

MEMORIES OF AN APSLEY KID Part three by Bob Dungey

Having heard from a few Apsley ites since my first two bits of literature it has sharpened up my focus on a few details. For instance it helped me to recall that the fish and chip shop was taken over by Bob and Elsie Molloy for a period and the drapery store (in which I named Duncan McIntosh) was run by Jim Brooksby and his wife post their tenure in the pub. I'm not quite sure whether they were before or after Duncan but I'm sure someone will put me straight.

As you grow older the years between groups becomes less relevant, what I mean by that is , having gone over some of my previous screed I realise there are some names missing that were part of the fabric back then. Kevin and Sharna Merrett, Rob and Wilma Carberry, Toady Munn, Ian and Trevor Grigg and Ronny Sherriff to name just a few. The thing is that any kids a couple of years younger (the little kids) or older (the big kids) than you at that time are almost a different generation and seemed to move in different circles. With time that gap diminishes and even disappears. Oh!...and I made a blue with another name previously, calling Frosty MacKenzie.....Snowy. I was close. Also I think I referred to Dave Hannaford as Ian. Sorry.

My first ever experience with television was in Max Taylors garage. He put up a huge antenna tower and I recall being there on a Sunday morningand in amongst the 'snow' on the black and white TV we could catch a glimpse of a men's basketball game flitting on and off the screen as the highly suspect reception wavered. It was the first time I had seen basketball too. It must have been around 1958 or 59. I have no idea where that broadcast would have been coming from but there was certainly no Ballarat or Mount Gambier TV then.

Back then shoes had to be worn until they were absolutely shot.....especially kids shoes or school boots, so they used to get 'reborn' a couple of times at the hands of 'Wardy'. Wardy had a bit of a cottage up on the hill just west of the golf club and he was the resident shoe repairer. Mum or dad would take our shoes up to him for a half sole and a reheel. They would come back shining and looking like new with another six months or so life in them.

Another regular in our lives was a little bloke by the name of Billy Court. Every few months Billy would ride into town on his pushbike and hunt up a bit of gardening or maintenance work. He was always as neat as a pin, he wore dark green drills , good work boots and always looked like he shaved an hour ago, he took well groomed and 'tidy' to a whole new level with his bike clips keeping his cuffs tight around his ankles. Dad and others always found enough toil to keep Billy around the place for a week or two. He often stayed in a sleep out next to our garage and he must have cut a deal with dad for his keep and a few quid for the work he did. He was a very polite and well spoken gentleman. When there was no more work he would throw the leg over the old Malvern Star and ride on to the next town.

Speaking of well spoken gentlemen, there was another fellow by the name of Reeves Stevens. Reeves was a very cultured fellow, polite to the enth degree and always well dressed, usually in a sports coat and Fletcher Jones pants....and always with a collar and tie. He had the quirky habit whilst speaking of randomly throwing the word 'theres' into a paragraph any old time....for example..... 'It's a very nice day here...theres' or 'I spoke to that fellow ummm theres...in Elders.'

Anyway, one night at our house Reeves and the old man fixed up a few longnecks and probably a couple of Ports to boot. It came time for Reeves to leave and he assured dad that he could find his own way out. Our veranda had probably had a three foot drop either side of the steps and in the darkness Reeves just walked off into the abyss, completely missing the steps. Dad heard a bit of a commotion and some groans so he rushed out and called 'Reeves....are you alright?' Reeves replied, 'Yes, I'm alright theres, I just went arse over head here....theres'. I reckon my old man told that story a thousand times.

One spring day myself and 2 or 3 cronies (I suspect Keith Grigg and Mick Carroll might have been there) decided to undertake a major scrub hike. The back gate at our place led right onto a sandy track that took off into the scrub and we had decided some serious exploration was required. I would have been about 10 at the time. We equipped ourselves with the standard vegemite sandwiches and a bottle of Kia Ora 50/50 cordial and away we went.

We ambled on through the scrub for quite away, exchanging expert opinions on just about everything. We hiked all the way along the back of the golf course and onwards, then it occurred to us that our sandwiches and drinks were gone; we were far from home and hungry and thirsty. In the distance we spotted a farmhouse and headed for it. It was Cormack's farm and Mr. Cormack was a bit dumbfounded when this bunch of kids came wandering out of the scrub. He quizzed us about what time we had started and where we had left from and estimated that we were making about a mile an hour. He said at that rate we would get home at about 10pm. He was kind enough to give us biscuits and drinks and drove us far enough that we would get home before dark, which we did.....pretty much mission accomplished for us boys.

My old man wasn't a fisherman in the true sense of the word, but he was, let's say, a fishing opportunist. The following are a couple of examples.

It had been pretty wet and dad got a whisper that a narrow channel that flowed through to a wetland or waterhole on Koijak was well and truly running. So with permission (I assume) from the Rainsfords, dad and I set off with this net to try our luck. The net was made of netting and was maybe 3 foot across the front...a foot high and 18 inches deep, it was generally used to catch bait yabbies by throwing it and retrieving it with a rope. I hope you've got the picture.

Anyway we found this channel and put the net into the flow. It was a yabbi's dream ... unbelievable. Every few minutes we'd pull the net out and it would have a heap of yabbies in it that were getting washed down with the flow. We got a hell of a feed. It was a day to remember.

On another occasion word went around about a shallow swamp out the Benayeo road, for some reason Porters place was mentioned, but I am reliably informed there is no regular swamp on their place. Dad and I went out there and there were all these big redfin swimming around in the shin deep water, many with their backs and fins sticking out of the water. There were quite a few blokes there catching them with a crazy variety of methods. There were pitch forks, landing nets, spikey sticks, bare hands.... And one bloke was even shooting them with a pea rifle. We got about half a dozen. It seems they must have become stranded when the water receded. I would very much like to hear from anyone else that recalls this event. I never heard of it before or since.

Like a lot of Apsley kids I attended the Presbyterian Sunday School. Mr. and Mrs. Murray Whittaker certainly put everything they had into making us Apsley kids' better people. They were good humoured people who you need to look back on from maturity and understand how dedicated they were. I think they were admired and appreciated by the community. Sunday school picnics were always a lot of fun. At one stage there was a prize of a new bible to the boy who could recite the 23rd psalm and I reckon it came down to Colin Munn and me. I had about 4 goes at it over four Sundays and just couldn't quite get it right. I hope St. Peter doesn't put it on me at the Pearly Gates.....I think I still might struggle.

My regular short back and sides haircut was provided by Mrs. Foster...next door to Dowlings or thereabouts. It was always a stool on her back verandah with the stern warning that any movement while she was cutting would result in a big gap in my hairdo....so I sat absolutely still for the 10 minutes it took. I would give her the 2 bob that was tied in the corner of my hanky and I was good to go for another month or so. She was before her time....the old short back and sides are right back in vogue now.

Just now and then dad would be feeling generous and we would go down to Bushys café for a milk shake.....that was a real treat. If not a milk shake we might get a 'Family Brick' of 'Peters' icecream. It was in fact ice cream about the size of a brick in a cardboard wrapper. We would take it home and would have to eat it there and then as we didn't have the kind of freezer storage to put it away for another day.

There were a couple of old gentlemen who resided in a bit of a rough corrugated iron dwelling up behind the hall, the Commerford brothers. My recollection is that Tommy Commerford was a quiet and easy going gentle soul where as his brother Jack liked his grog and was a bit of a punter. For some reason I felt that Jack always bullied Tommy but that may well just have been my view at the time. I think at least one of them had expired by the time I left in 1960.

That's about my lot I reckon, I hope it provides a read for some. We now reside in Mandurah WA so don't forget to say hello if you are in our area. Cheers, Bob Dungey.