

The Early Years in Hartwell

The Family House at 81 Glyndon Road, Hartwell

Phone Number: WB 5609

The year is about **1940**.

The late summer sun shines relentlessly on the west side of the house and the paint on some of the wide pine weatherboards is blistering.

Climbing up the back wooden ramp you feel heat being reflected from the cream boards. In those days the occupants of the house came in the back door. Only visitors rang the electric bell at the front of the house. Some of the vertical timber on the back door had also been attacked by that western sun. You were pleased to turn the old loose brass handle to step inside out of the heat. Not that the back verandah seemed cooler as indicated by the old wooden black and red thermometer that hung next to an old **Coolgardie** meat safe.

Milk and butter was cooled near the hearth place in the dining room because there was a cool draught at the chimney. Later came an ice chest where the ice man came with a big square block of ice wrapped in a cloth bag and would put it in the ice compartment. This happened about three times a week.

You came from the back verandah area to open the fly wire door leading into the kitchen. It was now cooler, but as you entered the inner rooms of the house, you experienced the coolness of a double brick house. In summer you flopped in a comfortable armchair in a semi-darkened room.

81 Glyndon Road was built in **1928** by my then **uncle Jim**, who had built an almost identical house a few doors down. **Uncle Jim** rode a motorbike with a sidecar where he carried wood strapped to the car. In a later chapter you will see a glimpse of the motorbike alongside the frame of our first house which **Uncle Jim** built for us in **Heathmont**.

Double brick homes took about 3 days to warm up in the summer and were cold in winter. At night we lit the coke or briquette fireplace in the dining room, while the kitchen had a kerosene heater going during the day. The back sleep-out was warm from the westerly sun in the winter. That's where I slept and had my radio bench and sets which I made as my main hobby.

The front rooms were comfortably furnished. The front lounge room had a beautiful bay window with a lovely palm tree in the bay. Pictures and statues around the rooms seemed old and dull to me as a young lad. The front lounge was used to entertain visitors. I used to assemble the cushions and chairs in the lounge to make a cubby house. This was the entertainment room.

The tea trolley would be wheeled in with date scones, nut loaf and coffee sponge. Sometimes I would be called in to sing or recite a poem. All was proper.

This was all in preparation for the time when I would be auditioned by **Dr. A.E. Floyd** (Flop was his nickname) of **St. Paul's Cathedral Choir**. I would be accepted in on a scholarship to attend **Trinity Grammar School** in **Kew**, and sing at St. Paul's 4 nights a week and twice on Sunday. Then there was Choir practice in the **Cathedral Chapter House** every weekday morning. We kicked a ball around in the quadrangle before practice which was like having a mini soccer match.

At some stage before I left **Canterbury State School**, my father had arranged a meeting with **Norman Banks** of **3KZ** radio station fame. We met in a milk bar in Collins Street near the Regent Theatre. The meeting, I then presumed, was to get an audition with **Dr. A.E. Floyd** at St. Paul's. Before **Norman Banks** went into radio he was training for the **Church of England** priesthood. He obviously had connections at **St. Paul's**, and soon I was called up to have my audition in the **Chapter House** and won an education scholarship at **Trinity**.

Norman Banks was the founder of **Carols By Candlelight** and the original compere. Maybe **God** was preparing me for a Christian life later on because I loved the oratorios like **Handel's** "Messiah", "The Crucifixion" and "The Psalms". **Smokey Dawson**, so nicknamed because of his shock of white hair, would hand out lollies to the choirboys in front. We were hidden from view to the rest of the congregation.

We scoffed buns, cake and lemonade before one of the Evensong Services in the **Chapter House**....which reminds me that before every Christmas, we sang carols unaccompanied at a couple of **Melbourne** hospitals. The hospitals put on a feast for the boys....plenty of delicious eats, washed down with pop. I think they allowed me to take some lemonade home. I probably drank it before arriving home on the train. The nickname for the train that ran from **Camberwell Station** to **Ashburton** was called "**The Ashey Dasher**". I was scared on a couple of occasions as a "false cleric" would board this train and look at me. Today he would be called a child molester. After informing my parents, I never saw him again.

Where we lived was a conservative area. I would call it middle to upper living class. Sunday afternoons we would either go visiting or my parents would take me for a walk and possibly get a small ice-cream at the local milk bar.

Picnics at **Wattle Park** were a treat as I could play in the old trams on display. On special occasions my dad took me to **Becketts Park** in **Balwyn**, where you could climb inside the 100ft tower. Occasionally we also went to the **Canterbury Park** at night which was lit up with colourful lanterns.

There would be no playing with boys on Sundays and if they called to play, my mother would kindly tell them to come at another time. Sunday was church day and was considered holy. I was always well-dressed and had to polish my shoes!!

Mum loved to shop in **Burke Road, Camberwell**. My main memory of **Burke Road** was **Coles Store** (nothing over 2/6p). Another favourite shopping centre was **Ball's** and **Dimmeys** (both variety stores) in **Richmond**. I used to be fascinated by the way cash transactions were brought about by the sales assistant sending the docket and cash in a capsule via an overhead wire to a central cashier's office upstairs.

One day on the tram, passing the old **Temple** on **Bridge Road, Richmond**, my mother, pointing to the **Temple**, told me that strange things happened in there and told me to be careful. I was later to attend the **Richmond Temple** and came away exalted.

Both parents were hard workers and saved their small wage. My mum worked at the local Italian fruit shop, which in those days she called "the dagoes". Then there was the ham & beef shop (now called delicatessen) where she made sandwiches. She finished up working for her brother **uncle Bill** and his wife **Amy**, who ran a bakery in **Carlton** called **Owen & Dixons**. They owned a beautiful holiday home on **Oliver's Hill** in **Frankston**, where we were allowed to stay for holidays. Mum sometimes played tennis at a private court behind a large house in **Wattle Valley Road**, owned by, I think, **Auntie Amy's sister**. I would meet her there on my way home from school.

Back to **81 Glyndon Road**....

Our winter nights were spent sitting in an inner circle, in the dining room, so all of us could receive warmth from the fire. Dad was on the right of the fire and Mum on the left. Mum's dad, **Geary** (known to us as **Gear**), read the paper and I sat next to him, directly facing the fire. He lived in the inner bedroom. **Geary's wife** had died earlier. They once owned a milk bar in **Caulfield**. My mum and I would sometimes go and help them in the shop. They lived at the back of the shop. I would tell Mum I was going out to the front of the shop, but my excuse would be to snatch up a few lollies as I passed by. Lollies in those days were openly displayed in their original boxes, so it was easy to steal a few. My grandma was a wake-up to me and I got scolded.

My dad invariably would have a glass of Brewer's Yeast fermenting and rising on the hearth. When it had frothed up, he would down it. My dad was an advocate of health foods and I was brought up that way! We never used salt and pepper or white flour, sugar etc. and never drank with meals. Some meals were vegetarian. Herbs were taken for most ailments, except for more serious complaints. Then **Dr. Crotty** would do a house visit.

Dr. Crotty was a bachelor who had a large corporation. He drank a lot and attended the **Roman Catholic Church** on **Riversdale Road**. He never charged my parents a penny for his services. He was abrupt and you didn't ask questions. His practice where he lived was cold at night in the waiting room, which had a small one bar radiator burning. Patients sat upright, never talking and **Dr. Crotty** would yell out from the surgery, "Next please!" and the door would slam. "What are you here for?" A bunsen burner was alight on his desk which he would sterilise the hypodermic needles.

My dad had been influenced by the teachings of **F. G. Roberts**, who was probably one of Australia's first naturopaths and osteopaths. I was taken to listen to his lectures in the **Athenaeum Theatre Hall** in **Collins Street**. **F. G. Roberts** and his wife - more his wife I believe - were **Seventh Day Adventists**. Although I didn't know it at the time of course, but he was probably an advocate of what we now know as "New Age". In this instance, **Fred Roberts** could be described as having a holistic approach to healing.

He ran a well packed health food shop in **Post Office Place**, now known as **Little Bourke Street**. He had treatment rooms at the rear of the shop where he diagnosed using iridology. Then the practitioner would use a magnifying lens and a small torch....this technique has now been highly refined. He would prescribe bark herbs and his brand of health foods, some of which were Vita Elm Porridge and Gland Tone (a drink).

Yes, our meals at home were wholesome. We used some Sanitarium products and others my mother made up. One dish was a kind of mixture of cheese and ground nuts bound with egg and breadcrumbs. I wasn't too keen on that one!! Old bread was baked in the oven and made crisp. Saturday lunch was pineapple and cheese with Vita-Weat biscuits. We never diluted our meal with drinks!

Toilet paper was old newspapers cut in square pieces with a hole pierced through in the corner to put the string through to hang down. The motto was "waste not, want not" and my parents stood strongly by this!!

Most of my boyhood days were spent making my crystal sets which later developed into valve receivers, amplifiers and finally making up and recording on vinyl discs. I made up a 5 watt transmitter on the Ham Bands and tested this out at **Clive Sloss's** house in **East Burwood**. **Clive** was the engineer at **3XY** radio station where I worked in the record department, did some turntable operating and was a general office boy. **Clive** and myself were very pleased when we made contact with another Ham operator in **Tasmania**, using my small 5 watt transmitter. I admit I also transmitted some music using the broadcasting band near 200 metres. I would spin a disc and run around to **Maurice Sperring's** place in **Nevis Street** to listen to it.

Doug McKenzie was the publicity officer at **3XY** and I would take copy to the newspaper offices. He also interestingly was one of the **Zig & Zag** team that would be in the parade at **Moomba**. Two notable people I worked with were **Alwyn Kurts** and **Bob Rodgers**. To this day **Bob Rodgers** is still a working DJ in **Sydney**.

I started making radios when playing as a boy in the paddock diagonally opposite. I found what someone had disposed of....their old Bakelite panels and chassis receivers. They were like hidden treasures to me. It started me off. I loved short wave at nights when I would pick up transmissions from the **Fretilin Resistance Forces** in **East Timor**.

I played footy on the roads with my friends **Rowan Ebbles** and **Graham Liddell** in **Killara Avenue**. Most kids at my early age had made a shanghai (a catapult) from a nice piece of wood cut from a Y piece of a tree. I used lead BB shots or small pebbles. We also used pea-shooters. At the back of the lilly pilly trees, which lined the rear of our property, was a favourite place to build cubbies or dig for "gold". I also had my "chemistry set" which consisted of coloured chalk dissolved in jars of water.

Later, as a teen, I played a lot of tennis at the local **Hartwell Courts** and on the lawn at **Wattle Park**. Summertimes I went to the public baths near **Prospect Hill Road**. Our neighbours on one side, **Vale & Muriel Coogle**, took me to the **Richmond Baths** and paid to have me taught swimming under a famous olympic coach. I think his name was **Tom Donnet**. I learnt to become a **Melbourne** supporter through **Mr. Coogle**, who sometimes would take me to see **The Demons** (Red Legs) play.