

LORRAINE REEVES AND GWEN McDONALD

These are the recollections of Lorraine Reeves, interviewed by Alison St. John on behalf of the Middle Park History Group, at her home at 265 Danks Street on 26 November 2014, and of her daughter Gwen who joined her mother for the second interview on December 10th . Lorraine's son Robert also joined in during the first interview to share his memories.

Lorraine, who was born in April, 1925, grew up on a farm at Lowesdale, near Corowa in New South Wales, with her parents, Alfred and Deborah (Dorrie) Clifton, and five siblings. The children attended the small local school till Grade 6, after which the girls went to boarding school in Albury and the boys in Melbourne. The Lowesdale school was small, with only about twelve children attending, and Lorraine and her sisters rode horses to school along a country track. In the morning, they would have breakfast and feed the horses, and, after the hour's ride to school, unsaddle the horses, which grazed in the paddock during the day, to be resaddled for the ride home. Lorraine recalled that her three brothers, all older than her, drove a gig to school.

Lorraine's father Alfred, had been born in Melbourne, but on the death of his mother when he was about four years old, he was sent to live on a farm near Corowa, tenanted by an English couple who were less than kind to him. He told his children how they would do things like tear up his school books. His father remarried in Melbourne, and visited him once a year. Alfred grew up and married Dorrie, a local girl who was also on the land, their wedding during World War 1 (in 1917) taking place at Dorrie's home on her father's farm. Alfred and Dorrie began their married life on the farm that Alfred's father had left to him.

FAMILY LIFE

Lorraine talked about life on the farm being busy . It was a sheep and wheat farm, and they also had some cattle, pigs, chooks and turkeys and killed their own meat to eat. Shearing time was busy with shearers having to be fed and housed in the shearers' quarters.

Lorraine left school at 14 and went home to help as her mother was in hospital for a six week stay. She remained at home, working on the farm and looking after her brothers. At this stage all the children lived on the farm. Her mother always had good domestic help and Lorraine was also taught on the family piano by a teacher who visited the house.. They had a tennis court and tennis featured in parties at the house. There were also local dances in the local hall and fundraising events for the war effort.

BOARDING SCHOOL

Lorraine and her sister travelled by train each term to boarding school in Albury, returning home for the holidays. Lorraine loved the life at boarding school and felt it prepared her for her later occupation. Her favourite subjects were Maths and Sport.

PROFESSIONAL LIFE

At 18 Lorraine started nursing. The Alfred Hospital in Melbourne was her choice of hospital as it had a good name. She underwent three and a half years training, which she said was very strict. She lived in the nurses' home in Punt Road, and said that if nurses went out for the evening, it was imperative that they were home by 10.30, when lights were to be out. Before they could start on the wards, the nurses had to attend school for 3 months, and pass an exam at the end of that time. After that their lectures were given by tutor sisters in the hospital, and were undertaken at the same time as ward work.

The working day started at 6.30 am and finished at 2.30. The thing that Lorraine remembered most about her uniform were the black stockings, starched white belts and cuffs and the starched veil on graduation. Her favourite wards were surgical. She was asked to stay on and work as a staff nurse after completing her training, but declined as by then she was engaged to John. However, after marriage and having the three children, Lorraine returned to nursing in 1963, which made her quite unusual for the times.

MARRIAGE

Lorraine had met John through her brother Lloyd with whom he was in the Air Force. John had attended South Melbourne Technical School, after which he did an apprenticeship at Trasks, furniture makers in Prahran, before a stint in the Air Force. His father's family business was furniture making and he and his brother built a factory behind their house in Danks Street where they carried on the business for many years. John set up a clog making enterprise in Middle Park with a friend, then later joined the family business. In 1963 the business was ended when the factory was burnt down. The site was bought by the Hunters who were wholesalers, needed space for their butter trucks and they operated out of 129 Page Street.

Lorraine and John married in 1948 and honeymooned in Sydney. After living in a flat in Carrington Mansions in St Kilda Road, which they shared with another couple, they moved in to the house in Danks Street, next door to John's father's factory (where John worked for a number of years before his father died) with their first child Gwen, who was later followed in Middle Park by Robert and Annette.

LIFE IN MIDDLE PARK

The children all went to Middle Park Central (now Primary) School, after which the girls attended McRobertson High and Robert, Melbourne High. After primary school children were streamed according to test results and girls either went to JHBoyd Domestic College or McRobertson High and the boys to South Melbourne Technical School or Melbourne High.

Both Lorraine and Gwen remember Middle Park in the fifties and sixties as being a very friendly place and they, together with Lorraine's son Robert, felt it was a wonderful place to live; for Gwen, easy access to the shops to do the shopping for her mother, the proximity to the beach, the facility of the Middle Park library and easy access to music lessons at the nearby convent were seen by her as great features. Robert talked about the beach culture of the sixties, which included racing along Beaconsfield Parade with three mates operating a wind yacht. Another highlight of the lives of the young Middle Park boys in the sixties was the fun to be had in the Cowderoy Street drain(locally nicknamed Mrs Oigle !) which could be accessed from the beach and which could deliver them to St Kilda Road. The Reeves knew everyone in the street and there was much talking to people in the street. Doors were never locked and children tended to visit each other's places with no formal invitation. Cubby houses were a feature of backyards and socialisation was much more spontaneous and lots of "calling in" happened. In the Reeves home friends and relations would frequently pop in on Sunday afternoons for a cuppa and a chat and there were occasional visits from Lorraine's family from Lowesdale when they came to Melbourne with the wool clip. Football as now was very popular, and everyone barracked for South Melbourne!

The Reeves were the first people in the street to buy a television (in 1957) and adults and children alike were keen to come and watch it!

Cards were often played and Tuesday nights was Cards Night at the Reeves'. Euchre and Five Hundred were popular card games. Social life tended to be home based with occasional visits to a play or show, with a night out seeing Margot Fonteyn and Rudolph Nureyev being fondly recalled. The "picture palaces" visited were the Kinema in Albert Park and Hoyts' Park Cinema also in Albert Park. Gwen recalled Saturday matinees, for which she was given two shillings, of which one shilling and threepence was spent on the pictures, three pence on a Chew Chew bar, with sixpence left for fish and chips on the way home. On occasions in the school holidays they would go to the city on the tram and pay visits to Foys and the Coles Cafeteria. Even though children were free to walk everywhere, they were warned about not talking to strangers and the apprehending of the escaped prisoner Ronald Ryan and his accomplice hiding in the local public toilets created some degree of fear in the community.

The same degree of affluence which characterises the suburb today was not evident in the forties, fifties and sixties. Children often went to school without shoes, and John Reeves regularly took extra lunches to school in the thirties as some children would not have any lunch. In the fifties and sixties, families were generally on one income with mother at home and father employed in clerical or trade positions or such like. Cars were not common and a frequent theme in Gwen's recollections was the use of trams and the walking everyone did. She remarked on the distances that everyone walked, and in particular children. They would walk to Luna Park for an occasional treat (a distance of some kms) and even though the family had a car which they bought in the fifties, they would walk over to South Melbourne market to shop. Lorraine remarked that the car was only used on Sundays to go to the cemetery. From the Middle Park Central School Gwen and her classmates would walk over to Albert Park Primary School once a week for sewing lessons. For the annual school sports the children from MPPS walked to the Port Melbourne Football Ground and for weekly school sports they walked to the oval by Albert Park Lake.

In the forties, fifties and sixties, Lorraine, being a nurse, was frequently called on by local people to come and help them by dressing a hand or giving a shower etc. Lorraine describes the times of being one of "communal kindness" when people helped their neighbours. At this time there were no district nurses and because people walked everywhere "they were not closed off" but aware of how their neighbours were faring.

Gwen who was present for the second interview, supplied lots of details of life in Middle Park in the fifties. She played the organ at the Church of Christ (now converted into apartments) and also spent Saturdays and holidays working in one of the chemist shops in Armstrong Street. Gwen talked about the very good Youth Club at the Church of Christ in the fifties and early sixties. There was also a Presbyterian Church (later destroyed by fire), the site of which is now Creans Park in Richardson Street. A typical Saturday in the sixties would see her working at the chemist on Saturday morning, earning a pound for the morning, and then playing the piano for a callisthenics group (no tape recorders then) in the Presbyterian Kindergarten in the afternoon, which also earned her a pound. At Wills' chemist shop she began the morning by dusting everything and then served customers as required. Chemists compounded and dispensed all their own medications, and pills were counted and put into bottles. The doctors had their own formulas which would be made up by the chemist. Some formulae required the addition of cocaine which was kept in the safe. Other products which would not be seen today included Amyl Nitrate, APCs, Bex Powders and Vincents powders. Ten percent of the work was made up of compounding and the rest of counting tablets into jars. Unlike pharmacists today, little advice was given by them.

Like most Middle Park families, the Reeves family always attended the Old Buffers Parade, and the Middle Park Central School band, consisting of recorders and drums and fifes would play, and children would dress up their bikes. One of the remembered features was children scrabbling for the chewing gum which was thrown up for them to retrieve.

SHOPPING

Robert remembered ice deliveries in Middle Park which continued until the late fifties- early sixties he thought, and the “Bottle-O” who came round with his horse and dray, wearing his leather apron, to collect empty bottles up until the sixties.

Lorraine didn't have food deliveries but used the local shops and the South Melbourne market, also patronising Crofts self service shop in Albert Park (now the IGA) which was thought to be the first supermarket in Melbourne. In Mills Street there were two lots of shops.

From their location near the corner of Mills and Danks Street, the shops going north were Mr Lyons' butcher's shop, Mr. Dorrigan's grocery, the Johnsons' fruit shop, and John Adams' chemist, next to which was a house with a delicatessen attached (still there) which sold pastry, German sausage, broken biscuits etc. Next was a milk bar, then Mr Naum's fish and chips shop, then two houses (one of which is currently a tailor's shop) and a shop for Mrs Young's haberdashery. On the opposite side of the road between Page and Lt Page was Con the Fruiterer, who was thought to have deserted his ship in order to stay in Australia. He anglicised his name from Kollivas to Collins. He forged a strong link with John's father who helped him in his bid to set up a house where newly arrived families could be temporarily housed.

Con's family stood out in Middle Park for their European clothes and shoes. In this section of Mills Street, there were just two shop, the other one being a hairdresser.

On the corner of Richardson and Mills Streets was a bakery specialising in old-fashioned goodies like “matchsticks” and from which quarter boston buns filled with mock cream could be bought.

Mr Cheese's newagency was also at this corner, opposite the Church of Christ.

GASWORKS CINDERS

Many Middle Park backyards had the sub-stratum sand removed (for the purposes of being used in building works) and replaced with cinders from the Albert Park gasworks.

Lorraine Reeves in 2015



Lorraine Reeves 2015



Lorraine Reeves Wedding