Robert Barry.

The Sarah Sands became a Melbourne landmark and is still there.

Many other hotels including the Cornish Arms were soon added in Brunswick, then the road was built up with stores, shops and churches.

In the late 1800's cable trams replaced the old horse trams and a railway line terminating at Fawkner was laid about 200 yards to the west of Sydney Road.

East Brunswick was mainly developed in the 19th Century. It extended to the Merri Creek, about a mile east of Sydney Road and was served by two tram services running to the city – Lygon Street (to Swanston Street) and Nicholson Street (to Spring Street).

Parts of Brunswick to the west of the railway line were developed in the 19th Century as a mixture of industry and workers' housing. This development did not extend much beyond Pearson Street, and there were still a number of 'country' estates beyond, in what became West Brunswick.

Some of the main estates that I know of are –

1. Phoenix Park. Owned by Michael Dawson. In south-west Brunswick near the western end of the present Dawson Street. The Dawson family was well represented in Council affairs, owned an iron foundry in Dawson Street next to the Town hall and probably owned the Phoenix Potteries just to the west of the railway line. Michael Dawson's headstone in the Melbourne General Cemetery is spectacular – a great carved stone angel with enormous wings.

2. A mansion between Dawson Street and Victoria Street, probably owned by the Cornwall family. There was also a pottery called Cornwall Potteries near the railway, producing stoneware pipes.

3. 'Whitby'. A gothic-style mansion in Whitby Street near Ferry Street, built in 1854. It was on a large property which was sub-divided in about 1930. The old building is still there.

4. Melville. The name of a property and mansion located on the south side of a creek which flowed through what is now Jacobs Reserve, east of Melville Road. The creek flowed generally in a westerly direction to join up with the Moonee Ponds Creek only about 100 yards south of Moreland Road.

This un-named creek is important to my story because of the time we Walsh kids spent around it, and occasionally in it, during our childhood years. We just called it 'the creek'.

As I have mentioned earlier, central and east Brunswick were well developed in the 1800's, largely due to the provision of good rail and tram services. There were already slums in parts of these old areas when we were kids.

There was no public transport from the city to West Brunswick until after the first World War.

In the 1920's a tramline was built from William Street, travelling along Flemington Road then through Royal Park to the west of the Zoo emerging into Grantham Street, then Dawson Street, and finally swinging in a wide curve into Melville Road.

Melville Road would have been named after the property previously referred to and was exactly one mile west of Sydney Road.

In the region of Albion Street and Moreland Road, Moonee Ponds Creek which formed the boundary between Brunswick and Essendon, was about half a mile west of Melville Road.

Towards the end of the 1920's practically all the land between Albion Street and Moreland Road west of Melville Road was open country. For decades it had been divided into small farms and only a few old farmhouses existed.

With the provision of the tram service in Melville Road and talk of a new State School, the developers moved in.

Practically all new houses were 5-roomed of weatherboard construction in California Bungalow style, generally having corrugated iron roofs. Most blocks would have had 45 feet frontage, with some 50 feet.

Floor layouts and appearance varied in different streets and where different developers were involved.

I think that houses would have been built in this order –

1927: Zeal St., Bayles St., part of Culloden St.
1928: Everett St., Peacock St., Wales St. (South end). Developer, T. M. Burke.
1929: Bakers Pde., McGregor Ave., Bonar Ave., Wales St. (North end).
All part of the Baker Estate.

Our house at 15 Wales Street was in the south half of the street. The open creek separated it from the northern half for at least 10 years.

There were nine houses in our section of the street, starting at Culloden Street, all with a similar floor plan, facing east and generally with a driveway on the south.

Directly across the road from us was North West Brunswick State School No. 4399, newly built and opened in ?. It had 5 acres of grounds and the 2-storey red brick school building with orange tiled roof sat above a steep hill on the highest part of the site.

The schoolground was roughly square with each boundary about 160 yards.

The customary Caretaker's residence was on its own fenced-off piece of land in the south-west corner with the house facing Culloden Street.

The school fence along the Wales Street boundary was of chainwire fixed to galvanised pipe framing and was about 4 feet 6 inches high. There was a small gate near the northern end.

The northern fence was a substantial Public Works type paling fence 6 feet 6 inches high with rails triangular in cross section to make it difficult to climb. This paling fence was built along the edge of the creek bank and in parts erosion below the plinth board allowed kids to scramble through.

The creek meandered a little in a space about 50 yards wide between the school fence and the back fences of houses facing McGregor Avenue. Below steep banks on either side there was a lower level about 20 feet down, and the actual narrower watercourse was a few feet lower again.

In the 1920's that portion of the creek to the east of Melville Road had been put underground into a large concrete tunnel which extended to the west side of the road and discharged into 'our' creek.

The creek formed such a barrier that the northern half of Wales Street might as well have been a mile away. Adventurous kids prepared to risk getting wet were generally able to find a way across, but it was almost impossible for adults.

The only bridge which crossed it was an old timber trestle bridge half a mile downstream at McLean Street.

To the north of the creek the streets that formed the Baker Estate – Baker's Parade, McGregor Avenue, Bonar Avenue and the north end of Wales Street, had houses that appeared to be a little more up-to-date than the rest. Many had hipped main roofs rather than gables, but their front fences were distinctive. They were relatively low and built of cast concrete blocks having a slight pattern imprinted on them. The same style was used to divide front gardens from the neighbours. All gates were low, of wrought iron.

Most of the brickwork used on front verandahs was covered with roughcast grey stucco. The roads and footpaths in this area were asphalt paved. When the stucco was combined with the grey block fences, the overall light grey appearance of the streets, I thought was quite pleasant.

Not so good was the planting of a palm tree in every front garden in accordance with fashion.

Our end of Wales Street seemed to be the poor relation for over ten years. The road was unmade and did not even have gravel over the brown dirt. The footpath occasionally had rough ashes from the gasworks spread along it in a strip 4 feet wide. Whenever a new layer was put on, we could hardly walk on it in bare feet, our preferred 'footwear' in summer.

I wonder now whether the reason we were left in these primitive conditions was that the Education department, owning all the land on one side of the road, did not want to spend its funds on one-half of the road-making and drainage costs. Brunswick Council never had any money to spare.

Our house originally consisted of two front bedrooms each side of a narrow hall, with one bedroom standing 6 feet forward of the other; a bathroom with claw-foot cast iron bath and chip-heater (no basin); a kitchen-dining room with a cast iron fire stove and gas stove in a wide recess; a lounge room with open fireplace in one corner; a porch with one side open to the west; a laundry (called the wash-house) containing a sink with kauri draining board, a brick copper and cement double wash-troughs; a narrow bedroom opening to the south off the porch, which we called the sleepout.

At the front was a verandah partly enclosed with brickwork, having a great brick archway about 12 feet wide facing the street. Our house block was 50 ft by 120 feet deep and there was a free-standing pan closet (toilet) not far from the back fence.

Although the house was new in late 1928, Dad wasted no time in carrying out 'improvements'. Within 2 years he had extended the open porch 8 feet to the west and enclosed it; built a small bedroom behind the wash-house; constructed a large fernery covered with wooden laths outside the back door and moved the pan closet up close to the house. All without drawings or building permits.

Dad was employed full-time at the Herald-Sun Office at that time.

Nearly all the timber he used for the building would have come from Whelan the Wrecker's yard in Melville Road opposite Zeal Street. He may have had some of it delivered by horse and wagon, but I am sure there would have been many trips with timber tied onto the bike while he walked home.

I believe that I can remember things from when I was three (after August 1930) but these extensions were mostly completed before my memory begins.

Nancy was born 25th March 1926 while Mum and Dad were living with Nin and Grandpa (George and Bertha Matthews) in Footscray.
Brian was born at Vaucluse private hospital in Moreland Road, Moreland, on 28th february 1929, soon after the family had moved into the new house. A young nurse named Sister Biggs was in charge of the hospital. Almost exactly six years later Mum was back at Vaucluse, still under Sister Biggs, when Geoff was born on 3rd march, 1935.

More than 40 years after that I was contacted by Sister Biggs on the recommendation of a builder friend and was asked to design and have carried out internal alterations and a new main entrance at Vaucluse.

Sister Biggs had married a doctor many years earlier and I believe they had extensive hospital interests. She was then in her seventies with a domineering personality.

The first personal activity I can remember at Wales Street was helping Dad (unasked) to finish the renovations. The 6 inch Baltic Pine flooring boards were not covered and I helped myself to a handful of nails and a hammer, and bashed them through the boards in the extended porch which we always called the back verandah.

How I was allowed to get away with this I don't know, but day after day I would belt 2 inch (and longer) nails into the boards. Of course more than half their length would project below and in later years Brian and I would get our jumpers and skin caught on the sharp nails when we crawled under the house to look for the cat or tennis balls.

A few months later this floor was covered with linoleum, but when it was polished many of the nail head bumps could be seen. Many years later, carpet solved this problem.

At this time Brian and I spent a lot of time playing in the empty sleepout. I can remember I had a set of cast lead soldiers painted red, blue and black – at least they were when they started. After I had sucked them for weeks on end there was not much paint left and I must have swallowed a lot of highly toxic paint and lead. Who can I sue?

At that time I had a wooden rocking horse consisting of two cut-out horse-shaped sides on curved runners, connected to each other by a seat and a rod forming a hand-hold. The horses were painted dapple grey and the seat and backrest red, with strips of fur tacked on for manes. I read recently that these were called "Shoofly" rocking horses. I seemed to go into a trance-like state (no comments please) induced by the sound of the runners crossing the joints in the boards like the sound of train wheels, and the regular back and forth motion. I wouldn't stop until I fell asleep.

The Great depression had not yet bitten and we seemed to be well supplied with toys. Nancy had a sleeping doll whose eyes closed when she was put to bed, and at least two tea-sets. These were child-size china versions of the real thing, made by English potteries and complete with cups and saucers, plates, teapot and milk jug. One set had been handed down from Mum and was as good as new. Brian and I both had tricycles.

In 1930 Dad won £100 in Tattersalls. He spent the rest of his life trying to repeat this feat – unsuccessfully. He decided to take Mum on a two-week holiday to Sydney, travelling by steamship both ways. This must have been late September because they brought home a special copy of the Sydney Morning Herald dated 30th September 1930 with photos showing the joining

of the arch of the Harbour Bridge. The arch had been built from both sides of the harbour and the accurate meeting of the two halves was considered to be quite a feat.

While they were away, Nancy (4-1/2), and Brian (18 months) were billeted out with Little Nin and Big Grandpa Matthews at Whitehall Street, Footscray. It was there that Nancy famously tackled Nin after she had scolded Brian for some crime – "We don't live here you know, we are only staying!"

I was staying for the two weeks with Dad's parents Big Nin and Little Grandpa in a white-painted 2-storey terrace house in Park Street, Parkville. This house looked across Royal Park near the golf course, but has long gone. I can remember small palms near the front door and aspidistras inside, but nothing more. I had just turned three, and when Mum and Dad got back to pick me up, I can remember not knowing who they were.

The bridge was big news throughout Australia. We must have been told stories of the harbour by Dad, and Mum had brought back a drawing of the bridge on a piece of cloth, which she embroidered as a cushion cover.

Soon afterwards I had one of the few really bad nightmares I can remember. I was trying to cross Sydney Harbour with my trike – half riding it, half dragging it across stones sticking out of the water. I didn't make it by morning.

In those early years life seemed to be pretty good. Often on Sunday afternoons Mum had friends she had worked with or members of the family around for 'Afternoon Tea'. Pride of place on the table was taken by a heavy 3-tier silver cake stand with removable plates. There seemed to be an array of bought cream cakes. Ladies' Fingers and Cream Puffs were my favourites.

Coloured plaster statuettes were in fashion for use in hallways or lounge rooms. Mum bought one called 'Like Papa'. It was a little over 2 feet high and consisted of a small boy dressed in military-style clothes including Wellington boots and peaked cap, all too big for him. He had a curved pipe in his mouth.

Next day somebody came to the front door – a friend judging by Mum's welcome – and Brian thought it would be the Christian thing to do to show them the new acquisition. As he dashed from the back of the house he grabbed 'Like Papa' on the run, took two steps in the hallway, tripped and crashed to the floor. 'Like Papa' looked as though he had been in a real war. Most of the pipe had been broken off along with odd plaster corners.

Mum was devastated. She had hardly had time to look at it, and now it was a mess. Brian didn't suffer (except for his conscience) and eventually the pieces were glued back together, but the joints were always visible.

From the earliest days at Wales Street we had a parrot in a movable cage, and a cat.

The parrot didn't last long. He was a fairly big rosella-type bird as far as I remember and one day he partly disappeared while the cage was hanging outside, near the fernery. His feathers were strewn around on the ground. Dad didn't wait for an inquest. Our black tomcat with torn ears from many battles was hanging around and Dad let fly at him with the empty cage – after all it was never going to be used again.

Next thing Dad arrived home with a pup.

It was part fox terrier, but the other part must have been a bigger breed. He grew to have medium-length white hair with a couple of black patches.

Dad decided his name would be Jim because that was the name of a whippet Dad had owned as a boy.

The cute little pup soon grew into a dog which spent much of his life sitting just outside the front gate. There would be two mail deliveries a day and the postman was required to give a blast on his whistle after the letters went into the box. All the dogs in the street would be alerted by the whistle long before the postie arrived, and Jim, being outside the fence was best placed for attack. I think the whistle must have hurt the dogs' ears, because other people such as tradesmen could come around, and even inside the gate in reasonable safety.

Postmen really only needed one pedal when riding because the other foot would be flailing around trying to kick the dog which was scrabbling sideways in a cloud of dust snarling and trying to fasten his teeth in the shoe.

Dad thought that dogs should be washed occasionally, although he said that in Geelong he had to be careful not to let the dog see the bathtub in advance otherwise it would disappear for a couple of days. One Sunday morning Dad got the galvanised iron bathtub out, half filled it with warm soapy water and plonked Jim in.

This was in the enclosed back verandah, but the door was open. Dad was just starting to rub the suds into Jim's coat when he turned and snapped at the parent and shot out of the back door.

You can say many things about our Dad, but you can't deny that he was a man of action. Letting loose a couple of his favourite expressions he picked up the tub, water and all and dashed out. As he had done with the bird cage some months earlier the bathtub was heaved, this time at Jim.

We must have had Jim for nearly ten years after that, all bath-free.

Because our section of Wales Street was a No Through Road for most of the thirties, Jim roamed free and would occasionally stray into the schoolground. If we kids went up to the shops he would often come part of the way with us. No lead of course.

Mrs Harris next door had an Australian terrier, but this wasn't worth barking at.

Mr Mason's place four houses up was different. He was said by some to be a German, but I never knew whether this was so. He was a quiet man who might nod to neighbours but didn't seem to talk to them much. He had two dogs which were hardly ever allowed out – one a medium sized black dog and the other a mean-looking English bull terrier, sometimes called a pig-dog because of its pink and white colouring.

When Jim got to Mason's front fence he would race back and forth snarling while Mason's dogs did the same on the other side of the wire. How they did not rip each other's noses I don't know, because they seemed to hate each other. The bull terrier did not make as much noise as the other two, but Dad said if he got loose all the other dogs would run away because the breed is feared by other dogs. But they are apparently not dangerous to humans as American pit bulls have become in recent years.

If Jim crossed the road near the end of the street he would run along beside the high paling fence at the side of the caretakers' house occupied by Mr and Mrs Cook and their two sons, Stanley and Lennie. The boys were a little older than us, but sudents at the school. The Cooks had a big

white short-haired fox terrier called Jack who treated the whole schoolground as his domain and woe betide any other dog that trespassed!

When Jim was on the Wales Street side of the caretakers' paling fence Jack would often smell him and the two would go hammer and tongs in a violent confrontation although they couldn't see each other.

On one memorable Saturday we Walsh kids and one or two others were playing in the schoolground and were higher up the hill towards the school building.

Jim must have followed us although we did not encourage that, and suddenly Jack attacked. They must have fought non-stop for twenty minutes, each trying to get the other by the throat. Because they were both mainly white the blood they spilt probably looked worse than it was. It certainly looked bad.

The fight started near the top of the hill and they rolled over and over until they got near the bottom, 70 yards away. A large crowd gathered, including the Cooks, and everyone was trying to separate them without getting bitten.

Adults were hitting them with brooms and sticks while others threw buckets of water over them. It made no difference. Their concentration on the job in hand (murder) was exemplary.

I think it must have been exhaustion that finally ended the fight. Certainly the spectators were exhausted.

The dogs were soaked with water and covered in blood and dirt. We Walshes remember the big dogfight in detail nearly 70 years later.

From the earliest days we seemed to have permission from the Cooks to play in the schoolground, but we generally kept to the relatively level area opposite our house. We also played cricket and football on the dirt road because there was seldom any traffic.

When we were small we were not allowed to go down to the creek, but it was always a magnet and as we got older we were allowed to go in pairs or threes, but not alone.

If we went out of sight at weekends we would hear a roar from Dad at the front verandah that would waken the neighbourhood. I don't remember Dad ever hitting us but the threat was there if we didn't obey orders – quickly. We occasionally got a light smack from Mum, immediately after we had done something wrong.

We were not allowed to contradict Mum. Dad must have heard us doing this and made a RULE which was never broken – "If your mother says the moon is blue, the moon is blue!"

Our front and back yards must have been left untended while Dad made the alterations to the house, because we didn't own a lawnmower, and no lawn had ever been planted.

The builders had provided an S-shaped concrete path from the front gate to the verandah and Dad laid extra cement paths down the side of the house and around the back door – using local materials. He took his wooden barrow down to the creek and brought back many loads of brown-grey sand which he mixed with cement to make passable paths.

When Dad was ready to plant lawns he did it in his usual methodical way – carefully digging, levelling and raking the heavy black clay soil at the front, side and rear of the house, then spreading lawn seed. While the grass was growing I remember going with Dad and Mum to the

Eastern Market in the city to buy a mower. This was the usual cast-iron reel-type mower but was a size wider than standard. (I think 18 inch rather than 16 inch).

Before the first cutting of the lush new grass we kids, including Nancy I think, were told we had to search the whole area for stones which could damage the new mower. If we missed one stone there would be TROUBLE. Dad never specified what the trouble would be. He didn't have to – the thought of being shouted at by West Brunswick's loudest voice did the trick.

A golden privet hedge must have been planted behind the wire front fence at that time – it was still there fifty years later. In the front garden, in addition to the narrow flower beds against the side fences and across the front of the house there was a circular garden bed near the centre in the early days, but this was done away with when cricket and football took over.

At the back, the fernery outside the back door had a grape vine and a Tecoma bush growing on it. The tecoma always had a great number of orange trumpet-shaped flowers and a far greater number of ants swarming over it.

Before the sewerage was put through the area the pan closet was only about 12 feet from the back door after Dad had made his improvements. Every night before going to bed Nancy, Brian and I would go out together to the 'lav'. While one was inside all three would sing at the top of our voices to chase away the demons of darkness 'Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are'.

Very few new houses were fitted with flyscreens or flydoors at that time. Flies were caught inside the house on 'Flypapers' – generally spirals of paper about 2 inches wide covered with a honey-coloured sticky goo which caught all the flies which landed on it. In the middle of summer there could be hundreds of flies (some still making buzzing sounds with their wings) stuck to the Flypapers hanging from the ceiling.

We did not have much trouble with mosquitoes inside the house, but they could be a problem on the front verandah in the evenings. In the early years Dad had fitted large white roller canvas blinds to cover the openings at the front and end of the verandah. We had some very hot summers in the 1930's and on the terribly hot nights we kids would take our bedding out onto the Verandah and sleep there.

There were also lots of floods in Victoria at that time, often caused by thunderstorms. Because our road was unmade and lacking in kerbs and drains, any heavy rainfall would turn the road into an impassable quagmire.

Our worst flood was on Melbourne Cup Day 1932. The weather was fine early in the morning, but as soon as the crowds got to the course, torrential rain started and it never stopped. There were stories of well-dressed saturated ladies whose clothes shrank on them while still at the course.

Streets of houses were flooded in several suburbs.

Peter Pan, one of the few horses to win two Melbourne Cups, was the winner that year. Because of the conditions, the trainer tied the horse's tail in a short tight stump to prevent it picking up the heavy mud from the track.

During the morning we could see the roof gutters on the house next door overflowing because the downpipes could not handle the water. By lunchtime the street was flooded. Brown water extended from the house fences across to the school fence, and resembled a fast-flowing river.

Fortunately the road sloped towards the creek and there was no impediment to the flow, so the houses were saved from flooding.

From an early age we three kids were accustomed to climbing our rear paling fence which gave us access to a vast area of open ground which was not built on until after World War 2.

There were only two houses behind us in Everett Street. They were on the west side facing towards a grassy area. One was always occupied by the Dawson family and the other in later years by the Clarkes. There were two Dawson boys – Ken a couple of years older than I was, and Keith a bit older again. One day at school recess I saw Ken bailing up kids from my grade, one by one. He would grab them by the shirt just below the throat in his left hand and push a clenched right fist in front of their faces while he demanded to know what football tam they barracked for. If they named his team (Carlton) they would be pushed away, but if they nominated abother team they would cop one on the nose. I was lucky enough to see what he was up to before he reached me. When I was grabbed and the question asked I instantly said "Carlton" and escaped with a shove.

Ken was a short kid who grew into a short neatly-built adult. In later years he often caught my tram in Melville Road and we would just nod to each other. After I bought my first car I was driving to work one morning and saw him waiting for the tram. I picked him up and found him to be quite a nice bloke. I didn't ask him what team he barracked for!

Ken's brother Keith offended me once by calling me 'Curly'. I never liked having wavy hair and spent years plastering it down flat.

I was always a day-dreamer and my mind would often be miles away, thinking of something to do or make. One day I passed Keith in Everett Street, hardly seeing him, and he broke into the words of a popular love-song of the day – "Have you ever seen a dream walking? Well I have!" I am still amazed at how a kid could hit on such an apt description so quickly.

When I was about five, Brian and I decided to take up smoking. We bought small wooden pipes about 3 inches long which were scaled-down models of the real thing with bowls of a size to take a cigarette. We scrounged a number of Dad's old butts which were lying around and borrowed a box of matches.

At about 6 o'clock on a sunny Sunday morning, still in pyjamas, we took our equipment down behind the pussy willow tree which grew in the south-west corner of the back yard. We separated the tobacco from the smelly butts and packed it into the pipes in the way Uncle George Gillon always did. We were still trying to light them when a shadow fell across our little corner. We were so intent on the job in hand that we had failed to see Mum approaching. She was 'most displeased' as Jane Austen would say. In no time Brian and I were back in bed with sore backsides.

I haven't smoked very much since then. Brian has hardly stopped! I still think it's a bit rough when a mother does not trust her sons to be in bed at 6 o'clock on a Sunday morning.

On another Sunday morning Brian and I were wandering along the creek, heading west, at about 9 o'clock. Apart from Melville Road, the only street which crossed our creek was McLean Street about quarter of a mile to the west of home. There was an old wooden trestle bridge constructed of round hardwood logs bolted together in the way country bridges were commonly built. We kids would sometimes crawl across the framework below the bridge. There were no houses in the area.

This particular morning as we neared McLean Street we saw a man in a suit and hat standing on the road and looking aimlessly around. We went past him and peered between boxthorn bushes to see a group of more than twenty men on the lower level of the creek. They were all dressed in fairly ordinary suits and hats and were standing in a circle around a bare patch of ground.

We did not know anything about Druids, but this looked decidedly like a form of pagan worship. It was only when one man stepped into the ring and tossed two pennies into the air with the aid of a small slab of wood that we realised what they were up to. Two-up!

The game was illegal because the government had not figured out a way to tax it. The man up the road would have been the 'cockatoo' whose job was to give warning if the police tried to organise a raid.

Our Dad, who could be described as an experienced, if unsuccessful, gambler always claimed that Two-up is the fairest gambling game of all.

Bonfires were a regular twice-yearly feature of our lives. Empire day (24th May) and Guy Fawkes Day (5th November) were regularly observed. We would spend two or three weeks collecting material for the fires. Most of this would be dead Boxthorn bush, augmented by any burnable material collected from the houses in the street.

Boxthorn was a bush brought out from England in the early days (as was Hawthorn) and used at the edges of paddocks to restrain animals before barbed wire was readily available. There were still patches of it around the small farms to the west of us and it had spread along the creek. The live bushes had small round leaves and bright red berries. The thorns were up to 2 inches long, tapering to extremely hard and sharp points. We would look for dead bushes, which burned better, and were prepared to drag them several hundred yards.

We could generally count on help from a small number of kids from the Wales Street area and they and lots of adults from round about would turn up on the night.

Our bonfires were generally built on the vacant land behind our house, well back from the fence.

Occasionally other kids (vandals) would try to light the fire ahead of time, but would not be successful because we usually had trouble ourselves in getting it to start burning.

Once alight though, we had good fires.

One year, after some wet weather we could not get the fire started. Our practical neighbour from two doors up, Mr Moore, said he would fix it. He went home and got a large drum of sump oil which he liberally splashed over the heap. It was one of our most successful bonfires.

We never went in for burning a 'Guy' on the fire as they did in England, and even in Skipton. Guy Fawkes was a rebel who plotted to blow up the British Houses of Parliament on 5th November, 1605.

Our fireworks were fairly limited in range because we did not have much pocket money to spare. We would buy packs of little crackers about an inch long which came in sets of about twenty tied along both sides of a central string. I think the packs cost a penny. These were not spectacular, but had the advantage that if the wick pulled out, you could bend them in two and after lighting, get a double 'fizzer' from the two barrels. I think they were called 'Tom Thumbs'.

'Penny Bungers' were fat red crackers about three inches long. When they went off, everybody took notice.

Catherine Wheels were flat discs consisting of gunpowder wrapped in paper to form a long tube a bit thinner than a pencil. This tube was then bent in a tight spiral finishing about 3 inches across. When fixed to a post by a pin and lit, the Catherine Wheel would revolve at high speed with sparks shooting out of the lit end.

We could not afford rockets, but others sometimes had them. They consisted of a large cracker-like body partly open at the lower end, fixed to a length of cane. The cane would be stood in a bottle and the fuse lit. The rockets only went to a height of about a hundred feet, but these did not cost millions like the fireworks of today.

Another item which we could not afford was the 'Jumping Jack'. There would be eight or ten small explosive devices linked together. When lit at one end they would go off at short intervals, but the disconcerting thing was that the contraption could jump in any direction after each explosion, causing mild panic in the crowd.

We usually managed to scrounge a few potatoes from Mum to put in the fire. We would rake them out of the hot embers afterwards. At their best they tasted wonderful, but often the main taste would be grey ashes and the thick black burnt outer coating.

If we turned right at the end of the street we could walk along the upper bank of the creek against the tall paling fence of the school. This bank varied in width and in some places erosion had extended right to the fence, making it difficult to get past. One night Dad's stepfather, Alf Cron, after a night playing cards at our place was taking a short cut on his way home to Coburg and fell down the steep bank. He broke his arm. I don't know how he climbed up again, but he worked his way back to Wales Street and a doctor was called.

At the eastern end of this stretch of creek a large concrete drain emerged from below Melville Road. This drain had replaced the upper section of the creek in earlier years. The Walsh kids were not supposed to go up this drain, but a couple of times Brian and I, encouraged by others, ventured in. In dry weather there would be only a trickle of water at the centre and we could walk at the sides.

We probably only went a few hundred yards, but looking back, the patch of light at the entrance grew smaller and smaller until it appeared to be only a pinpoint. Brian and I never left the main drain but other kids claimed to have explored the smaller branch drains where they said they were able to emerge from manholes way up in Coburg.

Always at the back of my mind was the danger of sudden rain in areas further up which could cause the tunnels to be flooded. If this happened we would be down the Moonee Ponds Creek without a paddle!

Directly down the street from our place there was a small stormwater drain coming from the north which emerged from the steep creek bamk about 3 feet from the top. The drain was a precast concrete pipe about 8 feet in diameter discharging onto a large concrete apron which fanned out as it sloped down to the creek. Because the creek banks were so steep and difficult to climb, we found the best way to cross near Wales Street was to work your way down the bank on our side, jump across the creek where it was narrow, then climb onto the concrete apron and crawl up the right hand side. On reaching the drain outlet it was necessary to step across the water and green slime running down the concrete, to gain access to a less steep section of the bank.

I had been across at this point a number of times.

One day we had been flying a kite in a southerly when the string broke. We could see it coming down on the houses at the far end of Wales Street.

I took off, aiming to salvage the kite before it could be damaged. I went down the bank, jumped the water and climbed up the concrete apron. The water and green slime were about 2-1/2 feet wide at the drain outlet. I took a big step across. Not big enough! My foot landed on the edge of the slime and the next thing I knew I was under water in the big deep pool below the apron. I had trouble seeing anything and I could hear water burbling in my ears. I couldn't tell whether I was upside down or not.

Panic set my arms and legs flailing and I got to the edge safely. I must have gone straight home to dry out. I don't remember whether I ever got that kite back.

I seemed to be making kites from the time Dad made our first. He often showed us how to do things and how to use tools and I would take over from there. Our first kites were of orthodox shape but I varied the proportions later and then made one with a bow-shaped top. The bow was made from a rib taken from a big broken umbrella owned by Uncle Tom Garner, next door. I always covered the kites with re-used brown paper, carefully ironed smooth.

Because my kites were slightly larger than usual, I needed a good heavy tail to keep them steady. This was achieved with Mum's old stockings – lots of them. Some of our kite tails must have been 25 feet long. Because we had lots of open space around, we had no trouble getting them flying. Illustrations in children's books used to show kids running with a kite on about 4 yards of string. Hopeless! The only way is to start with about 50 yards of string stretched along the ground on a day with a good breeze. One person holds the string wound on a good smooth stick while the other faces him holding the kite upright and the string stretched tight. If the breeze is steady it is only necessary to release the kite, make sure you are not standing on the tail, and it will soar straight up in the sky. No running is necessary.

I always liked having plenty of string. I would save up if necessary to buy three balls of string and join them all together. Often with a southerly blowing, our kite would be flying above the houses on the other side of the creek.

One drawback to three balls of string was that at lunchtime it took a long time to wind the kite in.

There were SEC cables on poles serving the Wales Street houses, and two cables from the poles to the front of each house. Provided the cables were dry and not likely to transfer electricity, Dad showed us how we could leave the kite flying and control it from the front garden. One person would hold the kite string about 25 yards from the end while the other threw the stick over the cables from the street side. With the stick retrieved and firmly held in the front garden by the second person, the one in the street would release the string. The lack of tension meant the kite would start to drop, but when the slack was taken up, provided the string did not break with the shock, the kite would recover and rise again.

Brian and I decided to take Dad's idea a little further. We found that we could take the stick down the narrow north sideway of the house, poke it through the window of the room we mainly lived in and called the Dining Room, and fly the kite from the comfort of the big old armchair in the corner. Because our kites flew so well, there was plenty of clearance between the string and the roof of the house next door.

Another trick from Dad's boyhood which we learnt to use was the sending of 'messages' to the kite. We would take a sheet of paper about the size of a page from an exercise book, neatly tear a

hole in the middle and thread the kite stick and string through it. When released, the paper would quickly zoom up the string to the kite, even clearing any knots in the string on the way.

The vacant land behind our house extended the full length of our stretch of Wales Street and could be a fire problem when the long grass dried off in summer. It caught fire a few times over the years and I can remember seeing Mum with the hose over the back fence making sure the fence did not burn.

We had a regular visitor to this area for several years during the 1930's. He was a swaggie – Mr Murphy. He would suddenly turn up and camp for three or four weeks just behind our fence.

Mr Murphy must have been about sixty, and had a rough grey beard. He drove a wagon with a rounded canvas top drawn by a small pony. We always found him firendly and Mum would regularly heat his billy on the gas stove and pass it over the fence so that he did not have to risk lighting a camp fire.

We must have provided a bucket of water for the pony. I always liked horses although I could not ride, and eventually asked Mr Murphy if we could walk the pony while Brian and I took turns to sit on him – no saddle of course. He allowed us to lead the pony around th edge of the creek into Wales Street where we were allowed to ride him up and down. I thought it was marvellous.

In the mid 1930's a family from Derrinallum moved into the house on our north. They arrived on a wet day and the furniture van could not get right down the road because of the mud. The furniture was carried the last forty yards.

The family consisted of the mother Mrs Parsons, son Charlie, daughter Gwen and Uncle Tom Garner who we understood was Mrs Parsons' brother. Mrs parsons suffered from Elephantiasis and was the fattest woman I have seen. I always wondered how she was able to get through doorways. Charlie and Gwen were young teenagers when they arrived and were always very good to us younger Walsh kids.

When I was about seven and Charlie fourteen, Nancy, Brian and I were playing with Charlie in knee-high grass in the back paddock. Charlie was lying on his back, knees bent. We would sit on the soles of his feet and fly through the air when he straightened his legs.

We had been enjoying this for some time and were due to go home when I pleaded for "Just one more". This time I landed awkwardly in the grass with my left arm twisted behind my back. I instantly knew the arm was broken and I was in great pain.

We could not climb back over the fence, so Charlie walked us back around the bank of the creek, with me bawling all the way. Charlie was terribly concerned. Although I knew it was not Charlie's fault I can remember saying over and over to Mum "Charlie did it! Charlie did it!"

I have felt sorry about that ever since. Nobody else blamed Charlie. Our family G. P., Dr Davies was called. He said both bones in the forearm were broken, mixed up plaster of paris on the Kitchen table, wrapped the arm in muslin and applied thick plaster from fingers to elbow.

I then had to have an X-Ray to make sure the bones were reasonably straight. This was carried out by a chap called Enticott who lived in an old house on a large block of land at the corner of Murray Street and Bent Street. There were old Peppercorn trees overhanging the Bent Street fence, which we used to raid occasionally to get caterpillars for 'Nature Study' or peppercorns for our pea-shooters.

The X-Ray equipment half-filled a room and seemed fairly primitive, but it did the job. I still have the X-Rays somewhere.

I wrote with my right hand at school for about six weeks, but eventually the arm was as good as new.

Three or four years later Dad arrived home with an airgun, a dozen small darts and a thick cork target. The darts were of shiny metal, quite small and of the same diameter as the bore of the gun. They had a sharp point at the front and a bunch of colourful fibres at the rear. They were very accurate over the short distances were were shooting inside the house.

The next night Dad invited Charlie from next door to come in and do some shooting with us. Charlie was always very respectful when speaking to adults – just like Ron Trevaskis in later years – and was always welcome to join our family activities. A few days earlier Dad had made a batch of lemon drink to his own recipe. He called it lemonade. Shortly after Charlie arrived Dad poured him a glass of the magic potion. Charlie took a mouthful and was suitably impressed. "This is good stuff, Mr Walsh!" said Charlie enthusiastically. Dad pulled himself up to his full 5 feet 6 inches, glared at Charlie under his thick black eyebrows, and said "STUFF? You call my lemonade STUFF?"

Poor Charlie! The family was a wake-up to Dad playing around with words, but Charlie wasn't. He blushed and tried to explain that he hadn't meant to be rude about dad's wonderful drink. His aim with the airgun was a bit shaky that night.

The creek was a great place to study nature up close. In spring we would find frothy patches in pockets of still water beside the stream. Every bubble forming the froth contained a small black speck which later developed into a tadpole. After a few weeks e could see legs developing and the tadpole's tail becoming shorter until it became a frog.

Although they were not numerous, there were a few yabbies about. I caught a big green one once when Mum was out and decided to cook it for lunch. I boiled it in one of Mum's saucepans on the gas stove, but it was a total failure.

One morning Mum showed Brian and me an advertisement in The Sun newspaper. The Zoo was running short of food for some of its small animals and was offering to pay one shilling for a pound of live worms. Brian and I took a one pound treacle tin down to the creek and started digging in the wet sand. Perhaps if we had known the weight of one worm we could have calculated the number needed to fill the tin. It would have run into thousands. We spent hours on our knees, digging, while the squirming mass ever so slowly edged up to the rim.

After a quick lunch we caught our local tram to the Zoo. Scores of other would-be millionaires were cashing in their tins. Brian and I collected our shilling, but by the time we had paid to go into the Zoo and spent tuppence for each of four tram rides, we decided we had learned a valuable lesson in how to go broke – quickly.

In the mid-1930's work began on putting 'our' creek into a large underground concrete drain extending half a mile from Melville Road to the Moonee Ponds Creek. The construction of the reinforced concrete tunnel must have taken more than two years and the filling and levelling of the deep creek bed many years more.

Earth-moving machines were hardly used before WW2 and nearly all the digging of earth was done by men with pick and shovel. Earth and rocks were moved by filling horse-drawn drays of one cubic yard capacity capable of being tipped backwards when they reached their destination.

The most popular horse in Australia, used wherever strength and patience was needed, was the Clydesdale. In the country they were used in teams for ploughing and pulling wool and wheat wagons, while in towns and cities they were in demand wherever heavy loads had to be transported. They were everywhere. Clydesdales had big heads with Roman noses sprouting wispy hair. Their big hooves were usually covered with 'feathers' – the long white hair growing from their lower legs.

All the horses pulling drays on the creek job were Clydesdales. The drays were heavy wooden carts with two wheels. They did not look big, but held one cubic yard of material, weighing up to a ton. They could be tilted to empty.

The only item of mechanical equipment on the job was a steam shovel. This was a big heavy rust-covered contraption with an engine similar to the steamrollers commonly used in road-building at the time. It had big metal wheels more than a foot wide and a roof of curved iron plate over the driver. When it was operating the solid iron flywheel was spinning and there was a constant thump, thump, thump, which could be heard half a mile away.

An arm hinged in two parts projected from the front of the machine with a toothed bucket attached. A series of cables controlled by levers operated by the driver allowed the bucket to excavate and lift soil and rocks in much the same way as present-day excavators.

The many drays would be filled by this machine and hauled to other spots where they were emptied. One afternoon when I was doing my regular 'site supervision', I saw something terribly sad. The body of a horse was lying still and strangely flat at the lower level twenty feet below a cliff.

The dray must have been backed up to tip its load over the cliff, got too close to the edge and gone over backwards, breaking the horse's neck. That terrible picture is with me still.

The drain, which was built in the form of a concrete tunnel was much larger than the drain upstream. It was over 8 feet high and in cross section, had a semi-circular top 6 feet wide, and tapering sides meeting a floor sloping to the centre. It was of 6 inch thick concrete reinforced with steel rods at about 6 inch spacing both ways, all tied with wire. Welded mesh was hardly used before the war. The concrete was mixed by the labourers on the job, wheeled in barrows across planks and poured between inner and outer panels of timber formwork.

If bombs had been dropped during the war, that tunnel could have sheltered half the population of West Brunswick!

It seemed years before the creek was filled with soil and levelled. It was only after the war that our half of Wales Street could be connected to the northern half and properly constructed and sealed. By this time Bob Fraser was Brunswick City Engineer. Bob had studied engineering at night school while working as a draughtsman at the Town Hall before the war, and had married Dad's cousin, Teeny Gillon. In the later war years he was in the Air Force building landing strips in the islands as the Japs were forced back.

After he returned to the Town Hall, probably as Assistant Engineer, Mum used to tell us of running into Bob in Sydney Road and saying "When are you going to fix our road". Bob, who was very quiet and would never offend anyone, would give a half smile and say "I'll see what I can do". Most decisions on expenditure of course would have been made by Councillors, pushing thir own pet schemes.

We never had many problems with bullying in our early years, either in school or out. There were just a few bullies and troublemakers at the school, but they never seemed to affect us.

When we were young there was a nasty Catholic kid called Billy Dwyer who lived in Bayles Street near Zeal Street. We would be sent regularly by Mum to get milk at the corner of Albion Street and Bayles Street and this solid lump of a kid who was just a little older than I was, would try to block us from passing on the footpath. He was probably a student of history and admired the robber barons who had castles on the Rhine and would not let travellers pass without paying a tribute. While I was pretty scared, we somehow always got past without a fight.

Even at that age I can't remember ever complaining to Mum or dad about bullying – we just didn't 'tell tales'.

As it happened, Mrs Dwyer was one of the many friendly women Mum would stop and have a chat with while walking to the shops or tram.

Incidentally, we never joined in any name-calling or insulting verses when Catholic kids were around. We just knew it was wrong.

When we were a little older, Brian and I and two other kids, one of whom was Teddy Grummett, were bailed up by a number of bigger kids in Everett Street not far from home. We did not know them, but we could see they were spoiling for a fight.

Dad had a saying, or maxim for every occasion and would trot these out regularly. One was 'The boy who fights and runs away lives to fight another day!' As I was not keen to fight on any day if it could be avoided, I thought this day was the time to start running.

As we ran I could hear the threats from behind to 'get us' when we returned. We had headed towards the north, across the creek and up to Moreland Road which formed the boundary with the City of Coburg. We thought it would be safer to return home from a different direction, so we decided on the 'Great Circle Route'. We headed west along Moreland Road, past the big gas holder which we called the gasometer and turned south in Pascoe Vale Road, Essendon. After we got to Moonee Ponds we headed east into south-west Brunswick and eventually approached home from the south.

We had to keep our eyes open for the apprentice criminals because we did not know where they had come from, but eventually arrived home safely some three hours later.

Dad was a keen vegetable gardener and was always after manure to improve and break up our heavy clay soil.

A wonderful source of manure was Parry's dairy at the end of Bayles Street. The Parry house faced Albion Street and the stables were approached via a wide opening off Bayles Street. Because the site of the stable yard sloped up from the street, the whole area was paved in rough brickwork to prevent the horses slipping.

The stables were fairly primitive, built of brick with timber divisions for the stalls. They would have housed about fifteen horses. The floor was of brick and the walls and roof were roughly whitewashed. There were only a few small window openings high in the walls.

Dad must have got permission from Lou Parry to get manure and for the first trip he took his wheelbarrow and two sons. In the confined space some of the horses looked pretty big. Dad explained that it was necessary when moving around and behind the horses to make enough noise so the horses knew we were there. If they were startled, they could lash out with their hind feet and do some damage.

Most of the stalls had some remains of straw bedding and Dad liked to get some of this mixed with the manure which we raked and swept from the floor.

After that first trip Brian and I would take our home-made billy cart and do the job ourselves.

Most of the horses were quite docile and we were able to rake and sweep around them, but I was always wary of a big chestnut which would peer around showing quite a lot of the white of its eyes.

The Parry family were Italian and the family name was originally much longer. Although his hair was grey Lou was always on the go. He invariably wore light coloured bib and brace overalls without a shirt and would run around the streets at a trot in all weathers.

Mrs Parry was a short, motherly, grey-haired woman and they had a boy, Peter, and four or five daughters.

Two of their daughters, including Lois, who was in my grade at school, were particular friends of Nancy and she would often help in the dairy. Customers would go to a small servery at the back of the house and the girls would ladle out the milk or cream into their billies or jugs.

Nancy would often be invited to go out for a drive with the family in their big American car.

Cars were a novelty in our family, because Dad never owned one.

The first car I ever rode in was owned by Mr Marshall, who lived two doors from us towards the creek. The car was a dark blue squarish model of about 1930, with a hard roof.

Mr Marshall had generously offered to take our whole family motoring in 'The Hills' – the name given to the picturesque areas of mountains and hills to the north-east of Melbourne.

We drove to Kinglake, then detoured to the Yan Yean Reservoir. Yan Yean was the first reservoir built when it was decided that Melbourne was badly in need of a properly planned water supply. The main supply pipe serving the city and suburbs still follows the original route down the wide median strip in St George's Road, Northcote. We approached the Yan Yean down a gently sloping road and came upon a beautiful green park built at the base of the slipway. There were shade trees and picnic facilities provided by the Board of Works and we had a picnic lunch there.

We then drove over the Black Spur on a narrow mountain road which often had sheer drops on one side. It was often scary, but this was compensated for by the views of the misty blue valleys visible between the trees. On each side of the road, mountain ash trees grew straight and tall, often with few branches below a height of a hundred feet. Dad explained that they grew so straight because they were competing to get to the light.

The road took us to Healesville, a small country town popular with holiday-makers. We then made our way home extremely tired, but thrilled with what we had seen.

When I was about six, Mum and Dad decided to take us on our first holiday in the country. One of Mum's former girlfriends had married a young farmer named Harry who had a dairy farm at Macorna near Kerang in northern Victoria. They had invited the Walshes to spend two weeks with them during the summer school holidays.

As Macorna was on the main railway line to Kerang, transport should have been quite straightforward. But Dad had another 'brainwave'. He thought it would be fun to ride his bike part-way – say to Bendigo. He further thought it would be fun for me to ride with him.

Dad had owned a 'Preston Star' bike for a number of years and he made a padded seat which fitted across the main bar and was bolted to it. I was to sit on this seat holding on to the handlebars, with my feet resting on the shoulders formed at the top of the forks.

The plan was to ride through the night and meet the train at Bendigo next morning. Mum, Nancy, Brian and all our luggage would be on that train.

We set off just after dark. The light on the bike was powered by a generator fixed to one of the front forks and having a revolving top part pressed against the side of the tyre. No battery was required, but the generator added to the load of pedalling the bike.

I can't remember the early part of the ride, but the further we went, the steeper the hills became and the louder Dad's breathing.

It was a fine night when we set out, but before we got to the Great Dividing Range rain had started. Travelling through the Black Forest the rain was coming down steadily and without waterproofs we were soon soaked to the skin and frozen stiff.

At Woodend, Dad decided he had had enough. It was after one o'clock, but there was a light on at a small two-storey brick hotel on the left of the road. We knocked up the landlord and his wife, who couldn't have been more helpful. They stoked up the fire and soon had a good blaze going. They took off my saturated clothes and wrapped me in warm towels. Some might call me conservative, but I was very concerned at not having pyjamas to wear to bed. Eventually my singlet and underpants had dried out in front of the fire and I swallowed my pride and went to bed in them.

Next morning Dad and I caught the train and the bike was put in the Guard's Van. Mum must have got quite a shock to see us at Woodend instead of Bendigo, fifty miles further on.

We kids hadn't been on a country train before and there were new things to be discovered. There was a narrow corridor down the side of the carriage with a toilet at one end. The carriages were connected together and you could walk through a concertina-walled alleyway into the next. We were in a small triple compartment with a lot of people heading off for holidays, including a group of about twelve happy teenagers who sang all the way.

Our luggage was stowed in the usual heavy brass racks fixed to the walls, but it was the spittoons that got me in. These were a relic of Edwardian days when it must have been common for gentlemen to spit. They consisted of a heavy brass flanged bowl nine inches across, set flush in the floor and having a short pipe outlet in the centre. Fortunately I never saw one being used.

Incidentally, the tiled walls to the ramps in the subway to Flinders Street Station always had the words DO NOT SPIT marked on them.

The singing teenagers had a mouth organ, and they would go from one song to the next without pause. Some songs I can remember because they had nice tunes and were new to me were – When It's Springtime in the Rockies, Wagon Wheels, and Shuffle off to Buffalo. Buffalo was a popular resort for honeymooners, near Niagara Falls, at the time.

When we got to Macorna we were picked up by Harry and his wife at the station. They had a 'twenties-style roadster car which we spent a lot of time in because of distances travelled during our stay. The land was dead flat, reddish-brown dirt which turned to dust when dry and mud after every shower of rain. They had irrigation in the area and they must have had electricity to power the milking equipment in the dairy. This equipment included the hoses and 'cups' which

fitted over the cows' teats at milking time. We kids would help wash this equipment after milking. Harry and Dad would regularly go shooting rabbits which were in plague proportions everywhere in the 1930's.

We would collect the empty cartridge shells. They were usually yellow in colour, of smooth cardboard with a nicely finished brass cap at one end. They had an intriguing smell – the residue of gunpowder I suppose.

Whenever the roads were wet or muddy, Harry had to fit 'chains' to the four wheels of the car. Without the chains the wheels would spin and the car would get nowhere.

There were still a lot of aborigines living in northern Victoria in the Murray River country, and one day Harry took us to a football match between an all-aboriginal team and a white one. The aborigines were playing in bare feet and seemed to be able to kick even drop kicks as well as their opponents.

At the end of the holiday we returned to Melbourne by train – I can't remember Dad offering to ride the bike!

I was a very quiet kid and always tried to obey 'the rules'. This didn't mean that I never got into awkward situations. Our groceries were delivered in the early days by a young chap driving the common roadster car. One day as he pulled up outside our gate, we had been playing 'Hidey' (Hide and Seek). When the grocer went inside with Mum's order, I decided that a good hiding place would be under the car. I lay there, well-concealed, but when the driver came back and got in the car I was too embarrassed to let him see me. There was a good clearance between the car and the dirt road and if he had driven straight off I could have dodged between the back wheels.

Unfortunately he had to turn and go back up the street. I could see the angle of the wheels changing as he started to go forward, then reverse. I was starting to wonder how long I would be able to dodge the wheels when Nancy and Brian called out "Allen's under the car! Allen's under the car!" The car stopped and I sheepishly crawled out.

Three years later I went to a Saturday afternoon birthday party for Jacky Cameron, a small, freckled schoolmate who lived in Devon Avenue. Devon Avenue was in West Coburg, running off Moreland Road. We very rarely went to parties of this kind and I can remember plenty of good party food and a 'Mickey Mouse' watch brought back from America by Jacky's uncle.

Afterwards, when we came out to the street there was a flamboyantly painted baker's delivery cart standing there. For some reason I decided to 'whip behind' as the horse started off. I was clinging to the metal steps leading to the rear door, but after about a hundred yards the horse broke into a canter. It occurred to me that the next stop might be the bakery in North Coburg, so I thought I had better bail out. I wasn't very experienced at this business and when I hit the road I really hit it. I skinned my hands and both my knees, and was feeling very sorry for myself as I limped back to the other party-goers.

One New Year's Eve I decided it would be a good idea to ring in the new year myself. The school Mothers' Club had raised funds to build a school bell tower at the edge of the quadrangle. This took the form of a steel framed structure similar to the frame for a country windmill. At the top there was a half-round corrugated iron roof above the bell.

Five minutes before midnight I climbed the school hill, on edge in case the Caretaker, Mr Cook, was on patrol. When I reached the bell tower I realised that the bell rope must have been removed for the holidays. There was nothing for it but to climb the steel ladder and ring the bell by hand. This I did, and BONG! BONG! BONG! rang out across the land or at least our part of it.

I then had to get down the ladder and run down the hill with my heart pounding, expecting the Cooks' dog to be snapping at my heels.

As it happened I got home and into bed safely but I have never been tempted to be a bellringer since!
Nancy, Brian and I always went home for lunch and often the school bell would ring while we were still inside the house. We would tear out the front gate, climb the school fence, and run up the hill, gasping for breath in my case by the time I reached the quadrangle.

Only once were we stopped from jumping the fence. A new student teacher told us to walk quietly down to the corner gate 50 yards away and up the asphalt path to the school. This only happened once. Perhaps other teachers pointed out to him that "Walshes do not use the gate".

When I was ten I thought it was time to join the workforce. Coal mines and dark satanic mills were a bit hard to find in West Brunswick but I had seen the swashbuckling newsboys swinging on and off the trams in Melville Road and I thought that with a bit of practice I could do the same. These kids were a different breed from those who delivered papers to houses before dawn, riding bikes without lights.

Those I aimed to join were generally weedy kids with agile bodies and minds. They carried their papers in a loosely looped leather strap slung over one shoulder and a small leather money bag over the other. They would be based at main road intersections and every time a loaded tram came along they would swing aboard well before the tram stopped.

They would then give the universal newsboys' call which went something like – "Herald, a paper, read all about it" … and finish with a cross between a gargle and a yodel. On the tram they would quickly go along dispensing papers and collecting money, often being told to "keep the change". As the tram started off again they would jump off before it was going too fast, or occasionally stay on until the next stop. You can see why I thought their lifestyle was the next best thing to being a cowboy.

The newsagent at our shopping corner was a glum-looking shortish bloke who was distinctive because his raked-back coarse grey-brown hair started growing only an inch above his eyebrows.

His name was Falvey and he ran a penny Lending Library from his Newsagency. Dad would send his kids to select three library books quite regularly with the warning "Make sure I haven't read them". This was a bit difficult because of the limited stock and because we were only to get Murder Mysteries or Westerns (no Romances) and we were expected to remember the books we had seen lying around at home.

Dad often read a book per night and had rigged up a special bed light so that Mum would not be kept awake. The light was a bare clear light globe plugged into a wooden bracket on the bed-head. Dad had dipped the globe into green paint then scraped a clear patch on the side so that a small beam of light would illuminate his book. You would normally expect the globe to overheat and explode, but this didn't happen.

One day I plucked up courage and asked Falvey if he needed a paper boy. He said he did and I could have the job, starting in a few days' time. I went home and told Mum. The next day Dad arrived home from work and said he had called in at falvey's. He had been asked whether it was all right for his son to be a paper boy. Dad said "Definitely not". He did not offer any reason or try to explain his decision to me. The subject was closed.

I was terribly upset after being game enough to get my first job. We never argued with dad, but it seemed to me that the great democrat, the supporter of the working man, the type of person who would talk about the dignity of labour, had feet of clay. He was a snob, just like everybody else.

Mum could always sense how we felt. She didn't say anything, but a few weeks later she came home from shopping and said our butcher, Bill Carroll, wanted a delivery boy to work on Saturday mornings. I went to see Bill and agreed to work from 8 a.m. to 12.30 for two shillings per week. Bill had a bike, but I preferred to use my own, which was Dad's old Preston Star, repainted black, which had been passed on to me.

Bill's small shop, one door away from Zeal Street in Melville Road, had a Coolroom and a room at the back. The floor was always covered with aromatic sawdust, renewed regularly. He had a heavy timber chopping table about 3 feet square consisting of solid redgum blocks set vertically and held by brass bands. The top surface must have had years of use because it was worn into a series of hills and hollows reminiscent of the Alps.

Bill was in his thirties, extremely thin, and had straight black hair which often flopped over one side of his forehead. He always wore a long dark blue butcher's apron with narrow horizontal white stripes, which wrapped one and a half times around his body. He was very good to me.

Butchers always started work well before dawn and Bill would have a big rectangular basket packed with orders when I got there. The meat was first wrapped in white 'butchers paper' and then wrapped in several layers of newspaper. I soon learned that there was only one satisfactory way of loading the bike. I would stand the wheels in the gutter outside the shop with the pedal sitting firmly on the kerb. I would then struggle out with the heavy basket and jam it between the upturned handlebars. The bike would be facing down the steep hill. This was necessary because I had to get some momentum up before choosing to go in any particular direction. Sometimes if the basket was too heavy for me to carry, Bill would bring it out with me already seated on the bike to keep it steady.

There was only one accident in the 2-3 year period I worked for Bill. One day the bike and basket tipped over at the kerb before I had mounted. Fortunately the gutter was dry and Bill was able to re-wrap all the meat without damage.

The shop was fitted out with steel hanging rails suspended from the ceiling. All butchers would have their meat, ranging in size from lamb to a whole side of beef hanging on double-ended sharp steel hooks fitted to these rails.
The customer (always a housewife) would tell Bill what cut of meat she wanted, indicate the size or quantity required and it would be cut right before her eyes. While Bill was not a great talker, there was generally plenty of conversation going on while he worked.

The only exception to this procedure was the making-up of orders for me to deliver. This was done in the early morning.

Bill made his own sausages in full public view in the shop. I sometimes helped by turning the handle of a mincing machine which was fed with beef or pork. The outlet from the mincing machine had a long semi-transparent animal intestine attached and as it filled with the minced meat, Bill would give it a twist every few seconds, resulting in sausages about six inches long coiling onto a large white tray. I know that the ingredients must have had breadcrumbs and seasoning added, but I cannot remember how these were introduced.

During my second year I asked Bill for a rise in pay. He agreed to make it three shillings instead of two. I thought I needed a new bike and went with Mum to a Myer sale, where I chose a dark

green bike with the name ‘Myer’ on the sloping bar. The price was three pounds, nineteen shillings and sixpence.

Delivery of the bike was promised a few days later. It must have been school holiday time because I remember the three of us hanging around the front gate in anticipation. Several times we were tricked by seeing Myer delivery vans in the area, but they didn’t come to us. Eventually one did turn down Wales Street and I had my bike.

In those days the Myer Emporium was always packed with shoppers and they sold an enormous range of good quality merchandise. Nearly every day the herald, which was a ‘broadsheet’ published in the afternoons, would have dozens of pages of Myer advertisements. Dad said that a common saying of the time was that the Herald was printed on the back of the Myer advertisements.

One day Nancy, Brian and I went into town (the City) on our own for the first time. I think we must have intended doing a bit of Christmas shopping with our pocket money. I had heard Mum speak about the Myer Mural Hall as something special although she had never been there, so I decided that was where we would eat.

The Myer ‘empire’ which later covered every major city in Australia was started by a Russian Jewish migrant who arrived in the late 1800’s and started in business as a hawker with a horse and cart in northern Victoria. He was successful and soon had a shop in Bendigo. I don’t know his Russian name but he took the name Sidney Myer. By the 1920’s he had moved to Melbourne and started buying properties in Bourke Street between Elizabeth Street and Swanston Street, the commercial hub of Melbourne.

During the depression of the early 1930’s he replaced all these smaller buildings with a vast ‘Emporium’ of about six stories extending to Little Bourke Street. Later the buildings stretched to Lonsdale Street. Sidney Myer must have been a man of great charm because I don’t know of any personal animosity to this man who was making such mighty changes to the City. He built his amazing business by intuitively knowing what the public wanted and lifting their horizons as he went.

On one of the upper floors of the Myer Emporium he built the Myer Mural Hall, a majestic dining room such as would be found in top overseas hotels. He engaged Napier Waller, an outstanding painter and stained glass artist to paint murals on the upper walls. These were of classical figures painted in pale grey and beige tones similar to the restrained murals in the Melbourne Town Hall, also by Napier Waller.

It was to this Mural Hall that the Walsh kids aged from about 9 to 12 found their way on that never-to-be-forgotten day. We must have gone up by lift and were shown to a table. Fortunately we were scrubbed clean and dressed in our best clothes.

It was only after we were seated that I wondered if we were out of our depth. I did not recognise anything printed on the menu and I could not stop looking at the spotless white linen and the silverware (not stainless steel) decorating the tables.

Before I had worked out a way of slinking out, a dinner-suited waiter came and asked whether we were ready to order. As the eldest male present, I mumbled “Could we have a pie and sauce each, please?” He gave us a half-smile and said “I’ll see what I can do” and went to order from the Kitchen. I hope that man finished up as General Manager. He could have shattered our confidence for years by telling us to go down to the Cafeteria in the basement. As it was we wrapped ourselves around our pies (and sauce) and finished off with cups of tea poured from a silver teapot. Lovely!

We Walshes mightn't have been famous for much, but there would be no doubt that we were the only patrons of the Mural Hall ever to be served pies and sauce.

Only a few years later Brian and I went with Dad several times to the Mural Hall. In about 1942 the Hall had been turned over by the Myer organisation to be used for fund-raising activities to help the war effort. Dad (as Sergeant Walsh) was in charge of organising sport as recreation for the RAAF within Australia. With the co-operation of his counterparts in the Army and the Navy, Dad organised a Combined Services Boxing Tournament at the Mural Hall. This took place over a number of days and was taken seriously. Dad got me to do a drawing which turned out to be my first published work of art. It showed two boxers slugging it out. They were enclosed in a circle and this was reproduced on the cover of a booklet which served as the programme for the tournament.

Not long after that Dad organised a week-long exhibition of billiards by world champion Walter Lindrum. Like Don Bradman, Lindrum had made his name in the early 1930's and had spent most of the 'thirties in Europe being feted by Kings and giving exhibitions of his skill. He was so far ahead of the next-best players in the world that the authorities changed the rules to try to curtail some of his favourite shots. The new rules affected his opponents more than they did Lindrum.

Walter Lindrum was just a little too old for war service, but he spent the whole of the war years travelling Australia and raising the equivalent of millions of dollars giving exhibitions for the war effort.

Lindrum died at a comparatively early age and is buried at the Melbourne General Cemetery. His grave is surmounted by a monument in stone of a full-size billiard table complete with balls and cues.

The Lindrum family home is still standing on a large block of land at the corner of Kerferd Road and Page Street, Albert Park.

There had been an English couple living three doors up the street since the Wales Street houses were first built. Their name was Calow (pronounced Kay-lo) and they were childless. Both were quite tall. Mum used to chat with Mrs Calow occasionally and was surprised that the husband was never referred to by name – only as 'he' and 'him'.

One afternoon 'he' came home when a few of us were playing cricket on our 'home' pitch – the middle of the road. Mr Calow had apparently stopped off for sustenance on his way home and he must have been feeling generous because he offered Brian a shilling if he could bowl me out with the next ball.

Brian bowled, I swung lustily and the ball rattled the stumps. Actually it clanged against our rubbish bin. Brian pocketed his prize. I thought he could have shown a bit of generosity and shared it with the batsman who had undoubtedly helped him.

In 1938, when there was talk of war in Europe, parents of children in the big English cities were wondering what to do if war started. Without much warning we heard that a niece of the Calows was on board a ship bound for Australia.

When the girl arrived it turned out she was the same age as Nancy and she finished up in the same class at school. We Walshes were a friendly mob and invited her to join in our less vigorous games. Her name was Joan Sabine and she had lived in London. Her voice was very

soft compared with the harsher voices of many Australian girls. I can't remember whether he voice went up or down at the end of words – it was certainly different.

Joan had one eye slightly turned – a bit like what has been called 'lazy eye' in more recent years. Unfortunately the eye got worse over time, resulting in the wearing of glasses and a shyness that appeared to make her rather withdrawn. She later went to our St David's Church where she teamed up with Girl Guides Norma Sims and Thelma Rowe, both from Zeal Street. The three of them ran the Guides organisation for many years at the church. I don't think any of the trio ever married.
I never could have guessed in 1938 that 25 years later I would marry a girl from that same distant country. But I'm glad I did!

I have never claimed to be a sportsman, but looking back from a distance of seventy years, I am amazed at the number of games we played while we were at Primary School. We seemed to play games of some kind before school, after school, at lunchtime, and at Recess (called playtime, both morning and afternoon). In addition there were games to be played during the Christmas and term holidays. We Walshes were very lucky. Because Nancy, Brian and I were so close together in age we could always organise a game of some sort without relying on others being available.

Running seemed to be the basis of all real sport. Nancy and Brian were both good at running and were very competitive. I was a slow runner and though I tried hard I didn't think it was the end of the world if I didn't win a race or a game.

But I still played nearly every sport available to us except men's basketball, and enjoyed most of them with the exception of swimming.

I have spent a lifetime trying to understand the Australian obsession with sport and I think it came originally (and continues) from an inferiority complex. Most sports with the notable exceptions of baseball, basketball and the snow sports originated in England. As Australia was originally populated from the British Isles, the British sports were played as a matter of course.

Because Australia generally had a climate in which sport could be played all year round and in the early days boys (especially in the country) were eating better food and so growing bigger and stronger, their sporting prowess developed rapidly.

Unfortunately their prowess in speaking and using the English language did not develop very much at all.

The millions of workers in the mills and factories of England did not have the time or opportunity to play games, so it was left to the 'upper crust' to represent their country in sport.

When the first English cricket teams visited Australia they would have been surprised to find the uncouth colonials could play nearly as well as they could. On the other hand I believe the Australians must have felt humiliated because they could not speak the English language properly. It seems to me that Australians as a whole decided that if they could never compete in speaking the language, they would pretend it didn't matter and go the other way, deliberately using slang and ''ocker'talk to show how tough and independent they were.

This has continued to the present day and with a few notable exceptions we have gloried in sending uneducated sportsmen and entertainers to represent Australia overseas.

It always surprised me to find school sports and games coming into vogue at regular times during the year.

Football and cricket of course had to be played in winter and summer respectively, but who determined that marbles, cigarette cards and skippy were played at the same time each year?

Cherry bobs were a little different. While keen punters might keep their cherry bobs from year to year as with marbles, most would get a new supply from the spring growth of cherries. Cherry bobs were the stones of the fruit which would be saved, cleaned and kept in a small cloth bag like a marbles bag which was made by your mum.

There was only one reason for having cherry bobs – gambling.

The cherry season coincided with the Spring Racing Carnival based on the Melbourne and Caulfield Cups and the cherry bob players based their game on the Sport of Kings.

The simplest game was played when a 'bookmaker' would scoop a small hole in the ground (about the size of a sweets bowl) and scrape a line about 8 feet away for the player (punter) to stand at. The bookie would then sit on the ground with his legs spread each side of the hole, and call 'the odds'. He might offer anything from 2 to 1 up to 10 to 1 to the player, depending on how difficult he thought it would be to throw a cherry bob into the hole. On a busy day there would be several kids lined up with legs spread guarding their holes while they competed for custom with shouts like "Three to one here" or "Four and your old girl back!"

A more sophisticated cherry bob game was played with a 'toodlembuck'. This was actually a home-made spinning wheel like those now used to select winners of raffles in pubs and clubs, except that they were much smaller, and would spin horizontally.

A toodlembuck consisted of a wooden skewer as used in cooking meat, pushed through the hole in a wooden cotton reel, just loose enough to allow it to spin. A disc of cardboard ruled into segments (up to 16) was marked with a horse's name and odds in each segment and attached to the top of the reel. A stop was fixed to the skewer below the reel and a pointer immediately above the disc. When a piece of string was wound around the cotton reel and pulled, the disc would spin and eventually the pointer would indicate the winning horse and the odds.

Punters would nominate their horse and bet any number of cherry bobs on it. The toodlembuck owner (or bookmaker) could hardly lose in the long run because the odds were stacked in his favour, just as on the racecourse.

It was no coincidence that Australia's richest man at the time, John Wren, started off with an illegal betting shop off a fortified yard in a back street in Collingwood and followed up by bribing policemen and manipulating politicians on his way to trying to buy respectability.

I don't know how many legal and illegal bookmakers started off with their toodlembucks at primary school, but from what I have learned in recent years, they were in use throughout Victoria.

I was amazed to see kids who couldn't learn their 'two times' tables in the schoolroom were able to quickly calculate their much more complex cherry bob winnings in the schoolyard.

I mentioned swimming earlier. It must have been just before the schools swimming sports in spring each year that we would go to the Brunswick Baths to learn or practise swimming. Several grades at a time would be taken by tram to Grantham Street and would then walk down Dawson Street to the baths. Brunswick Baths was quite a large complex for those days. There was a full-size outdoor Olympic pool (50 metres) with a 10 metre diving tower, springboards and bleachers at the side for spectators, and also a 25 metre heated indoor pool with 3 metre and 1

metre diving boards. I've never been troubled much by smells, but the indoor pool reeked of chlorine.

I thought the best part of going to the baths was looking in at Dawson's foundry. It was a brick building directly opposite the entrance to the baths. The foundry had a wide opening facing the street, with a low barrier across the bottom. While we waited for the baths to open, we kids would line up like sparrows, leaning on the barrier and peering in. I say 'peering' because everything inside seemed to be black. As our eyes became accustomed to the darkness we could see workmen moving around not far from us, preparing sand moulds for making iron castings. They had wooden boxes on the floor, containing special black moulding sand. Solid wooden patterns would be set in the sand and later removed, leaving an impression that was to be filled with iron from the furnaces located a little further back. The red-hot molten iron was carried in a heavy container by a number of men and carefully poured into the sand moulds. I still do not know what prevented the sand from collapsing, but this was the system used throughout the world for centuries.

It always seemed to be very cold on the mornings we went swimming, and I was so skinny that I think I suffered from hypothermia every time I went in the outdoor pool. I certainly suffered. This pool was fully tiled, floor and walls, with ice-blue tiles that were reminiscent of photos of the antarctic.

When we were occasionally allowed to use the indoor pool I found the humid atmosphere and the noise also uncomfortable. The hard surfaces on walls and roof reflected and magnified the shouts and squeals of excited kids so much that it would hurt your ears.

Teachers would try to teach us to float on our backs. Dad (and others) claimed that it was impossible for the live human body to sink and therefor floating was easy. I always thought otherwise. It was many years later that I read that researchers had discovered that 15 per cent of human bodies did not naturally float. These would be the skinny ones, because you only had to see fat floating on the top of soup to appreciate that it is lighter than water.

There was one day that I did not feel cold in the outdoor pool – Friday, 13th January 1939.

Nancy, Brian and I walked the two miles to the baths in the morning and spent several hours there. Half the population of Brunswick seemed to be there and I noticed that the wooden bleachers, though constantly in use by swimmers, seemed to be dry rather than being covered by the usual pools of water.

We walked home in mid-afternoon and knew it was pretty hot because the scorching north wind was carrying smoke from the bushfires and we found it hot underfoot even though we were wearing runners. We were accustomed to hot bare feet crossing Beach Road, Black Rock, in summer, but this day we had to find a strip of shade from an SEC pole and run along it just to cross the road, then find another patch of shade on a footpath.

Later we learned that we had experienced the hottest day in Victoria's recorded history. The temperature in Melbourne was 114° F (45° C) and the day became known as Black Friday. All the forests of Victoria were alight and scores of timber mill townships were wiped out, together with many of their occupants. Grass fires were not a problem that year as a drought in 1938 meant that there was very little grass to burn.

Later that year war against Hitler's Germany was declared on September 3rd. after he invaded Poland. Nobody could have forecast the way the world would change in the following six years. In 1939, Australia, along with New Zealand, Canada and South Africa considered itself an equal

partner in the British Empire – not as some who have tried to re-write history have claimed, a subservient colony. The Colonial period finished in the year 1900.

In 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbour and this brought the United States into the war on the Allied side.

Because Britain was still engaged in a life or death struggle in Europe, Australia was becoming more dependent on the United States for survival, culminating in the Battle of the Coral Sea in which a Japanese invasion force was destroyed by the US Navy not far away from Australia's shores.

Is it any wonder that Australians who lived through those times give credit to the United States for the freedom which we still enjoy today?

The war years also spelt the end of our 'country' life in West Brunswick.

In the late 1940's as servicemen returned to civilian life there was optimism about the future. Unfortunately shortages of building materials slowed down the building trade for many years. In the early 1950's houses of a limited size (up to 12 squares (1200 s. ft.) for a brick veneer) could be built after getting the approval of the State Building Directorate.

Gradually the vacant land all around Melbourne started to fill up with housing, starting at the other side of our back fence. The state government and councils could not keep up with the provision of roads, footpaths and drainage in these areas, so thousands of houses were built on dusty paddocks that turned into muddy pools of water in winter. Generally people understood the problems and were glad just to have a roof over their head.

Post-war immigration brought a flood of people which has never stopped and Melbourne has continued to expand in every direction. Visitors to our corner of West Brunswick now could never believe that we grew up in what seemed like a semi-rural area not so very long ago.