

Interview with Kath Scanlan

_by Annette Robinson

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Early Life

My parents were Patrick Scanlan and Ruby Makin. Dad was born in 1896 in Richardson Street. Mum was born in 1898 in North Melbourne (the Makin family came to Middle Park in 1910, bought the house in Harold Street).

Patrick and Ruby were married in 1923 at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Middle Park. Real estate in this area was too expensive for a young couple at that time (as it has ever been?) so they lived in the Moreland / Coburg suburbs for a number of years before eventually returning to Middle Park in 1932.

There were 5 children in the family by then (my brother Ray was a few months old). Number 6 in the family, my sister Phil was born in 1939 while we were living in Mills Street, Middle Park. Kathleen had been born on 14 December 1927.

From age 5 my addresses were: 37 Harold Street (next door to the Parker Sisters well known as a singing group and Miss Sennitt lived on the other side on the Neville Street corner); then 151 Mills Street until 1948. I live in the house that belonged to my mother's family the Makins. I've lived in the area for 82 years!

Dad's family

My father's parents the Scanlans lived in Greig Street Albert Park, but later they lived first in a house in Richardson Street Middle Park where the kindergarten now is, and later at 241 Richardson Street . That was where they lived when Dad went to the first World War in 1916. When I first talked to Rosemary Goad about my life, she was able to look up on a big sheet to see where the Scanlans lived.

Our family are a fairly sports oriented lot. We have a photo of Dad in the local CYMS (Catholic Young Mens Society) cricket team in 1920. He was the captain of the team, so he had wasted no time after returning from the war in 1919 to get back to his beloved sport. I often think that sport must have been a saviour to those men coming home from war. He was playing for the Leopolds (the South Melbourne football club seconds team) initially. Then after that he was playing for the South Melbourne firsts, and in 1923 he was captain of South Melbourne.

When dad was growing up, he and his friends and brothers almost lived at the Middle Park baths in the summer. He led a very active life. When they weren't playing cricket, it was football or swimming. His brother Joe (born in 1900) also played for South Melbourne. He became captain of South after Dad. Joe Scanlan was only about 14 years old when the first World War broke out, so was too young to join up. They also had an older brother Jack who rose to become a Colonel in WW1. He had a fairly illustrious army career. Jack rowed as a sport, but was not as much into cricket and footy as his two younger brothers. Jack Scanlan also served in the second World War.

Dad was from an Irish background, his mother was Irish. She came out to Australia without her family when she was 16 years of age around 1880, making the passage in the care of the ship's Captain. She came out to join her cousin who was in domestic service in Bendigo. Dad's parents were married in St Peter and Paul's Church South Melbourne. His father was a coach builder. He worked for the railways when they lived in Middle Park. He was James Andrew Scanlan.

Dad's sister Nora Barry lived first in Danks Street, then Page Street Middle Park not far from 91 Harold Street. Dad started school at the Convent on Beaconsfield Parade. In Grade 2 he went to the Christian Brothers' School in South Melbourne.

Mum's Family

Mum's mother was born in Clunes, a small town out of Ballarat, and her father was born at Raywood near Bendigo. They were married at St Francis Church, corner Lonsdale and Elizabeth Streets in the city. Mum's family didn't come to Middle Park until 1910 when they bought the house in Harold Street. It was a "spec" house. She told us that when they were buying the house, the builder wanted them to purchase another 10 feet of land, but at that stage they couldn't afford the extra 30 pounds for it!

Mum's father worked at the Post Office in Spencer/ Bourke Street, sorting mail, parcels etc.

I remember Nana well. Mum and Dad bought the family home from Nana in 1948 and we moved to 91 Harold Street. Nana was getting old and needed the company. She died in 1952. Before that we had been living in rented houses at 37 Harold Street, between Richardson and Neville Streets, then at 151 Mills Street.

We had a sleepout in the backyard at Mills Street. Some builders moved it from our old house in Mills Street to Harold Street. I have many happy memories of growing up.

My primary schooling was at the Good Shepherd Convent in Middle Park, then to Kilbride. My final year of study was at Hasset's Business College in Chapel Street Prahran.

Growing Up

I played basketball (now called netball) with the local church team, and also played in the Victorian womens' competition. I joined the Carmelite Tennis Club when I was about 18 or 19. When we were younger we used to play tennis during school holidays at the courts in the park, called The Chalet, somewhere about opposite Wright Street I think. It was run by Miss Fitzpatrick, and we were a bit afraid of her. If you hit a ball after she had blown the whistle to signal end of play you were in all sorts of trouble!

In summer we spent hours at the beach. On a hot Friday or Saturday night a group of us would meet on the beach at the end of Wright Street, near the club and dressing sheds. The Middle Park baths were at Armstrong Street. At Wright, Mills, Nimmo and McGregor Streets there was a platform/ raft with a diving board on it. You had to swim out quite a way to get to it, but it had a spring board which was not very high, and that's one place we learnt to dive. We did our share of belly flops too. It was a great way to learn to swim. The incentive to get out to the platform meant you tried and tried til you could make it. I can remember dad and some of my brothers and sisters encouraging Phil to swim out, by forming a sort of flotilla around her and saying "Come on, you can make it".

At Phillipson Street Albert Park, Stubb's Baths was an enclosed baths, smaller than Middle Park. In time many of the baths and platforms fell into disrepair because of storms, wild weather etc. Eventually they were removed. When my father was a boy he used to spend whole summers at the Middle Park baths. There was no open swimming. Women were allowed in only during noon – 2pm. I can remember mum remarking that that was just the time when women would be getting lunch for their families and would find it rather inconvenient.

Because we were from a pretty big family we mostly played games amongst ourselves. Of course, we also made other friends, who went to the same school.

The house in Harold Street was warmed by one fireplace in the dining room. The fire would roar away, you would be boiling on one side and cold on the other. There were quite a few woodyards around the suburb. Wood would be delivered, and Dad would chop it up. One of us would have the task of cleaning out the fireplace. Before Nana died we had a big table in the dining room, and later we put doors between the two front rooms to make a combined lounge and dining room.

Middle Park Shops

When we lived at 151 Mills Street, we were next door to a group of shops between Little Page and Danks Street. There was a house on the corner of Little Page Street, then the house where we lived (single fronted and a deep block).

Next door to our house in Mills Street on the beach side, there was a fish shop, a milk bar, a "ham and beef" shop (deli), then there was a single fronted house, then John Adams the chemist, then the grocers and finally on the corner, a butcher's shop. You didn't need a car at all, and we never had one. Then across the road on the Albert Park side of Mills Street there was Con the greengrocer, and on the corner of Page Street and Mills Street another butcher shop (Mr Rice).

Every morning one of us would go next door and get 8 pints of milk, it came in glass bottles. I know it was threepence a pint. Then any other shopping we needed we did all at these few local shops. We never went to South Melbourne market, we just didn't need to. John Adams was a bit of an institution as a chemist. He was very highly regarded, and was there in Mills Street for many years.

There was a cake shop further up Mills Street on the Albert Park side, owned by Mr and Mrs Todd Culph, and on the corner of Mills and Richardson Streets I can recall a newsagent. Another shop I remember was Flemmings on the corner of Harold and Richardson streets, now it's a house, and part of a terrace. But then it sold bread, milk, pies, pasties, lollies and icecreams.

Many things were delivered by horse and cart, I used to hear and see them going up the lane. There was a butcher, greengrocer and the iceman. We had a Coolgardie safe, prior to having a fridge.

Armstrong Street and its shops did not figure much in our household because we had all those Mills Street shops at our front door. But I do know that there were, at one stage, three butchers shops in Armstrong Street. I also recall a haberdashery, and Crofts the grocer, (Archie Croft was on South Melbourne Council and also played a significant role with south Melbourne football club).

On the corner of Armstrong and Richardson where Gumtree is now, there was a hardware shop, it later became a video shop. I can remember Mum and Dad talking about the Bughouse, the 2 storey building where Aris Shoe Repairs now is, firstly showing films, later live theatre, and run by Frank Thring's father. When they were young, and possibly even before "talkies" came in, they went there, and laughed when they remembered the projectionist poking his head out a hole saying "It won't be long ladies and gentlemen", when he had to change the reel, or attend to some other minor delay!

There were SP Bookies down the lane there behind the Bughouse, and often someone would be on the look out for the police. In the 1950's and 1960's I used to take my old original EJ Holden car to be serviced by Jimmy Meredith, then Phil Waller motors who was there in Canterbury Road backing onto the lane for many years. I was very loath to part with that car, as it had served me well.

Entertainment

When I first started work I would take my little brother Ray to the pictures. We would go to either the Park or the Kinema in Victoria Avenue, Albert Park. It was threepence for him to get in and sixpence for me. We would walk there. I would have been 16 or 17 I think. Later we would sometimes be allowed to get on a tram on a Saturday afternoon, and go to the Palais in St Kilda. We loved the serials, and Hop-along Cassidy etc.

We loved playing jacks. Dad taught me to kick a football. Pat and I often went over to Albert Park to play cricket or to kick the football with his friends. There were no restrictions on where you could play over there.

We had our jobs at home too. I can remember Mum telling me that when she was a teenager, once a week, probably on a Saturday, she would have to scrub the front path from the gate to the front door, then all down the hall to the back door on her hands and knees. Then she would go to the dance at St Kilda that night! What energy!

When I was in my late teens I would go skating at St Moritz with Chris Hawkins, Pat Brown's sister. We were friends from school. Pat and Chris are the only two left living here with whom I can reminisce with about school days. My cousin Mary Barry who died a couple of years ago also had a wonderful memory. She lived in Page Street and her house backed onto Little Page Street a hop, step and jump from our house. Mary was a nurse who won many awards for service to the community. She was matron at Geelong, then she was the first lay person to be made matron at St Vincent's Private Hospital.

The Carmelite Church was the centre of much of our lives. YCW and NCGM were big during our teenage years. There were many concerts in the hall. We would sing, act in plays, or play the piano. It kept us all busy, and connected. Everyone knew everyone else then. There was no television or computers of course. We rarely needed to venture out of our own suburb. There were dances at the Church Hall, also rather controversially on Sunday nights! Albert Argenti was a well known Italian singer, all the girls loved him. He would play and sing with his band at the Hall. Sometimes a group of us would go to the St Kilda Town Hall for dances. Some went by tram to Manresa Hall attached to the Hawthorn Catholic Church. The youth groups also went on tennis picnics, or excursions to the snow- in the back of a furniture van!

When my mother was growing up, she recalls the "Children of Mary", a Church group for girls and young women. Mum remembered the night the Carmelite hall was opened. The priest was Irish and said in his Irish lilt "C'mon girrrrls, let's go and open and bless the new hall". There weren't many men present for that occasion, as they were all still away at war. Mum had her 21st birthday at about the time the hall was first opened in 1919.

My sister Betty entered the Convent in 1945, when she joined the Good Shepherd Sisters, so she didn't move to Harold Street with the rest of us. My two brothers had the sleep out, Jo and I shared a room, and the youngest Phil had her own room.

Working Life

Then I started work at 16 years of age. My pay was 38 shillings and sixpence, about \$4! Little did I know that I would work for that same company for 44 years.

I remember that when I was about to start work, Mum took me into Cann's in Swanston Street where she bought me two summer dresses for work. I also had gloves to wear. You dressed up to go to work back then.

It was threepence to get in to the city by tram. The trams were packed, people were hanging from the straps, and half hanging out the doors!

The company I worked for was originally the Zinc Corporation (lead, silver, zinc from Broken Hill), then it changed to Consolidated Zinc, ConZinc Rio Tinto of Australia (CRA), and finally it is now known as Rio Tinto.

I worked for some wonderful people over the years, including the retired President of the Company (14 years); the Director of Exploration for the Group until he retired (5 years), a "new" younger Company Director who eventually became Managing Director (10 years), and then for the Director of Finance for the Group, until my retirement! A varied life as CRA became a multi-national company.

I started work in 1944 at 360 Collins Street (Collins House), between Elizabeth and Queen, now a Westpac Bank building. It was a shame that the building was later demolished.

I retired from work in 1988, to care for Mum as she had just turned 90. She was still in pretty good health though, and used to cook our meals on my return from work. She was happy to have me around, as wouldn't have wanted to live on her own. I knew it was the right time to retire from paid employment. Now I'm very happy to not have to be anywhere at a given time, after all those years of regular commitments.

Dad's Football Career

Dad, known as Paddy Scanlan in the VFL world had finished his football playing career by the time I was growing up. He played for South Melbourne up until the end of 1926, when he was lured to Footscray for the grand sum of 9 pounds a week, a phenomenal amount back then.

He was Captain Coach of Footscray for 2 years. In 1929 he left Footscray and was then appointed Captain Coach of Richmond Seconds. They won the premiership that year, and Dad went out on a high as a player. In 1930 he was invited to return to South Melbourne as Coach. He coached North Melbourne in the mid 1930's for 2 years.

During all those football years he had been working full time in the public service, as well as attending training two nights a week. It is so different these days.

Dad worked with the Customs Department in the Customs House in Flinders Street. He also later worked for the Department of Munitions when WW2 broke out.

Getting Around

We did not use the trains much, mainly went places by tram. We never had a car. When Mum and Dad decided to come back to live in Middle Park, the fact that everything was close at hand would have been a significant factor. They just did not need a car.

Betty was the first in the family to have a bike. It lasted 60 years. I inherited it from Betty and had it until about the year 2000. I left it outside the Carmelite Church one day, and came out to find it had been stolen! I could not believe my eyes! Anyway my family have since bought me a replacement.

Dad bought the bike for Betty to ride to school when she went to Kilbride. It was quite a treat for one of us to have a bike, and it was duly handed down from one to the next of us, as needed. Dad had his own bike which he needed to get down to the wharves in Port Melbourne when he was working for Customs. That bike too had a long life.

Migration

I don't have a strong recollection of migrants arriving in Middle Park. I do remember that a Greek family had the greengrocer in Mills Street. Con was the owner and my sister Jo used to help out in the shop on Saturday mornings. Con brought his wife out from Greece. Anna who lives near me in Harold Street is one of Con's daughters. Con and his wife had about 5 children I think. Con eventually owned quite a few houses in the area. The house on the corner of our block in Mills Street was owned by Con. It was a bit of a boarding house for young Greek men who had recently arrived in Australia. There would have been a couple of dozen different young men staying there over the years.

Health

I remember the polio epidemic which happened when I was about 10 years old. I recall that the people who had the wine shop on the corner of Mills Street and Hambleton Street had a daughter who contracted polio. Her mother would take her in a long pram down to the beach on a warm day, and carry her into the water.

There were a couple of doctor's surgeries in the suburb. One was Dr Walsh on the corner of Armstrong and Danks Street, and another Doctor McQueen Thompson in Canterbury Road near McGregor Street. I remember him as a member of the tennis club. There was a small hospital in Albert Road in a two storey building between Ferrars Street and Clarendon Street.

Other Interests

We never had pets apart from a canary or a budgie, or once a guinea pig. We used to be often woken by cat fights in the lanes. I think Dad had a dog when he was growing up. As they moved about so often, the dog would sense that the family was packing, and just jump into his basket, as if to say "where are you taking me next"!

In Mum's single life, in the early 1920's, she was an enthusiastic South Melbourne supporter, and always went to the footy at the South ground with Dad's sister Nora and another friend Annie Barry, to cheer on the local boys. Later, she enjoyed listening to the footy and cricket on the wireless. She was always a great cook. I recall her going into the city by tram to the Gas Company where they held cooking demonstrations. Mum was also a brilliant sewer. She made lots of clothes for us girls, even up to the time we were going to dances and formal functions.

We all learnt piano at school from the nuns. We weren't too keen on practising. Phil was very talented. We all loved singing. When Betty started work, she used to spend some of her pay, about 2 shillings I think, on a piece or two of sheet music.

We would all sing around the piano, Dad loved it particularly anything with an Irish flavour. We had cousins on both sides of the family within a short distance. The Barry's (Dad's sister), and also the Makins (Mum's brother). They all had 4 or 5 children so there was never a shortage of company.

Holidays

At Christmas every now and then, we would have a holiday usually at Ferny Creek, Olinda or Sherbrooke. We would rent a house and we must have gone by car I think, although we didn't own one. That was always a bit of a highlight. There was often a test match on and we would listen to the radio to hear the latest on the cricket. I also remember listening to Dad and Dave etc. The Sun or The Herald plus the radio were the source of news.

The Dark Side

Although Middle Park was a safe place to grow up, I do recall that there were a couple of murders in the area.

A young woman was murdered at the public toilet on Beaconsfield Parade near Mills Street, also the famous Leonski murders. Dad remembered Squizzy Taylor and his notorious exploits.

There was a bookie called Sol Green, who lived in Middle Park in a big two storey house on Beaconsfield Parade, near Harold Street. He would go to the Baths quite often in the summer, and once he offered Dad sixpence if he would dive off the fairly high diving board there. Dad, aged about 12, took the challenge and received his sixpence. That was a lot of money then!

Dad didn't drink. There was a wine shop in Armstrong Street on the corner of Erskine Street, with long beaded doorway. It was the talk of the street if any women were spotted drinking sherry at the wine bar. O'Connors the baker nearby was an institution.

Conclusion

I'm very glad to have grown up and still be living in Middle Park. You get used to living by the water, and I still go for a swim when the weather is hot. I don't like swimming pools much, but I love the beach. These days it takes a bit of a mental effort to get down there, but I'm usually glad I did.