

## **‘Roar Like a Bull!’ (growing up in Port Melbourne in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century)**

by Albert Caton

I was born in 1942 in the maternity ward of the Women’s Hospital in North Melbourne, the son of Edward Harold (‘Ted’) Caton and Muriel Lily (Reed) Caton. Soon afterwards, my mum and I moved to Sydney where my father was stationed in the Navy during World War II. When I was just about four-years old we returned to Melbourne, living at 23 Alfred Street, Port Melbourne, where my dad’s father William Edward (‘Gramps’) Caton and dad’s mother Louisa Maria (‘Mum’) Caton had lived. We were there for about six years.

‘Our’ Catons’ name was brought to Australia—to the Port Melbourne area (at that time ‘Sandridge’)—by John Christopher Caton, who was born in approximately 1800 (presumably in England; he was a sailor). My cousin Alwynne (younger daughter of my father’s oldest brother Richard) when undertaking family history research had tracked John Christopher back to St Helena. On a world cruise in 2011 that called at St Helena she visited the registry office and located details of his marriage on 13 July 1820 to Mary Lions (‘slave to Mr Carr’). Alwynne’s collection of births, deaths and marriage certificates showed that they had a son, also John Christopher, born at ‘Cape of Good Hope’ (at sea?) in 1821 (he died at Sandridge in 1877). Alwynne was unable to find any details such as the date or location of John senior’s death. However, a 1857 marriage certificate for John junior’s second marriage (in Sandridge, to Annie Williams; when that John’s age was given as 36) appears to show that it might have been his mother Mary Lions signing as a witness (‘Mary [X] Lions her mark’) and hence still alive in Sandridge in 1857.

Details of John junior’s first wife are unknown but she is noted on the 1857 marriage certificate as dying on 31 December 1855 (perhaps in childbirth?). The certificate also indicated that John and his first wife had had a child who Alwynne has determined was another John Christopher, born in about 1855, known in the family as ‘Uncle Jack’, and dying in Port Melbourne in 1942. All of these details need verification.

John Christopher junior and Annie Williams had eight children, the last being William Edward (‘Gramps’) Caton, my paternal grandfather.]

I know that I was just four-years old when I attended kindergarten in Port Melbourne. It was in the hall of the Wesleyan Methodist Church (demolished in the 1970s and replaced now by units) in Graham Street between Stokes Street and Nott Street, across the road from where my dad’s older brother Uncle Fred Caton had his butcher shop at the time. The woman who ran the kindergarten was Miss Hopkins<sup>1</sup>. We were seated several-to-a-small-table on very tiny chairs. It was co-ed, but tables were gender-specific. The girls’ tables were up near Miss Hopkins.

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<sup>1</sup> The Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society Inc. 2011 ‘Historic Port Melbourne’ Calendar noted that Miss Hopkins ran the Graham Street Wesleyan Methodist Kindergarten for some seventy years.

Apart from my recollection of the hall, I have two fairly fixed impressions. On one afternoon there was a sort of presentation of 'Babes in the Woods' for parents—next door in the church perhaps? I was 'autumn leaves', and had to fall down around the babes at an appropriate time. I assume I had pastel-tone associates, or the autumn-leaf fall, albeit convincing (and worthy of favourable reviews in the press), would have been rather meagre.

My other memory would imply that from the outset I've been unable to resist competitions. Miss Hopkins offered a propelling-pencil (perhaps operable?) prize for the one of us who could identify a tune that she percussed with pencil on table. 'Tappity, tappity tap; tap-tap, tap-tap, tap-tap; tap-tap tap-tap; tap-tap tap-tap; tappity, tappity tap.' 'Hickory dickory dock', obviously; the prize was mine! But of course the girls had pride of place; and Miss Hopkins (who clearly must have been short-sighted—or perhaps not?) beamed upon them, ignoring my upthrust hand, thereby dashing my hopes. I have awkward feelings about propelling pencils to this day. And about girls too, of course.

Mum and I walked the half-mile or so to the kindergarten. It was always fun at the railway crossing at Graham railway station. There were both steam-engine goods lines to the piers, and suburban electric-train lines to Port Melbourne, with two sets of large white wooden railway gates. As a youngster it was always fun to hop onto the gates and ride them as they opened or closed. They were operated by a large wheel up in the station box between the suburban and goods lines. Most of the gate-keepers turned a blind eye, but some screamed 'bugger off' at me from the signal-box window. It was exciting to watch from the gates when the old black steam trains were shunting; but they were coming to the end of their service days with the introduction of the large, yellow-and-blue, diesel-electric engines.

In addition to kindergarten, I was drafted of a Sunday afternoon to the Baptist Church located across the road from 95 Ross Street where Uncle Fred Caton and Aunt May lived. Sunday School was held in the room at the back, and a dozen or so of us mini Christians-to-be (non-Roman Catholic; the Catholic brigade had to go elsewhere) would be regaled with stories of wonder. At the end it was sing-along: 'Our Sunday School is over, and we are going home: Good Bye, Good Bye, for we are going home; Good Bye, Good Bye, for we are going home.' I suppose the tune remains stuck in my mind because it generated pleasant associations (namely the Sunday School session coming to an end).

It was convenient that some of those who attended kindergarten with me were with me again in the subsequent year when I started at Graham Street State School (State School number 2932). I vaguely remember my first day. Mother in tow, I went up the steps (below the bell tower) to sit on the bench outside Mr Price's (the headmaster's) office. I think I was allowed to walk to school by myself from then on because it was only a couple of blocks away from home. I had turned five in January 1947, which had made me eligible to start primary school that year. It was a pity in a way because, having no problems with progressing academically to the next grade each year, I was always the youngest (and skinniest, and weakest) in my classes.

My more permanent memories of primary school are its smells: of the shelter-sheds (boys' on the left; girls' on the right), especially on rainy days when the aroma of old bananas and dank food wafted strongly; of the boys lavatories, fetid in the cubicles and uriferous at the wall; of the incinerator behind them that combined the stale-food smell of the shelter-sheds and the aroma from the adjacent lavatories with that of burnt and damp paper; of ink wells and ink, especially once one's fingers were attractively blued; and of lead pencils and pencil shavings.

First Grade and Grade 2, at the southern side of the school buildings, were housed together with a folding partition door/wall separating them. It was folded back for collective activities like singing. I remember the brick wall outside, below the windows—probably because on one afternoon I ran into it forehead-first and grew an egg-sized lump; god knows what they were meant to do, but butter and brown paper were applied when I reached home.

I'm not sure if I was a good singer in First Grade because I was often distracted. Seated near the track that the folding doors slid along, I found a tack one day. An uncle had held tacks in his mouth once when putting new soles onto shoes (he used one of those funny cast-iron shoe-lasts with three metal feet at right angles three-dimensionally). I wondered what the tacks tasted like. Actually, when I put my tack in my mouth and moved it around so that it didn't stick in my tongue I found that it slid quite easily down my throat without much taste at all.

When I arrived home I told my mother, of course, and she made me eat dry bread (I think this was the standard remedy of the time for fish bones; it's a wonder that it wasn't accompanied by butter and brown paper). It was a bit late in the day by then, so I doubt the bread made much difference. Concerned that it might lodge in a dead-end organ like my appendix or do some other dastardly deed to my innards she took me to the doctor (Dr Dudley Edwards, with his rooms on Bay Street perhaps?). He X-Rayed me, and sure enough there was the dark little thing (good contrast) somewhere in the tubes. The outcome was that my mother forced me to use a chamber pot for the next day or three until she was able to confirm the tack's passing. Perhaps she could have used a magnet more hygienically?

The First Grade teacher was Miss Hemple. Clothed in a sort of green, cloaky shawl-dress, her nickname among the parents was 'Green Riding Hood'. From my perspective she would have made good wolf fodder—or perhaps even a good wolf. She sought to teach us the alphabet via the usual pictures up above the black board ('A for apple'; 'B for banana'; 'C for control';... and so on) and an accompanying pointer-cum-whip.

For me it was all old hat. I had kindergartened; and, more significantly, I had received stern tutoring diagonally across the road from our 23 Alfred Street corner—in the back yard of Mary McDonald's house. Mary, 7, was considerably older than us (me; Billy and Denny Eastmuir from Alfred Street; Noel Edwards and Ray Horsey from Ross Street (Ray's house backing on to the rear of Mary's); and Gary (Wieden?) from Albert Street (his house backed on to the narrow night-cart laneway at the back of ours). She had a blackboard and chalk, giving sums and spelling (and the strap).

Most of my play activity was with the Eastmuirs, Ray, Gary and Noel. We would occasionally tolerate Gary's little brother Peter. One of the favourite comics at the time included the exploits of 'The Blackhawks'—a miscellaneous assemblage of five intrepid pilots dedicated to fighting the Germans. Non-British, and hence delayed in their attempts to join the RAF, they established a squadron of their own. We would draw outlines of their planes on the Union Street bitumen and sit in them (there was virtually no vehicular traffic there), carrying out fearless missions while singing the squadron song: 'Over land and over sea, we fight to make men free, of danger we don't care... we're Blackhawks!' Biggles would have been proud of us.

Television had not arrived in Australia but we had radio; and it was always important to get inside in time to hear the evening serials: Superman ('Up, up; and awa-a-a-y'); Captain Silver of the Sea Hawk; Hop Harrigan; Ta-a-a-r-zan, Ki-i-i-ng, of the A-a-apes; and 'The Air Adventures of Biggles'. A few were more grown-up offerings such as 'Mrs Obbs'; 'Daddy and Paddy', 'Dad and Dave' and 'Life with Dexter'<sup>2</sup>. Even so I found their humour quite delightful. Later in the evening there were quiz shows such as Bob Dyer's 'Pick a Box', Jack Davey's Colgate-Palmolive show, and John Dease's 'The Quiz Kids'. I assume that our radio was rarely tuned to the ABC because we were not listeners to 'Blue Hills' and, unlike my wife and her sister, I was never an Argonaut.

It was great at Alfred Street on warm summer evenings. I don't think that paedophiles had been invented, and so my mates and I were allowed outside to play in the street for an hour after dinner. A favourite game required a flattened tin can and a home base (the iron manhole cover in the middle of the Albert and Union streets intersection, underneath the street light). Some unfortunate soul was selected as 'it' ("you're it"). The tin was tapped three times on the manhole cover and then hurled off metallicly clattering along the ground into the darkness. While 'it' hurried off to find the tin, the rest of us would race off to hide. Returning the tin to the top of the manhole cover, 'it' would proceed to search for us. When one of us was found, we and 'it' would both race back for the tin, the first there tapping it three times and then hurling it off again, the loser chasing the tin. At any time it was legitimate for anybody to come out of hiding, rush to the tin, tap it three times and hurl it off again for 'it' to chase. In the darkness, there were parked cars, narrow laneways, narrow front yards and verandas to provide hiding cover. All the while, black crickets would be chirruping, and scampering on the road under the street light. I recall also occasionally seeing green lights of the Aurora Australis in the night sky to the south.

The 23 Alfred Street house was a small weatherboard cottage fronting Alfred Street on the corner of Union Street. Sadly, progress has seen it gutted presumably for erection for a modern mansion, an October 2019 image on Google Earth showing most of the back demolished and the front part a hollow weatherboard shell.

The (brick-paved) yard was quite small—about 2 m x 3 m, with a six-foot fence and gate against the Union Street footpath. The yard had a 4-inch steel pipe draining it under the footpath to the gutter. I remember the pipe because dad chased a rat into it

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<sup>2</sup> The National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra has examples of them among its collections.

once. It was trapped there with a parent at each end, but eventually outwitted them with rat cunning.

There was a narrow laneway at the back of the block separating 23 Alfred St from the house that fronted Albert St. A small woodshed backed against the laneway fence with a covered alcove to the adjacent lavatory (also against the laneway fence for access in the past by the dunny-can man). The 3-wide bluestone blocks that lined the laneway are still apparent out to the gutter, but the property owners have closed off the laneway itself.

The lavatory had a ceramic bowl, no doubt with the obligatory 'U'-bend, but didn't sport a lift-up plastic seat (I think the only plastic in common use at the time was Bakelite, its main application the manufacture of utensils designed for the opposite end of the alimentary tract). Instead there was a fine-grained, smooth, rectangular wooden seat, extending sideways from wall to wall, and from front to back, complete with a central cut-out. I think there was also a prudently placed panel across the front below the seat, a left-over from the days prior to the ceramic bowl when the dunny can required discreet enclosure. The lavatory was flushed from an open-topped, cast-iron tank above. A chain-pull at shoulder level was attached to a metal lever that opened the flow valve. The water level in the tank was controlled by a floating ball that controlled a stop-cock on the water inlet. With the open tank above, and an open pedestal below, the air was always fairly high in humidity and infused with a dank wet-wood aroma.

Next to the lavatory along the fence that adjoined our neighbour (Mr Rowan) there was first a narrow space for storage of coke (not 'the pause that refreshes'; rather the carbonaceous fuel material derived from destructive distillation of low-ash, low-sulphur bituminous coal) was stored; then a wash-house/bathroom; then a space with a gully trap (and the obligatory basket of maidenhair fern, replete with used tea leaves, hanging above it); and then the kitchen across the back of the house.

I recall that there were a couple of laundry troughs at the kitchen end of the laundry, and there was a bath along the side of the room. I assume that there was also a copper<sup>3</sup> in it because Auntie May's and nana's laundries had coppers set above a fireplace so that large amounts of water could be boiled for washing clothes. Probably also for filling baths. The process was usually to get water to the boil in the copper, and then to scoop it out to the troughs or bath using a galvanised iron 'dipper' with a capacity of about half-a-gallon (i.e. about 2.5 litres). The dipper had a handle to facilitate the exercise, but I imagine that there were occasional accidents during transfer of boiling water around the room<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Coppers were laundry tubs made from copper—large, beaten bowls, almost the size of half a 44-gallon drum.

<sup>4</sup> Acquiring hot water in Alfred Street must have been rather tedious. From memory it was not until our move to Graham Street (see later) that we had a gas hot water unit. It was an upright cylinder that housed a gas-burner ring that burnt up through a water jacket. There was a swivel pilot burner at the base. Turning on the pilot-light tap gas, one lit it with matches then swivelled it through 90 degrees so that the flame was directed over the gas ring. The swivelling opened the gas supply to the burner ring, which ignited loudly and fiercely. When I boarded in Adelaide, the bathroom heater had a cylindrical water jacket but it was thinner and longer, and instead of a gas ring there was a giant Bunsen burner

The kitchen had a small rectangular wooden table with four upright wooden chairs (the seats were made of round plywood with a petal-shaped pattern of holes drilled into them for decoration and ventilation); a green and cream baked-enamel-covered gas oven on four legs with a space with a griller above it and two or three gas hot-plate hobs on the metal grid above that; a dresser beside the back door that held crockery, table cloths and tea towels; and a cupboard bench along the side wall that was used for serving up meals. I remember its location because it was where the simmered vegetables were strained; each evening I was required to drink the resultant healthy 'veggie water'. I don't think we had a sink in the kitchen because I have vague recollections of the washing-up being done in a galvanised 'Willowware' tub on the serving bench. Similarly, I don't think that the kitchen stove was flued?

The kitchen led to the lounge, again across the width of the house, and then there were two bedrooms off a passage at the left that led to the front door. From memory, there was no fireplace in the lounge? I seem to recall that we used a bar radiator initially<sup>5</sup>, but it was replaced by an upright gas heater against the wall. The gas burnt up through white firebrick 'mantles' that glowed and radiated warmth.

My parent's bedroom was next to the lounge, and mine was at the front, my window opening (not that it ever was) onto the veranda. There was a fireplace in the wall separating the two bedrooms. In my room there were two single beds, separated by a wardrobe/dresser that had three drawers attached with a mirror above. Nana's embroidered Red Indian -pattern doily graced its top, underneath a wind-up clock that, along with the obligatory hour and minute hands, had a Donald Duck whose head rocked back and forth. I slept in the bed further from the window, but I always faced the window (i.e. to the left) to go to sleep. I think this started after a dream I had about a lion when I'd gone to sleep facing to the right<sup>6</sup>.

There was space between the two beds, where I could play. When I was probably about six-years old I was given a Hornby train set and could lay it out on my bedroom floor. Not that it required much room. There were six curved rails that joined together to make a circle of about two-foot diameter (say half-a-metre). The train consisted of a clockwork engine, a coal tender and two carriages, everything made out of tin. There was also a tin station. It must have been exciting for the (painted) passengers at the station watching the train pass by every three seconds. The activity could be made even more exciting (I still get a thrill just thinking of it) by setting the engine on the

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look-alike that one lit directly with a match, generating an even more fearsome roar and flame. The government house over in Ceduna where the fisheries inspector lived had a less-modern, wood-fired version—a 'chip heater'. One set a small fire of paper and kindling in the base of the cylinder and showered before the fire dwindled. I'm not sure of the physics but as it burnt there was a fast 'chuff, chuff, chuff' noise.

<sup>5</sup> Our cat 'Snowy'—jet black, as you'd expect—bit through the radiator flex on one occasion, and took a while to stop wandering in tight circles. His/its eyes had odd flecks in them afterwards.

<sup>6</sup> I wonder if that all stemmed from Stanley Holloway's comic patter routine? About the Ramsbottoms, their son Albert, their visit to Blackpool, and young Albert poking his 'stick with the horse's head handle' into the lion Wallace's ear (the little lad then promptly being dragged into the cage and swallowed whole, 'him in his Sunday clothes, too'). When people were introduced to me as Albert, their rejoinder was often 'Are you the Albert wot got et by lion'.

rails without any tender or carriages and watching how far it could proceed around the circle before succumbing to centrifugal force. Oh, the joys of childhood.

I suppose that even I ultimately tired of the limited stimulus that my train set offered, and so I set about embellishing it. Each week I received 2/- (20 cents) pocket money. By saving up for six weeks I was able to buy a set of six lead animals around the corner at Arthur A'Beckett's bike shop (next door in Ross Street to Auntie May and Uncle Fred). The transformation was so amazing that I was inspired to save for a further six weeks and double the size of my leaden farm. BHP must have been proud of me.

Later, when I was a more grown-up child, I was given a more suitable train set, replete with a green, clockwork, Hornby Type 501 engine that could travel backwards as well as forwards. It boasted a red and black wagon that could carry logs; a covered yellow wagon with a Portland cement label; a crane wagon; a tanker wagon and a wagon holding a wire cable roll. There was no stopping my enthusiasm so that after several years I could run the train around the room, under the bed, through switching points, over a wooden bridge, beside a wooden signal box, and through railway gates. My farm-animal fetish was replaced by a more rail-relevant fervour, and so I assembled a motley collection of road and railway-crossing signs, and obtained a clockwork tray truck to give purpose to them. I was also eventually given a Meccano construction set that provided excellent experience in the use of screwdrivers and spanners (and the desirability of using three hands at once were I fortunate to be so equipped).

At one time dad had to paint the Alfred Street house. My memory of it is fairly vague, but mum reported that in the process of melting and stripping back paint from the weatherboard he was so enthusiastic (unskilled, perhaps?) that he set fire to the wall. I can remember the paint stripper. It was a pump-up kerosene-fuelled blowtorch that was first heated around the flame nozzle by metho (the same principle as 'Tilley' kerosene pressure lamps) so that subsequently the kero passing into the nozzle would evaporate and become flammable.

There was always friendliness around Alfred Street. Some neighbours, like the Tinsleys across the road, were Caton-line relatives. In any event, Christmas and New Year were quite social events. Mum and dad visited neighbours on Christmas morning to share a drink and snack before our Christmas lunch—usually a roast that dad, a non-drinker in those days, sometimes was too under-the-weather to appreciate. Even so, he always managed a chorus of 'It's Christmas all over the Ocean', and its segue into 'I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year; Poor Babes in the Woods, Poor Babes in the Woods'. On New Year's Eve there would always be a gathering in the street, everybody with pots and pans to belt at midnight, and then all joining arms to sing 'For Auld Lang Syne'.

Post-war, dad had not returned to work as a barber. His oldest cousin Big Charlie (Watt) was a foreman on the wharves at the time, and arranged a job for dad. Each day he headed off on his push-bike with his lunch. The bike was black, with thick mudguards, huge head and tail lights and a spring-loaded dynamo that pressed against the side wall of the front tyre. There was only one gear, and it was free-wheel with a foot brake that came on when you turned the pedals backwards a little (you could also

get ‘fixed-wheel’ bikes where the pedals always turned). Dad had his own cargo hook—a solid wooden bar with a fearsome metal hook coming out at a right-angle. I suppose they were good for moving wool bales around—or for self-preservation? He had a waterproof cape for rainy days. It was a Mackintosh; not an oilskin *per se*, but made of woven material covered with a black rubberised coating. He needed a thick scarf and balaclava for winter mornings. Even so, he always suffered badly each winter from chilblains on his ears.

At the time that we moved into Alfred Street I was fully bipedal, and so mum had requisitioned my pram as her shopping trolley. It was made of fawn-painted ply-wood with padding inside. The four wheels were spoked, with rubber around the rim. There was a cute little trap-door in the floor presumably to hold a potty. As this was during the years following the end of the war we needed ration tickets<sup>7</sup> for the butcher, grocer, etc. Meals were usually ‘meat-and-three-veggies’ (usually peas, carrots and potato), possibly facilitated by having Uncle Fred Caton as a butcher uncle. I remember mum’s grilled lamb chops (always delicious); fried crumbed lamb cutlets (often a bit dry, and fatty because the crumbs prevented the fat from browning); thin pork sausages in gravy; corned beef now and then; rabbit casserole sometimes (good, especially the kidneys); and occasionally tripe. Despite several attempts by mum and dad to make me eat tripe I could never stomach it (well, actually that’s not correct; I couldn’t even oesophagus it). We never had chicken because it wasn’t as readily available as nowadays. On the weekend we sometimes had lamb roast.

On Fridays we had fish and chips. There was a fish shop a block or two away at the Ross Street and Farrell Street corner, and we’d walk around to it. The options were flake (gummy shark) or (barra)’couta (Chiko Rolls had not been invented). I was limited to boneless flake, whereas dad was sufficiently adult to cope with the bones of ’couta. The battered fish came plump and hot out of the oil, the chips crisp but moist. They were placed on a sheet of greaseproof paper then wrapped in several layers of newspaper. Newspapers were a great invention because they kept fish-and-chips piping hot for a quarter-of-an-hour until we got them home.

When we moved in to 23 Alfred Street we had no refrigerator. At first we had a Coolgardie safe—a tin-mesh cabinet covered in hessian down each side—that lived in the kitchen. There was a door at the front and an open tank filled with water at the top. A small tap on each side of the tank let water drip slowly down the hessian to keep it damp and to evaporate to keep the interior cool. Later it was displaced by an ice chest—a wooden-framed, tin-lined, upright cabinet on legs, with a door that opened outwards at the front. It had a handle that incorporated a wheel mechanism that would slide into a guide and pull the door firmly in to set up an airtight seal. The top of the cabinet had a lid that lifted so that a block of ice could sit in the tin-lined cavity there. Underneath the cabinet was a tin to collect the melt-water. Ice was delivered by horse-and-cart. The tin-lined, insulated ice ‘van’ had wooden slats at the base along which the ice could slide. In summer it was a treat when the ice-man used his pick to chip a

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<sup>7</sup> Rationing, introduced from May 1942, was enforced by the use of coupons and was limited to clothing, tea (½lb/5 weeks), sugar (2lb/fortnight), butter (1lb/fortnight), and meat. From time to time, eggs and milk were also rationed under a system of priority for vulnerable groups during periods of shortage.



sliver of ice off a slab for us to suck. I remember that it tasted a little of wood, at times probably because of splinters that had come off the floor of the van.

Horse-and-cart was the order of the day for deliveries. And for pick-ups. The garbage man had a metal cart with a curved top separated into two, front and back. One of the curved covers could be slid up so that our galvanised iron garbage can could be hoisted up and emptied into it. The smell was reminiscent of school shelter sheds—over-ripe bananas, cabbage and lettuce, and dank paper. The blinkered Clydesdale hauling it had its own smell, too close for comfort when one was forced by a parent to hold one's palm out with a bit of bread for the bristled, yellow-toothed mouth. The baker delivered bread by horse-and-cart. The van smelled warm and delicious when the back door was open. The milk-man, too, used horse transport, with large milk cans from which he would ladle out milk to our jug (always covered by a lace doily with little beads around the edge so that it was weighted down around the sides of the jug to keep flies off). I learnt early not to cry over spilt milk. Just the reverse, in fact, on the morning when, on rounding our corner, the horse took the cart too close to the telegraph pole outside my bedroom; all that milk wasted in the gutter.

Milk bottles were different then. They were bottles, for a start. They had thickened, round glass tops, and were sealed with small cardboard disks that were waxed on the underside to keep them dry, set into a groove and thoughtfully provided with a small tab to facilitate removal. At least I think the disks were waxed. Perhaps it was just the case that the cardboard did not become soggy from the milk because it was protected by oil from the thick layer of cream at the un-homogenised-milk surface. I suppose the bottles were rather uninspiring. There were no silhouettes of trim, fit women; no black Friesian decorations (nor purple ones either, for that matter); nor were the contents homogeneous, lite, A2, permeate-laden or -free. They were just glass; and one could see the milk and the cream. Of course, on the morning of the encounter with the electric light pole one could see the milk and cream more obviously. In the gutter.

I guess I was a bit preoccupied with gutters. They were very interesting gutters. They were made from bluestone blocks about nine inches long and seven inches wide (obviously because centimetres had not been invented in Australia then). A line of blocks formed the base of the drain, with a line either side on a slant of about 20 degrees against the roadway and 45 degrees against the footpath. The blocks were fairly close together but irregularities in their quarrying left gaps, which had filled with dirt. It was clean dirt because it was washed every time it rained and the gutters flowed. Some of the gaps hosted little moss gardens. Very quaint.

Naturally they looked bigger and more intricate to me then than they would now because I was smaller and closer to them. I suppose that's why I noticed them, and the gaps between the blocks. I keep thinking of the interstices between the sides of the blocks as gaps because that's what many of them eventually became. A piece of sharp wood; perseverance; and all manner of interesting nooks and crannies could be excavated. Just the right size for small flotillas of boats, whether real (tin) or stick look-(not much)-alikes. These mini-caverns and their navies were a bit like the U-boat pens of Rabaul, especially when roofs were built over the caverns. They created havoc when the armadas of one's mates drifted incautiously down-drain.

Mind you, the gutters outside my bedroom were usually dry. Their purpose in life, after all, was to get water away rather than keep it there (and I wasn't often allowed to play in them when it rained and they were at their best). One had to resort to alternative gutters. Sad as I am to admit the addiction, it was pubs that gave me my best early nautical lessons. It seems that a perpetual chore in pubs must be the washing-out of something. Maybe it was just that there was a lot of drinking in the Hibernian down at the corner of Graham Street and Ross Street, and hence a lot of washing. Whatever, the pub emptied the washings to the Ross Street gutter, providing a good two blocks of navigable waterway before the slops emptied into the depths outside the fish shop. The irregularities in the base layer of bluestone blocks produced some fearsome rapids. More fearsome, when I think back, were the blokes in the laneway around the back of the Hibernian. Actually I think I probably mean fearful. There would always be a worried-looking bloke, leaning, stationed at the edge of the laneway behind the pub and peering around the corner. He usually told us to 'bugger off' when we tried to talk to him. The illegal SP bookie further down the lane was just as rude.

On the roadways out from the gutters, the adjacent bitumen provided an ideal surface for Billy carts. Old pram wheels (with rubber around the small, spoked wheels) were fairly silent. But on more up-market concrete surfaces, if one had the right contacts, one could delight in the wonderful squeal of ball-bearing-race wheels. The exercise was a little more dangerous, of course, because roads finished with a concrete surface were usually made that way to cope with the busier traffic levels.

Great fun, Billy carts. 'The whip' was exciting, with somebody in the cart while another hauled it along rapidly, stopping suddenly, letting it go past, and then swinging it wildly in an arc. Sometimes parked cars were rather too close, with sad consequences for the box (and, sometimes, rider also). At first I had one of these 'saloon' models, with a fruit box to sit in and steering ropes. Ultimately, on growing up, I graduated to a 'racing model' with just a flat tray on the central beam, steered by one's hands on the front axle (one's body resting on one's side and a bent leg, so that a foot could be used for propulsion). A bit dangerous, because with that posture it was less easy to spot approaching cars; and sometimes one's fingers under the steering axle were rather too close to the road surface, especially when the really cool tiny ball-bearing races, that made the most piercing racket, dropped into the expansion joints between the slabs.

Ball-bearings like that were probably one of the first things I hoarded because they were hard to come by and 'they might be useful or valuable one day'. I think perhaps, also, I thought I might once-again build a billy cart. [When I eventually did construct one for my son it, sadly, was built along adult lines in that it weighed a ton, had 'sensible' large rubber wheels, was 'dependably sturdy', and quite unmanageable. Having no brakes (billy carts didn't when I was a kid), and our house at the time located at the top of a steep cul-de-sac, it would have been a death-trap for a youngster. It was good that, spurning it, my son had more sense than did the builder.]

But back to horses. There were beer deliveries on a tray cart (hauled by a pair of Clydesdales) to the pub (Clare Castle) down at the Ross Street and Graham Street corner. At the Graham Street kerb there was a cast-iron water trough (sadly no longer there) for them, the water level controlled by a float valve similar to those in the old

cast-iron cistern in the school dunny and at home. The hefty delivery bloke wore a thick, leather bib-apron and heavy leather gloves. Lift-up doors (again, no longer there) in the footpath against the pub wall opened to the cellar, and there were two iron-clad sturdy wooden rails sloping down into it. Beer came in wooden kegs that bulged slightly in the middle like wine kegs. The delivery man would drop a barrel from the cart onto a sandbag, move it across, upright, to the cellar rails by turning it on its rim, and set it on its side at the top of the rails. There was a sturdy rope attached to the top of each rail, and he would loop them over each side of the barrel to control the keg as it ran down the rails, feeding the rope through his gloves until the keg was near the bottom whence he would check the rope around the top side of the barrel thereby turning it skilfully onto its end again, ready to be moved across the cellar floor. I don't recall ever seeing an accident.

Our milko and his horse always ensured that we had fresh milk first thing in the morning. There was also fresh milk later in the day when free milk was delivered to us at school (in third-pint bottles, perhaps to prevent unscrupulous milkos pinching them for public sale).

But the best mornings came several years later. I was ten in 1952 when we moved from Alfred Street to our shop at 384 Graham Street<sup>8</sup>. Dad, looking to build a better future, had decided to take on a small mixed business that the owners at the time, the Sayers family, were selling. It became a seven-days-a-week job for him and my mother (and for that matter to a fair extent for me also).

It was exciting to live in a 'mixed business'—in reality, a just-about-everything shop; groceries, newspapers, magazines (comics!), post office, milk-bar and lollies. But also bread. Fresh bread. Every morning. Can you imagine having one room of your house set aside to disseminate the aroma of un-wrapped loaves of fresh bread? They say that when you are trying to sell a house you should brew coffee or bake bread in the oven when potential buyers come to do an inspection. Ours would have had estate agents in ecstasy. Every morning, about 150 warm, aromatic, freshly-baked loaves. Darkened high-top tins; golden slit-crust Vienna loaves; Vienna tins; corrugated 'pipe' loaves; and 5-inch x 5-inch sandwich loaves. Even the sandwich loaves were nice to be near.

Ahh! The glories of shop life! I'm still unsure whether the acne I suffered at adolescence was simply hormonal or the penance for the sugary indulgences available to a young teenager in a milk-bar sweet shop. The exquisite luxury of having one's bedroom at the end of the passage in which the chocolates were stored in summer. My favourites, the scorched almonds and chocolate-covered Turkish delight, never suffered the ignominy of reaching a use-by date. My experimental malted milks (two or three full-size scoops of ice cream; three tablespoons of malt) pre-dated 'thick shakes' by years. Little wonder that my nickname was 'pudding'. I have never lost my lolly-withdrawal symptoms, and I treat today's wimpy thick-shakes with the same derision that Crocodile Dundee treated the street-mugger's knife.

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<sup>8</sup> [see [http://search.slv.vic.gov.au/primo\\_library/libweb/action/dlDisplay.do?vid=MAIN&reset\\_config=true&docId=SLV\\_VOYAGER1680634](http://search.slv.vic.gov.au/primo_library/libweb/action/dlDisplay.do?vid=MAIN&reset_config=true&docId=SLV_VOYAGER1680634)]

I oozed smug contentment living in a shop. I delighted in the freshness, aroma and real-tea flavour produced by tea leaves packed loose in tinfoil (no overtones of infused blotter and tea dust); of the warm, sweet richness of the aromas emanating from the recently-baked and freshly-opened 5-lb tins of 'Swallow and Ariell' biscuits (and the luxury of first access to the fresh broken ones); of the combination of smells of spices, herbs, hessian, bulk sugar and cardboard in the store-cum-weighing-up bread room.

The sweets on offer for youngsters were not pre-packaged in hygienic cellophane packs but came in bulk in cardboard boxes, and were displayed behind glass, loose, to be counted out (two-, four- or eight-per-penny) to order into small white paper bags. There were liquorice 'straps' and sticks; square liquorice blocks; 'ripe raspberries' (raspberry-coloured and flavoured gums made in tiny moulds that were raspberry-patterned); small aniseed balls; large rainbow balls (about an inch [2.5cm] in diameter, and layered in multiple colours that appeared progressively as the ball dissolved); 'conversation' lollies (with their messages of love and such); mint leaves; small chocolate-covered liquorice bullets (eight per penny); chocolate-covered caramel cobbars; chocolate-covered honeycomb clinkers; chocolate frogs; and musk sticks. Larger items included dark-chocolate-covered McRobertson's vanilla nougat bars, McRobertson's 'OK' peanut-toffee bars and Hoadleys violet crumble honeycomb bars. Foot-long Jersey-toffee sticks came already wrapped and boxed.

Like sweets, biscuits were supplied loose in rectangular tins (about the size of a plastic bucket) to be weighed out to customers' likings. Sugar and salt came to the shop in bulk in Hessian bags. Slave labour (i.e. me) would weigh it out in one-, two- or four-pound lots into heavy-quality brown-paper bags, using large mechanical scales. My father showed me how to fold the bags to seal them so that the contents could not spill. We also weighed out flour and, at times, rice. Until its bottom rusted out I had a contemporary reminder in the back yard because the bin that held the bulk goodies was a repository for garden tools. I also had kept the scales but recently donated them to our local butcher where they hold pride of place above one of his refrigerated cabinets.

Ice cream—Sennits vanilla, strawberry or chocolate ('When it's Sennits then it's good')—came in 5-gallon cylindrical drums, was scooped out (always dip the scoop in clean water first so that the ice cream doesn't stick in it) individually, and was served on wafer cones (conical, of course; but there were cute little squat square ones in which one served flavoured ice blocks before the advent of icy-poles<sup>9</sup>). Ice creams were available as one-penny cones (for one- to four-year olds) or three-penny cones (for adults five-years and older). Up-market customers had the option of buying their ice cream pre-packed in cute little waxed-paper cups ('dixies', with their own tiny flat wooden spoon), or as slices wrapped in greaseproof paper and eaten between two thin rectangular wafers. Curiously, the creamy film that remained on the paper always tasted the best, if somewhat awkward to lick while holding the wafer at the same time.

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<sup>9</sup> What did kids do for craft projects before the invention of those flat sticks that were frozen in icy poles as handles?

Coca cola came in clear glass bottles with the logo glass-embossed around the side. The bottles had a greenish tinge and a crown-seal closure. Absent was today's hyped TV advertising (because TV wasn't invented in Australia until 1956 when the box began its infiltration of domesticity); instead, there were enamelled-tin signs that were nailed to the wall outside. 'Coca Cola—the Pause that Refreshes; 3d' (i.e. threepence; or 2½ cents in today-speak). Curiously, nobody covered the signs with graffiti? Perhaps this was because neither texta-colours nor pressure-pack spray cans had been invented at that stage.

We also stocked a range of Melbourne soft-drink brands at the time. Everything came in bottles; there were no cans of soft drinks, just as there were no cans of beer. We sold Marchants (the only brand that had a composition screw plug that wound into the threaded glass of the neck of the bottle—every other brand came with a crown-seal closure); Ecks (which were later taken over by Tarax); Boon Spa (Creamy Soda, Sarsaparilla and such); and, later, Cottee's ('Passiona'). We stocked small bottles of Schweppes mixers, but not the large, return-for-refill soda siphons that have become a collectors' item (I suppose, for that matter, that the other bottles are also collectable now). Dad topped up the shop refrigerator to chill the bottles for sale. Its solid metal doors (no glass) opened into the space behind the counter, and customers' requirements were supplied from there. All would be well until the temperature dropped too low (the same cabinet housed the frozen ice creams), which occasionally caused bottles to freeze and break, leaving broken glass and sticky residue inside—a bugger of a cleaning job, that didn't help dad's temper.

There was a deposit charged on soft-drink bottles, so that customers returned their empties when buying new ones. It was my job to gather the empties routinely from the back of the shop, take them out to the yard, and sort them into the stacks of wooden crates holding each brand (maintaining family tradition really—Grandpa Reed's uncle ran a 'marine store' [i.e. empty-bottle collection business] in Geelong). There was one advantage of the stack of crates of empties. They more or less formed a stairway up to the roof of the back-yard garage, which became quite useful in 1957 when Russia launched 'Sputnik', the first man-made satellite successfully placed into orbit. I was 15-years old at the time. On the first night it was due to pass over southern Australia I was up on the garage roof, flat on my back (bloody uncomfortable, let me tell you, on corrugated iron roofing). I saw it go across, but have to admit slight disappointment so far as spectacle was concerned—just like a very tiny star slowly moving across the night sky from the south. But, hey; I guess it was a rather major event?

Despite all the empties I wasn't a fan of fizzy drink; and I detested the craze for 'spiders'—cordial of choice, and a vanilla ice cream, in a glass, topped up with lemonade, and mixed together with a stainless-steel-rod plunger to which a penny-sized disc with four holes was attached.

None of our shop precinct was modern-day-supermarket compatible. There was no Muzak; no oppressive floral perfumes of cleaning-products; no proliferation of gladwrap around everything; no trolleys; and self-service was unnecessary because customers were served individually at the shop counter. Everybody brought their own string bags to carry things. It wasn't such a chore because they didn't have to take home a lot of the modern-day shopping paraphernalia (like air fresheners, tissues,

avocados, disposable gloves, fresh orange juice and quinoa) that hadn't been invented. Unlike the legions of introverted shoppers in today's Coles and Woolworths stores ours engaged in eye contact; and they spoke to each other while waiting their turn—bizarre, eh?

But you can't recover the trappings of nostalgia. Why is it that I can no longer find satisfaction in a cup of tea? For a brief moment when Liptons produced their yellow label leaf tea in sealed aluminium cans there was a re-burst of flavour; but the market men soon put an end to that. Why is it that plastic-wrapped, usable-(?)-for-several-days bread now has the texture of a laundry sponge? On the other hand it is a relief that we are no longer forced to endure Turban brand 'Coffee Essence', or Robur 'Essence of Coffee and Chicory'. These preceded instant coffee (thank heavens we now have the choice not to endure that either). They came in long, square-section glass bottles, and were a dark, intense, syrup of coffee and sugar. I'm not sure why a drawing of an Indian in a turban graced the label, or about the relevance of the camel and palm tree on the Turban-brand bottle.

Our range of groceries and household goods was reasonable. Sugar, salt, flour and biscuits, as I've mentioned; butter; Kellogs corn flakes and rice bubbles, Weet-bix and Weeties (with Willie the wheat grain carrying a box of Weeties on which a smaller Willie held a Weeties box, and so on *ad infinitum*); tomato sauce; baked beans; Tom Piper Beef Steak and Vegetables, and Camp Pie (a.k.a. 'Spam' elsewhere); Davis gelatine; junket tablets (were they Hansens? In a glass tube with cork stopper?); Robur and Bushells teas; condensed milk; and so on. Then products such as Nugget shoe polish; Rinso and Persil laundry powders; Velvet, Solvol and Palmolive soaps; Sand soap (for cleaning non-stainless knives) and steel wool (it always rusted after the first use); and methylated spirits and kerosene. We had a range of semi-medical items, like Laxettes, Bex Powders and tablets ('have a cup of tea, a Bex, and a good lie down'), Vincents APC (aspirin, phenacetin and caffeine, I believe), Bonningtons Irish Moss cough syrup ('with pectoral oxymel of carrageen'), and Vicks vaporub.

Despite the array of offerings there were some things that our shop was not allowed to stock and sell. Items such as Ipana toothpaste (with its eye-catching, red-and-yellow-striped tube that looked a bit reminiscent of the now-politically-incorrect Japanese imperial rising-sun flag), Lifebuoy soap (pink; and oddly smelly), and Aktavite (a powdered drink something like, but undoubtedly superior to, Milo or Ovaltine) were specialty comestibles available only from Chemist shops that catered to the elite. My Aunt May, who maintained a certain elegance, made sure that such up-market products were regularly present in her shopping bag.

Aunt May and Uncle Fred Caton lived at 95 Ross Street, their place backing onto the other side of Alfred Street from our place about half-a-dozen doors away across Union Street. Uncle Fred tended to be a bit serious and sit working on his book-keeping at his kitchen table. Actually his apparent seriousness might simply have been a reflection of the fact that he was fairly deaf. Aunt May, on the other hand, was very sociable. I didn't see much of their son my cousin Bill Caton because, being older, he was out and about socially. He frequented the YMCA, and played (Banjo?)

in a jazz group there. He had a fine collection of 78s<sup>10</sup> featuring all the contemporary jazz greats. My favourite was Graham Bell's 'Smokey Mokes'.

Aunty May's and Uncle Fred's house (now demolished and replaced by units), was something of a hub for the family when I was young. The main house was brick, but behind and beside it was a timber bungalow that served as the kitchen-living room for social gatherings. Aunty Sadie (dad's youngest sister), dad and other Caton siblings had lived there when young. Sadie informed me that 'Gramps' Caton had moved the kitchen on rollers from the back of the yard up alongside the main house. In its former place there was an old wagon with a canvas cover, high double gates preventing it from escape to the street. No longer mobile, its front seat nevertheless provided a base for imaginary adventures (and probably also, underneath, for hordes of red-backs and other biting critters). It eventually disappeared to make way for Uncle Fred's cars. The most up-market was a navy blue Dodge sedan that, instead of a boot, boasted a dicky seat. The hinged door that appeared to cover a boot pulled out from the top to provide an open-air bench seat. Very sporty.

Christmas Eve or Night was usually celebrated by a family gathering at 95 Ross Street. In some years the party would be on New Year's Eve, our mob moving out into the street to join everybody at midnight. The parties were musical affairs with a couple of ukuleles, spoons to tap out a rhythm, and a sing-along. There was a piano in the main part of the house (because Uncle Fred had trained for a time—formal lessons much to Aunty Sadie's disgust because she was probably the more promising prospect) but it was never called into service because the parties were never in there. Aunty Lou and Aunty Alma would always be cajoled into singing a duet of 'Lindy, sweet as the sugarcane'<sup>11</sup>, replete with gestures; and 'big Uncle Charlie' (young Charlie Watt's father), after a (drowned-out) speech, would give his rendition of 'Champagne Charlie'<sup>12</sup>. On occasional weekends there were also family gatherings at Tecoma (past Ferntree Gully) at Uncle Tom's (Jackson's) 'Cabin' there, the family travelling by suburban train via Melbourne to Fern Tree Gully, and then boarding 'Puffing Billy', the old steam train that stopped at Upwey and Tecoma on the way to Belgrave and beyond. The cabin was a couple of hundred yards behind Tecoma station, down at right angles to the track.

Once again, I think I've digressed somewhere? A while back I was talking about Graham Street State School ('number 2932') and First Grade. We switched seats and moved into Grade 2 on the other side of the joint space. Miss Groves was teacher this time. We had pencils for writing, and exercise books that had sets of four lines—two red and two blue, the central blue ones to mark the boundaries of the top and bottom of an a, e, i, o and u, and the round bits of b, d, etc. The red lines marked the bounds

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<sup>10</sup> Gramophone records that ran at 78 revs per minute—the precursor of the 45-rpm and 33-rpm discs.

<sup>11</sup> 'Lindy, Lindy, sweet as the sugar cane.

Lindy, Lindy, say you'll be mine.

When the moon is a-shining, and my heart is a-pining,  
meet me pretty Lindy by the watermelon vine'.

<sup>12</sup> 'Champagne Charlie is me name, and Champagne drinking is me game. I'll drink everything with  
fizz, fizz, fizz; it's the only drink there is, is, is.

All round town it is the same; by pop, pop, pop I rose to fame.  
I'm the idol of the barmaids, Champagne Charlie is me name.'

of the tails of g, j, z, and such, and of the tops of b, d, h, etc. We had to fill pages with endless runs of ‘aaaaaaa’, ‘lllllll’, ‘ggggggg’, and so on. The up and down strokes had to be parallel across the page.

I think it was in Grade 2 that we were provided with pastels to bring colour into our school-day world (and into our school-day clothes). I don’t remember much else except that during the year we were introduced to the recorder. Miss Doherty (presumably related to the virtuoso recorder player Diana Doherty of the 2020s?) came and gave lessons. I was rather taken with the recorder—perhaps because I was rather taken with Miss Doherty. I expect that this foray into the diatonic scale was the catalyst for my ultimately buying a ukulele when I was in my late 60s (there was no Thespian improvement). The recorder suffered (as did listening parents) endless beginnings of ‘Merrily We Roll Along,...’; of a German folk song of forgotten name; and eventually of ‘Sky Boat Song’, the inevitable mistakes rarely allowing the Bonny Prince to achieve his beloved Skye before one repeatedly returned to the beginning to speed his bonny boat like a bird on the wing.

Grade 3 was when we were under the watchful eye of Miss Gallagher and when, I think, we were first permitted to use pen and ink. More endless ‘aaaaaa’, ‘lllllll’, ‘ggggggg’, and such; but now our books were embellished with the occasional blue spatter when the nib caught on the page (ball-points had not been invented at that time). We had pens consisting of a wooden handle with a metal ferrule at the bottom into which a nib could be fitted. There were ‘rose’ nibs that the girls liked (they splayed down from the handle and then in to the point, the name due to an embossed rose); ‘plain’ nibs (because they were straight, plain, and boring—the style favoured by the Education Department I assume); and the one that I preferred (with no particular name that I recall) that looked like the central ‘petal’ of a Fleur de Lys. Ink was provided in small, white, china ink-wells, shaped like an inverted top-hat, that were set into a hole at the front right-hand corner of our (individual, wooden) desks.

Perhaps it was also in Grade 3 that we were first allowed to venture into the woodwork room? My marine ply, fret-saw-cut, yellow-painted, letter rack in the form of a duck on each side remains clear in my memory. Poor mum. She also had to approve of and display calendars stuck on wallpaper-covered cardboard; memo books stitched and bound; nice and colourful religious texts provided to us during religious-education class; and stitched-embroidery samplers resplendent in coloured wools.

In Grade 4 we felt we had arrived. Probably because of Mrs Corbett, who smoked, and drove a sleek, mid-brown Willys sedan. Mr Lyons in Grade 5 was scary—long, lean, red-haired, wiry, and with eyes like a hawk; he ruled supreme. Well, that is until the Headmaster Mr Price entered the room, whereupon all would cower (perhaps even Mr Lyons). ‘ROAR LIKE A BULL!!’ he would thunder out when looking for an answer to something. Mr Lyons was scary: Mr Price was REALLY scary. Thank heavens for Mr Chambers in Grade 6 who brought sanity back to schooling. The consequence was that I finished third-top in the end-of-year-exam ranking. Lynette Jones was Dux, and perhaps Beverley McDonald was second? Bloody girls beat me to it again. And they groan about glass ceilings?!

King George VI died, Queen Elizabeth II succeeding him on the throne, during 1952, my last year at Graham Street State School. I was in 6<sup>th</sup> Grade and 10-years old. We



heard the news from the ABC over the wireless system that broadcast weekly singing lessons and such (there had been a speaker up on the wall in each class room for a couple of years by then). The photo on stamps changed, and a new head appeared on pennies—and on shillings and pounds too. Queen Elizabeth was crowned in Westminster Abbey to popular acclaim (and to photographic rapture for readers of the *Australian Women's Weekly*). At home we listened on the wireless to the ceremony. She was already 'our Queen' because she had been on the way to visit Australia when she had had to return to England on the death of her father. When she eventually got here in 1954 I saw her twice—once in St Kilda Rd to take a blurred photo of her on my dad's old Kodak box camera, and once in Swanston Street to see her in white evening gown and tiara as she arrived for a formal evening (see *Women's Weekly*, of course).

Having finished Primary School, it was time to change to Secondary School. My cousin Mac Caton had attended Caulfield Grammar School at Ripponlea, and my parents enrolled me there too. Fortuitously, the bus line that ran along Graham Street continued on via South Melbourne and St Kilda out past the Ripponlea station, with a bus stop outside my school. However, the line ceased operation when I was in second year, and I had to change to train travel (into Flinders Street and then on the Sandringham line to Ripponlea).

We continued to live in the Graham Street shop for the duration of my time at Caulfield Grammar. Life in it must have been hellish for mum and dad with the shop open seven days a week. On weekdays dad opened at 7am when the morning papers arrived. The doors closed at about 8pm, whereupon it would be time to do the books (by hand—computers had yet to be invented), sort out orders, and in particular attend to the government's Post Office paperwork. It was usually about midnight by the time they got to bed. Weekends offered a little respite in the afternoon when they closed the doors between 1pm and 5pm; but Saturday nights were always chaotic with the arrival of the newspapers that carried the afternoon's sporting results. The thin, pink 'Sporting Globe', with essential racing and football results, was delivered at about 7 o'clock. With the shop crammed full-to-bursting with people, the bundles of papers would be passed overhead from the door to the counter, whence there would be pandemonium until everybody had their copy. My personal triumph was the night when, in hastening to serve people, I pulled the cash register drawer fully out from its runners, up-ending it and its contents onto the floor. Daddy was rather unforgiving.

Being an only child I had always been interested in books. The first ones I remember were ones that mum read to me at night in Alfred Street—Norman Lindsay's 'The Magic Pudding', with its wonderful drawings of Albert, Sam Sawnoff the penguin, Barnacle Bill the sailor, and dapper young koala Bunyip Bluegum (an antipodean incarnation of David Suchet's Hercule Poirot<sup>13</sup>); 'Hookum's Gang', by Cedric and Sylvia Weigall-Chase, a 1940 tale of a young cripple who befriended and hid Hookum the elephant who had escaped from Taronga Zoo; 'In the Land of the Talking Trees', based on the curious adventure of Dusty the digger suffering from malarial fever and isolated from his WW2 unit in Papua New Guinea; 'The Witch in

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<sup>13</sup> Or perhaps vice versa? Belgium's roly-poly Poirot and our own well-groomed, similarly be-spatted, rotund koala both came into being just before 1920.

the Clocktower'; 'Andy Tinpockets'; and of course 'Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories', Great Grandma Kerr's Christmas present to me in 1948 to introduce me to some Bible stories, and to teach me manners and good behaviour. How could I ever forget Uncle Arthur's cautionary tale about Robert who always took the biggest and best of everything for himself, but who found that the biggest pear—to which he'd helped himself—was rotten inside?

But I think my reading became doomed forever once we'd moved to the shop. Each week two batches of comics arrived—a batch of British ones on Tuesday and of American ones on Thursday. I could gather up one of everything and repair to the outside lavatory<sup>14</sup> in peace. I still delight in my memories of many of the comics. The British ones centred on film, radio and sport: 'Film Fun' (although British it featured cartoon strips of many of the popular American movie stars of the time such as Laurel and Hardy); 'Radio Fun' (featuring cartoon strips of popular radio stars such as Arthur Askey, George Formby and Norman Wisdom); 'Champion', a weekly paper of boys stories; 'Knockout', featuring comic strips with characters such as Billy Bunter, and adventure stories for boys; 'Beano' and 'Dandy', with characters such as Denis the Menace and Desperate Dan; and 'Tiger', which starred soccer whizz Roy of the Rovers.

American comics were dominated by Disney cartoons such as Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse and their relatives/derivatives (Huey, Dewey and Louie; Daisy Duck; Uncle Scrooge; Minnie Mouse; and Goofy). There was also a range of Marvel comic characters (Captain Marvel; Captain Marvel Junior; and Mary Marvel), of the ever popular 'Phantom' and 'Mandrake the Magician', and of others such as 'Felix the Cat', 'Popeye', 'The Katzenjammer Kids' and 'Straight Arrow'. I was quite taken with Straight Arrow. An orphaned Comanche warrior, he rode an impressive horse but more significantly was a great archer. Among other things (how to build a tepee) in a giveaway inside one of his comics was an instruction booklet on how to make a bow from a 6-foot length by 1½-inch square length of willow. Sadly, however, my pre-mentioned primary-school carpentry skills (viz. one yellow plywood duck letter-rack) were no match for the job, and I had to return to bow-making using the Council's annual prunings from the plane tree that graced nana's nature strip. I found a great source of arrows by splitting down lengths of timber from the back fence of the market gardener's yard across nana's back laneway—that is until on one occasion he glared down at me from the top of the fence and suggested I 'bugger off' and 'leave the bloody fence alone'. I did (all a-quiver with the arrow bits I'd already gleaned).

When I was a teenager a couple of more interesting comic/magazines appeared. The cover of one, 'The Silver Jacket', had a gleaming silver border surrounding a full colour cover photo. It was an Australian publication of action stories for boys, the first few serialising a 'Biggles' story. It was a breath of fresh air when compared with the American and British offerings. Regrettably, although I had supported it earnestly by saving every issue, it ceased production.

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<sup>14</sup> like the loo in Alfred Street, rather than having a modern liftable oval lid it had a bench seat that was convenient for placing a pile of reading material.

But the 'comic' that appealed most was 'The Experimenter', another Australian offering from, I think, the publisher of 'The Silver Jacket'. It gave precise and practical advice on how to cause carnage. I remember, for example, that it presented the formula and manufacturing process for that iodide paste (I think that's what it was) that is spreadable when moist but that explodes on touch when dry. Sadly 'The Experimenter' faded just as quickly as the Jacket.

And the outcome of this access to such a proliferation of comics each week? I became a speed reader—but of images rather than words. After six years of this conditioning at the shop I became bored with non-illustrated literature, such that text had to capture my full attention or my mind would start to meander. The consequence? I was hopeless at meeting reading-list requirements at school and university. Most of my learning was from lecturers, by discussion and by questioning. I think a further subliminal consequence might have been my preference for the microscopic study of plant rather than animal tissues. Plants have such nicely-defined borders to their cells just like the drawings of cartoon characters, whereas animal cells seem, well, amoeboid and uncontained. My hard-edged preference might also explain my disenchantment with a fair deal of abstract art.

Comics were fine; but as adolescence progressed, the shop also offered scope for a teenager's more adventurous reading. 'Pix' and 'Australian Post' proffered titillating girlie shots. 'Man' magazine centre-folded the more risqué (but little-revealing) 'soft porn' of the times. In contrast, Melbourne's 'Truth' newspaper was more sordidly direct, leaving mid-pubescent lads gaping open-mouthed at the lurid court-reporter tales of dastardly carnal deeds.

When we moved to the shop, John Stanley, who lived across the road from us, became one of my close friends. His father Ron Stanley was a mechanic, and had a well-fitted-out workshop in his back yard. There were lathes, grindstones, oxyacetylene cylinders, and all manner of associated bits and pieces with which he serviced and sharpened the blades of old push-mowers. He also sharpened knives and scissors. It was fascinating to be in there surrounded by the din watching sparks fly everywhere from the grinding wheels, and smelling hot metal vapours. Clearly this all took place pre-Victa.

Life-style for kids was much more relaxed, in that there wasn't a paedophile hiding around every corner. While still just ten I had been allowed to travel alone into town by train to go to the several hour-show picture theatres that presented an endless loop of news reels and cartoons. I could also wander around the department stores (having listened to Uncle Arthur I was never a shop-lifter; but I know that some others from school had 'hot fingers'). The trip to town was on the red-rattler dog-boxes—old-style suburban electric trains that were almost exclusive to the Melbourne– Port Melbourne and the Melbourne– St Kilda lines. They had no central or side corridor in the carriages but just a series of compartments, each with a bench seats on either side across the width of the carriage. Each compartment had an outward-swinging door on either side of the train.

As teenagers, John Stanley and I were regular travellers to the city by train of a Saturday afternoon to attend the YMCA for a bit of Christianity, some gymnasium sessions (I was still moderately slim at that stage) and then a swim. It was a nude-

bathing pool because we were all boys together. That might not quite meet today's sensitivities? But apart from mutual comparisons of attributes I don't recall any questionable practices such as an onrush of homosexuality or paedophilia (of course I was a fairly naïve youngster, so probably wouldn't have noticed in any case; or perhaps I was too ugly to attract advances?). The 'Y' was across the road from the Glaciarium ice-skating rink, which we visited on a couple of occasions to try skating (Torville and Dean we weren't).

But life wasn't all play. I got my first job (well, a paid one as distinct from the slave labour I did in our shop in Graham Street, and the occasional profit from collecting and returning empty soft-drink bottles at the football for the deposit refund) when I was about eleven or twelve as an after-school paper boy<sup>15</sup>. I was collected at the front of the shop and trucked with other lads to Fisherman's Bend (Port Melbourne) where I sold papers to workers as they clocked out around 4 pm at DAP—the Department of Aircraft Production. Coincidentally, my mum had worked there at the start of the War when the factory was involved in the manufacture of Beaufort bombers. Later I sold papers at other Fishermen's Bend factories—the CAC (Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation); the Aeronautical Laboratories; and General Motors Holden. The Herald—the Melbourne evening newspaper—cost three-pence (2½ cents). When sales were finished we were collected and trucked back to the Graham Newsagency in Bay Street (run by the nice Mr Bottomley and the grumpy Mr Curtin; they were also the source of papers for mum's and dad's shop).

I can't remember the details now—perhaps I had an argument with Mr Curtin—but I left their employ and joined up with the other newsagent further along Bay Street (I forget their name now; but they were along Bay Street before Crockford Street broke off from it and went along to the now-demolished Hoyts picture theatre<sup>16</sup>). They gave me a job selling papers on the Bay and Liardet streets corner. 'Billiard Hall', the pitch was called. Perhaps there had been a billiards den there once; or it might still have been upstairs. I was too busy to look, because I had to try to canvass passers-by and people alighting at the bus stop across the street.

I made the mistake one day of getting onto one of the buses<sup>17</sup> and trying for sales on board. Quite innovative; but the bus went along Bay Street into the Bottomley/Curtin

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<sup>15</sup> When I came home with my first pay, I felt a bit like Bilbo and his 'precious'. This disappointed my father badly. He had assumed that I'd have immediately handed my pay packet to my mother. He took me out into the yard to lecture me about it, pointing out that he and his siblings had always done that in recognition of the hardship his mother and father faced in bringing up a family. It brought home the difference between his young life during the depression and mine in favoured circumstances in a shop.

<sup>16</sup> The theatre's advertising jingle (thanks to cousin Heather Wale's recollection) was: 'Oh we can't show all the pictures so we only show the best; the others get the rest (you can put it to the test). So, ring your girlfriend right away, when she hears the news she'll shout 'Hooray!; let's hurry along to our Hoyts suburban theatre'. No art deco building exists there now; the theatre has been demolished for construction of a boring 7 Eleven petrol station. Rather sad.

<sup>17</sup> Wonderful old 'MMTB' (Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board) green things with a hot-diesel smell. As one stepped aboard and approached the driver one had to avoid the large, noisy, silver dome over the gear box or whatever that graced the floor. Some were double-deckers, complete with pole to grab to haul oneself aboard the rear platform.

precinct, where my presence on their turf caused something of a furore. The outcome was that Bottomley/Curtin forgave me, re-employed me, and offered me a post selling papers at the London Hotel on the waterfront along the street from the Port Melbourne railway station. The young bloke who usually covered it had had to go away or have an operation or something, and would not be back for six months. I covered the front and lounge bars of the hotel; Gadsen's tin manufacturing factory<sup>18</sup> across the street; and the milk bar café half-way to the station. Everything was going fine until the brewery strike. Those who could stomach wine turned to tuppenny dark (port). The others probably suicided or took to self-flagellation. That fortnight was a series of seriously black days (and low sales).

The one salvation was the woman in the milk-bar café. When I introduced myself she told me she never gave her paper boy tips. However, at Christmas she would give them ten shillings (\$1). I felt rather sorry that the young bloke I was replacing would not be back until well into the New Year. But as the days went along I began to look forward to that ten shillings. Perhaps it was because the shop window displayed a (dusty, tired, aged, but immensely impressive) collection of items of fishing gear. Skeins of solid twine; solid (6- and 8-ounce) pyramid sinkers, boxes of fearsome (about size 8/0) tinned limerick hooks—everything an eager but dumb novice angler would need. And so it was Christmas. The ten shillings never left the shop; but I did, replete with the wherewithal to pillage and plunder the local ocean (I suppose unbeknown to me it was the day that my life's work was born—my career for 42 years became that of a fisheries biologist, from 1962 until my retirement in 2004).

My father was unconvinced. More so after I had cajoled him into taking me early one morning on my first fishing foray. We were on his old wide-mudguard plodder, me on the cross bar. Both of us well-served with white- (anchovy) and blue- (pilchard) bait from Bob Knell<sup>19</sup> two doors along in Albert Street, we headed to, and along, Williamstown Road to the Yarra River. We turned off just before the Punt<sup>20</sup> (the car

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<sup>18</sup> It was fascinating. In the absence of such a thing as OH&S I was free to wander along the Gadsen conveyor line watching how 4-gallon kerosene tins were cut, folded, turned up for the base to be soldered in place, turned upside down again for the top to be soldered on, moved along for the handle to be soldered on, and finally treated with a screw-thread filling-hole and cap.

<sup>19</sup> Bob Knell lived two doors from us along Albert Street. He was a commercial bait fisher who worked Station and Princes piers for the surface schools of anchovies and pilchards that frequented the area. I recall often walking the length of Station Pier and looking at the continual glitter of anchovies that extended from the Customs Gate to the outer end of the pier. Bob used a circular metal hoop slung with a cone of fine-mesh net. It was hung about 5 feet below the surface from a pole cantilevered out from the pier, and Bob would chew up boiled potato, spitting it to the centre of the net. When he was satisfied that enough bait-fish had followed the mash down he would lift the pole, bring the hoop vertically against the pier, and haul up the bunt, emptying the fish into a fish box. A good haul would fill the box, but a half to a quarter was normal. He would drain the fish then salt them with rock salt. At home he would drain them again then re-salt and chill them in an ice chest. In a domestic refrigerator they would last indefinitely (as the 1972 whitebait currently (ie 2022) in my refrigerator will attest).

<sup>20</sup> Apart from the green and yellow Sydney ones that roam free (well, with a ticket) around the Harbour, the first ferry that I remember was the steam 'chain' ferry ('The Punt') that plied across the Yarra between Newport on the Williamstown side and Williamstown Road at Garden City (the 1940s up-market name for the resettled Fisherman's Bend, Port Melbourne). Now, were it still in existence, it would be in the shadow of the Westgate Bridge. Wonderful old funnel at the side, and all manner of clunks and clangs, its steam engine pulled it along the chain on either side that crossed the river.

ferry that dragged itself on chains across to the Williamstown side of the Yarra), and walked the bike out what seemed to be a zig-zag of causeways, eventually settling for a place that looked no different to anywhere else along there. I think that in fact we were fishing in an enclosed pondage. I doubt that there ever were (and never will be—it has become land fill beneath the West Gate Bridge) fish within it. ‘So endeth the First Lesson...’

When I had to give up the hotel stand because the previous boy returned to work, I graduated to morning deliveries. By then I had a red, second-hand, fixed-wheel bike (my father obviously having no intention of any further ‘double dinking’ to get me around). The job involved house deliveries of Melbourne’s two morning papers—The Sun (a tabloid) and The Age (a broadsheet)—in the Garden City area, before school on weekdays and also on Saturday morning. There were no such things as a basket or panniers for carrying the papers. I had to use an empty sugar bag that had been re-closed by sewing across the top, and then slit across the middle on one side. This allowed half of the bag to hang down on each side of the cross bar so that the papers could be slotted in on each side. The front edge of the bag was hitched up to the handle-bar stem so that it wouldn’t slide back to the seat all the time and interfere with peddling. It was quite frustrating for the lady who lived at end of my round because I always seemed to get the count wrong. Compounding this was the fact that she was a big customer at our shop. Eventually she (and dad) persuaded me to begin the round at her place so that she would routinely receive her copy of the Age.

The shop at 384 Graham Street that had made a valuable contribution to our financial circumstances had contributed on a more personal scale (literally) to my avoirdupois, heralding a change from scrawn to fat Albert. The problem of my (once again) being the youngest was compounded by the onset of chubbiness. And, of course, the embellishment of that with pimples. Thank God, Bill Cosby and his ‘Fat Albert’ were yet to arrive on television, and so I was spared that association. For that matter, television itself was only just arriving (for the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne; but we didn’t have a set).

My initial practical experiences with fishing had convinced me that it was a pointless enterprise. On making this observation one day to a couple of friends who had suggested a fishing visit to the piers, and then rather stupidly showing them my once-prized gear (their laughter still palls), I was dragged by them to Earls Hardware Store in Bay Street and prompted to buy a 50-yard spool of 15-lb-breaking-strain Fisherman Brand Perlon, some fine-gauge 1/0 hooks and some 1-oz sinkers. They, of course, had fishing rods. My challenge was to become operative in the absence of such ephemera. I rose (admirably) to it. Using one of my (butcher) uncle’s meat skewers and a couple of turns of sturdy wire, I positioned the spool near the end of the skewer, held there by wire on each side. Sinker tied on, hook baited (thanks again to Bob Knell), and thumb against the side of the spool, I had a dubiously effective, revolving-spool ‘reel’. By rotating myself slowly, and then faster, I was able to get the sinker orbiting my person whence, at hopefully the correct moment, I was able to release the spool and watch the sinker and bait soar (?) out into the sea. I admit it took some rather scary (for bystanders), incorrectly-timed releases before I could be sure the sinker would head seawards. But eventually, although still looking a right Charlie, I became fairly competent—at least in so far as getting bait into water; removing fish from water still eluded me.

Finding that my style of fishing was best practised in private, and having quite a deal of ‘Robbery Under Arms’ to churn through for Intermediate Certificate English, I took book and gear one Saturday afternoon to the Customs Gate at Princes Pier<sup>21</sup>. I’m not sure now what Captain Starlight was up to at the time, but his rascally deeds were interrupted by turmoil at the seaward end of my line. I knew this because of the alerting device that I’d made based on watching other pier fishers. A piece of umbrella wire stuck upright in the pier timbers, a cork threaded onto it at the top, a bell above the cork (those cute little brass orbs that little kids had on their slippers), the fishing line threaded through a slit in the cork, and—Voila!

It was a bream<sup>22</sup>. They shouldn’t be there where I was fishing. They are difficult to catch. Most of them are undersize anyway. But I had a specimen longer than a foot and in fine nick. And within ten minutes I’d also caught a 13-inch flathead. It really is amazing what one can do with a wooden skewer and a couple of bits of wire.

There was no stopping me then. I became a regular at the piers. My fishing effort expanded dramatically with the purchase of further spools of Fisherman Perlon and the discovery that winding it around the narrow waist of a (glass) Coca Cola bottle overcame the occasional mess-ups with the spool-on-skewer technique. The bottle functioned like the spool of a thread-line (‘egg-beater’) reel, and winding it back on the bottle reversed the line twist so that there were none of the tangles common to side-cast gear. If a fish had sufficient strength to drag line off the bottle and roll it around, the bottle would not break because the pier surface was wooden. The raised beam around the pier edge prevented bottles being dragged off and into the bay.

Eventually I would arrive at the end of either Station<sup>23</sup> or Princes piers early of a Saturday or Sunday morning, and set half-a-dozen lines out around the corner of it, all with umbrella-wire bell-ringers. A morning haul of three or four flathead was common.

My visits to the piers had a further benefit. To supplement my earnings from selling and delivering newspapers I was able to get a job selling streamers when overseas passenger liners were departing. The café milk-bar just outside the Customs gate at Station Pier hired youngsters for the streamer trade. We sold them at 6-pence (5 cents) each, keeping a penny of that as our wage.

The best sales were made on evenings when the boats were sailing to the UK. These were the Strath-line boats [*Strathmore*, *Stratheden*, *Strathnaider*], and the P&O fleet of *Orontes*, *Orion*, *Orcades* and *Orsova*. The departures were quite moving

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<sup>21</sup> The Customs Gate building still stands; but the spiked iron barriers that graced either side to prevent unsupervised entry to, or exit from, the pier are gone. While the pier deck has been demolished and removed, Google Earth shows that its pylon remnants extending out seawards underwater. No doubt flathead, snapper and the occasional bream delight in the artificial reef that they represent.

<sup>22</sup> I’m not sure what my mother did with the bream because I doubt that she’d ever been close to one before. But with flathead she was well-skilled from her days fishing in the Derwent in Tasmania.

<sup>23</sup> See photo at:

[http://search.slv.vic.gov.au/primo\\_library/libweb/action/dlDisplay.do?vid=MAIN&reset\\_config=true&docId=SLV\\_VOYAGER1671772](http://search.slv.vic.gov.au/primo_library/libweb/action/dlDisplay.do?vid=MAIN&reset_config=true&docId=SLV_VOYAGER1671772)

(emotionally; and of course literally). People would usually buy six to twelve streamers, passengers taking some aboard, and shore friends and family keeping some ashore. When both lots were settled, they would throw their streamers to each other, holding them and letting out more ribbon as the tugs gradually moved the ship away from the pier, until the last contact was torn. Best sales were to those who thought streamers should be thrown by unwinding a strip from the outside of the roll and then hurling the roll. That simply succeeded in breaking the roll off so that it usually fell into the water between the ship and pier. Doyens of the practice (those from families wealthy enough to have regular international travellers in their midst) knew that one pulled out and held the strip from the inside of the roll such that, when thrown, the paper streamer would coil out unbroken. We were outwardly sympathetic servicing the second round of sales to the uninitiated.

I had a more regular but less lucrative job selling streamers to departures of the *Taroona* for Tasmania. It was the *Taroona* and its sister ship (until it was decommissioned) the *Nairana* that had carried mum and the Reeds back and forth to Tasmania for Bert Reed's Royal Australian Navy signals-teaching role postings there after the years of the First World War.

While haunting the piers I soon became envious of the rods and reels of the old hands. One couple frequently fishing there, Mr and Mrs Bellam (from Swallow Street, I think), were customers at the shop. Taking pity on my primitive assemblage of Coca-Cola bottles, they sold me second-hand my first rod and reel. The reel was an 'Offshore' revolving-spool bait-caster, and the rod a short (6-foot?), two-piece, Rangoon cane rod that Mr Bellam had made. It took me some time to master control of a revolving spool, but the eventual success was fundamental to my later enjoyment of fishing and casting. Before long I achieved the maximum distance of which the rod was capable, so set my mind to obtaining a longer and stronger rod. Ultimately I had saved enough to buy a Jarvis Walker 'Kilcunda'<sup>24</sup> two-piece split-cane surf rod at the Melbourne Sports Depot in Elizabeth Street in the city, and for Christmas that year my parents gave me a Surfmaster surf reel to accompany it. So all I needed then was a surf beach. And the means to get to it.

The Melbourne Sports Depot came to the rescue. The young bloke (Kenny Aylett) who had sold me the rod said there was a local surf-fishing club that headed off to surf beaches every fortnight, those without transport travelling in the back of an old PMG<sup>25</sup> truck. He provided contact details so that before long I became a new member of the Victorian Surf Anglers Club. It held meetings each month in Clifton Hill in the hall owned by the Abbotsford Angling Club. From Port Melbourne there was a short train trip to Flinders Street and then a similarly short one from the Princes Bridge platforms out to Clifton Hill<sup>26</sup>. I was a bit of a wall-flower at first, but soon I was off every second weekend in the PMG truck to fish the beaches.

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<sup>24</sup> A Victorian surf beach between San Remo and Wonthaggi.

<sup>25</sup> Post Master General; the Commonwealth Government's combined precursor to Australia Post and Telstra.

<sup>26</sup> These platforms were familiar to me because it was the departure point for trains out to Preston where nana's friend and medium Mrs Gruer ran her delicatessen. When I went there as a youngster



The club's regular trips were to the fairly accessible surf beaches—Kilcunda, Woolamai on Philip Island, and the Rye back beach, where small Australian salmon were reasonably abundant. Most of us were regulars. Bill's wife always went on the trips, having the luxury of travel in the GUN's front-passenger's seat. Old John Yemen was fascinating. He clearly didn't trust banks because he always had a huge roll of notes in his pockets. On long weekends and at Easter there were more distant trips—to Manns Beach, near Port Albert, at the western end of the Ninety-mile Beach; and to Seaspray in the middle of it. There was enough room in Bill's truck for all of us, our gear, and Bill's large marquee. Manns Beach involved a boat trip out to the island at the Port Albert entrance where we camped, tying the marquee guy ropes to sandbags buried deep in the sand. You get the impression that it could be windy? Australian salmon could be taken from the beach, and around in the estuary there were large flathead. Seaspray beach provided salmon but occasionally there were also gummy shark. Camping was more civil because there was a camping park 'with amenities' behind the dunes.

One of the frustrations of beach fishing with long rods and revolving-spool reels was their need for sizeable sinkers to overcome the spool's inertia and to hold bottom when heavy swell and wind were dragging lines all over the place. The star sinkers that were effective were fairly expensive. An alternative to the purchase of them was to manufacture them oneself. My production line involved use of a plaster-of-Paris mould made from a respectable shop-bought specimen, an old aluminium saucepan, some bent wire for a loop at the top, and a pile of scrounged lead. I think OH&S would be hesitant about condoning use of the kitchen gas stove for a foundry? Even mum was not impressed in those days. By now any signs of lead have probably grown out of my hair. But I often wonder about the effect it had on my state of mind. Alternatively, that might just have been a reflection of the stupidity of adolescence<sup>27</sup>?

Fishing provided a diversion from the shop on a weekend, but my weekdays had to focus on school and homework. It was convenient that I enjoyed algebra and geometry, especially the solution of equations and coordinate geometry problems. I passed my Leaving Certificate in all subjects except Chemistry: English, Maths I, Maths II, Physics and German (fortuitously there was no compulsory Physical Education unit for the certificate). Results were middle-of-the-road. From memory the same subjects, but without German, were involved for the Matriculation Certificate.

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with nana she always stopped at the café at the top of the ramp to buy delicious Cornish pasties (replete with plaited pastry along the top) for our lunch.

<sup>27</sup> I think the latter is the probable explanation, because well before my entrée to sinker manufacture I was a bit of a dill—especially in the kitchen. Around one cracker night, I decided to have fun with some bungers, lighting them on the gas stove and chucking them out through the kitchen window. The Ancient Mariner, 'stoppeth(ed) one in three' according to Samuel Coleridge Taylor. In the case of my crackers it was the lacy kitchen curtains. They not only stoppethed, but also ignited. Mum was fortunate, in the process of dragging them down into the sink because: (a) she was there to do it; (b) they came down promptly without setting fire to the timber ceiling; (c) they didn't set fire to her; (d) they went out in the sink; and (e) dad didn't get to find out. Regrettably, on a different 'cracker' occasion, he did find out when I put one in the next-door neighbour's letterbox (perhaps not noticing said neighbour watching me). See? A bit of a dill even then, well before any impact of molten lead fumes.

The difference was that the exams were held externally (at the Melbourne Exhibition Building. During my very first external exam—English—under the dome of the building, the fire alarm sounded. There was no smoke or evacuation, but at one stage firemen trooped through the rows of desks. Rather unsettling, but I passed even so. The same outcome applied for pure and applied maths and physics, but not for chemistry.

In 1958, after seven years in the Port Melbourne shop, Ted and Lil sold it and moved to a small self-service grocery store in Malvern Road in Tooronga, three shops around the corner from Parslow Street where my grandmother lived. And so my twelve years growing up in Port Melbourne came to an end. The new shop offered them the chance to relax a little because it was closed from midday on Saturday until Monday morning. At first we lived with my grandmother in Parslow St; but when the owner of the Malvern Road shop and building moved out, we took over the premises at the rear.

Ted and Lil remained in the self-service Foodland grocery shop in Tooronga until 1974, when Ted felt the time had come to retire from the retail game. They were tired of the long hours, but also faced declining custom because of the opening half-a-mile away on Toorak Road of a new shopping mall that incorporated a large supermarket. After selling the shop, moving back around the corner to Parslow Street with my grandmother, and Ted biding time with some interim part-time work, they booked a cabin for a world-cruise holiday. It had been Ted's dream once I had become financially independent and hence no longer a financial burden to them. They left Melbourne on the cruise ship 'Australis' for Sydney, catching up there with some old friends from their war years. Next came Auckland, their first foreign port, where they enjoyed local sightseeing before setting out for Fiji. But Ted, aged 61, suffered a fatal heart attack one morning in the shower two days before reaching Suva. Curiously, since his Navy days he had always expressed the desire to be buried at sea. And so his wish was granted. My mum Lil, also 60 when Ted died, lived until a burst aortic aneurism saw her die peacefully in 2005 aged 91.