

The Life and Times of (Harold) Keith Morter

Sept 28, 1926 - Aug 3, 1999

At the time of Dad's passing, his direct descendants were;

Wife: Wilma Juliet (nee Millett - Married 7 July 1951)

Son: John Charles (8 Aug 1952)
Married: Diane Margaret Flux
Daughter: Elizabeth Shannon
Daughter: Jennifer Irene

Daughter: Stephenie Ann (15 May 1954)
Married: Rodney Victor Campbell
Son: Richard James
Son: David Charles
Son: Michael John
Daughter: Jessica Louise

Son: Robert Stanley (3 April 1956)
Married: Laurenza (Loes) Cornelia Verburg
Son: Casey William
Daughter: Monique Laurenza

John Morter, Dec 25, 1999

Chapter 1

GRANDPARENTS -

Thomas Gerard Morter, Goldminer and Alice Morter (nee Hulls)
Born in Sandhurst (Bendigo) - 1861.

This was the second instant where Hulls and Morters were joined in matrimony. Further background appears in "Surname - HULLS" family tree herewith. The Morter family was traced well back by Beryl Thompson nee Morter - Of Numurkah - daughter of Frederick Francis Morter. Some of her sons live, I believe live at Kapunda.

I recall being told that, when his family was young, the goldmining at Bendigo began to become mechanized, creating unemployment for Thomas Gerard Morter. So he and a group of fellow miners travelled by ship to Esperance W.A. then on to Kalgoorlie to find employment for some time. His health began to fail on his return to Bendigo - (Imphasema from dust in the mines).

At some stage about then he selected land at Koorooman, via Leongatha, adjoining land taken up by his brothers in law the Hulls. (The property was eventually owned by, to my knowledge three generations of Hyde families). It seems that a condition of selection of land at that time was that a certain amount of clearing, fencing and sowing of pasture had to be done each year. Perhaps due to ill health, Thomas was unable to secure the selection, so instead occupied on a rental basis the farm at Mardan which was later bought and sub-divided by Ernest and Thomas Matthies.

Harold's Mother had died by this time and Thomas subsequently married Catherine Creighton of Creighton's Hill, north of Leongatha. It seems that Thomas visited Leongatha way back, even before that railway line was built. I remember stories of him travelling by train through Morwell to Mirboo North then riding a horse to Koorooman. Thomas is featured a number of times in the book "They Were No Featherbed Men" in which it is stated that Tom Morter and Peter O Malley were then the only families in Mardan not related (Steeles, McKinnons, Campbells, Allens all being related).

Catherine was the maternal Grandmother that I knew. I remember her as old, with a crooked face from a stroke she took in the cowshed at Mardan (on the property now known as "Strathaven"). She wore long black dresses, beautiful big brooches and a black apron. She was very kind to us and laughed a lot. Due to her face being pulled up on one side (the stroke effects) her false teeth used to rattle when she laughed. She died at St Ives Hospital, East Melbourne in 1942.

In 1912, Thomas Gerard purchased the farm now known as "Strathaven" - so named by Harold in 1919, it being the place where he worked in Scotland-referred to later. The property was previously owned by W. Richardson (See "They Were Not Featherbed Men" page 21). Surrounding selectors were

Grey, Steele, Gardner and McKinnon. The farm was on good quality land (coveted "Blue Gum Country") but largely virgin bush with little undergrowth, large gum trees, blackwoods and tall treeferns in the gullies. Except for a small section of permanent creek flow on the northeast corner, the only water was in open wells, about seven metres in diameter and five metres deep. I can recall five of these wells, replenished only from surface rainwater runoff.

Water was siphoned from two of these wells to a galvenised iron trough, set in a wooden frame down the hill from the well. When one well was empty, the trough was moved to the next. The property was well equipped with tools and implements, an old house, I believe quite large, and old sheds, the latter of which I can remember in a fallen down state with snakes under the sheets of iron on the ground, just north west of the existing house - near old pepper trees.

Harold's two sisters, Lal and Annie also lived on the farm, and the younger brother - Fred, who was one of the original students at Mardan South Primary School, also one of the original students at Leongatha High School. He subsequently became a School Teacher, married Mabel Binns of a pioneer family of the Victorian Mallee wheat districts. My memories are of Fred teaching at Ellenbank near Warragul, Rosedale then Melbourne suburbs including Princes Hill and Tottenham. Mabel died in about 1936 - Fred later married Gwen Frewin, daughter of the then Vicar of St Clements, Elsternwick. He died of a heart attack from Asthma in early 1950s. Gwen now lives at Mt Waverly with her daughter Gwendolyn, the only child of that marriage.

Lal (Alice) originally worked in a shop in the Beehive Arcade, Bendigo, and later became a music teacher at Mardan. The other sister - Annie helped Grandma in the home. Also lived on the farm at Mardan was Uncle Bob - Thomas Gerard's brother. People said he was mentally handicapped but I believe he fell into an empty well and suffered head injuries, causing this impression.

Whilst I distinctly remember my Mother saying that Thomas Gerard died in 1924 when his grandson Thomas Gerard was six weeks old, records quote his year of death as 1921.

Chapter 2

Parents

Harold Morter and Annie Fairbairn Morter (Nee Myers)
Born - Bendigo - 4.8.1896 and Ballan 19.12.1898 resp.

Harold, I believe, enjoyed a fairly carefree upbringing in Bendigo - with other working class families. Garden was always a pastime enjoyed, also as a means of providing food supplement on a limited income. He sometimes talked of playing tricks on the many Chinese who grew vegetables for sale after mining became unprofitable. He also told the story of how he and another kid hid in the large water drains under Pall Mall on the day they were to have been confirmed into the Church of England. They lived within a short walking distance of St John's Anglican Church, North Bendigo and according to Dad, went to Services twice on Sundays. Wilma and I took Mother and Dad on a holiday in 1960 and we called at the Church. The key which Dad remembered to be hidden on a nail under the Parish Hall was still in place and Dad was surprised to find his name on a WW1 Honour Roll which had been erected next to where he used to sing in the choir.

The family moved to the Mardan farm (later named "Strathaven") I think in about 1912.

Harold, my father, worked on the farm, gradually clearing the land by burning logs, cutting ferns, ploughing some land each year, growing a crop of maize, millett, oats or similar, then sowing pasture, until late 1917 when he joined the A.I.F. I never knew whether he could not get parental permission to join earlier or whether he waited for his mate, Don Chalmers to be old enough to join with him. Don subsequently married Dad's cousin - Annie Hulls - whom we all loved, and mourned when she died of cancer in about 1942.

Making a trio with Dad and Don was Bill Mewburn, then from Koonwarra who was brother of Lilian Millett, Wilmas's mother. After war service Bill was a driver of Melbourne cable trams. He was tragically killed in a tram accident at the terminus in Sydney Road, at the time of Wilma's birth in 1929.

They were drafted into the 10th Regiment Mobile Veterinary Corps, Anzac Mounted Division A.I.F. Dad served 864 days, 646 of them overseas. Dad's diary and other items I have on file give more details of service. They completed initial training in the Melbourne suburbs of first Maribyrnong then the large Army Camp of Broadmeadows. On 19th April 1918 they took their horses aboard trains for Sydney where, following a march through the city, they went aboard ship, sailed past Victoria and South Australia to the port of Albany W.A, then headed for the Indian Ocean, stopped at Columbo and sailed through the Suez Canal to Port Said.

In 1986 and again in 1996, Wilma and I visited the War Memorial at Albany. It has a statue of Lighthorsemen, which I believe was transported there from

Jerusalem when it was threatened with destruction at the time of the Seven Days War. It is set high on hill, out of the town, with a view of the sea. That hill was the last land sight of Australian soil for thousands of WW1 soldiers who never came home again.

The Lighthorsemen would care, each for his own horse, on board ship. They would bring a number at a time, on a roster system, up ramps from the hold of the ship, to exercise them on deck. Harold's Corps were trained to ride with the mounted troops, bringing wagons where possible, with equipment to treat sick and wounded horses. One of the common sicknesses was from eating sand while foraging for food in the sparse desert growth. In my memory, Dad was known in the Mardan district as one trained to "fall" a horse (tie ropes around its legs in such a way that it would fall off its feet, bound in such a way that it couldn't move, to enable surgery or similar). He was often asked to perform this operation, especially prior to WW2 when draught horses were bred and used on every farm.

The gap in the diary - July to September 1918 appears to be the period when the Corps advanced first to catch up with the fighting troops because by that time the Turks had been driven north into Palestine. The diary records their first day under shellfire on 19th September and a "great gallop" to outflank the Turks. The maps on Pages 34 and 48 of "Australians in Palestine" (a grey hard covered book) show Ludd and Nablus referred to in the diary. This part of the campaign is described from page 22 of the same book (See the "Wonderful Fortnight"). Diary notes around 1st October refer to events in the book – see page 44. Dad records his entry in to Damascus in diary notes Oct 2 to 23. The book describes the Damascus action on page 44.

A much more graphic description of that campaign is written in "The Desert Column" by Ion Idriess, the diary of an individual trooper. Ion Idriess supports Dad's description of his war having been always difficult because at that time it moved so fast, in country where water was scarce. It was hard to keep supplies, especially horse feed, up with the pace of the advancing army.

The Lighthouse maintained a base of sorts, where there was water and they would ride perhaps 40 miles at night, one trooper would then hold eight horses, while his mates went into action against the Turks as infantry. They would then ride back to the base, they and the horses having often spent 40 hours without fresh water. The exceptions were when they effected a cavalry charge (See "Australia In Palestine" page 15 - the famous charge into Beersheba - "Anzacs - Australians at War" page 102). The troops travelled light, to enable ammunition to be carried and to lighten the horses' loads. Using only a saddle cloth for warmth on the cold desert nights.

Dad used to talk of the time in Palestine when he was stricken with malaria and lay shivering under a bush for two days. When he recovered, he found that his horse had stayed with him when his mates rode on, and was lying beside him.

As far as I can read, the Turks surrendered shortly before the German

surrender of 11.11.18. The northern most advance by the Australians was to Homs. Dad was there from November 17. It seems they soon began to ride south again. Dad often spoke of his stay at Baalbeck (North West of Damascus - Map on Page 48). The Army was faced at this stage with the question of what to do with thousands of horses. The Bedouin farmers wanted them, of course, but no Lighthorseman wanted his horse to be beaten, starved, worked to death, perhaps yoked to a plough with an old camel. I remember the sadness with which Dad spoke of the Veterinary Corps lot in shooting hundreds of horses, letting them fall over a cliff into the sea. Page 78 of "Australians in Palestine" describes the feelings of the troopers.

Dad must have stayed on around the Damascus area for some months after the surrender. (Oh, how I wish I had asked him more questions and taken some notes while he was alive. By the time I was old enough to realize the importance of finding out these details, I was too wrapped up in my own interests and problems). As late as May 1919 he was at Moascar according to a letter to my Mother dated 26.5.19. Moascar is not far from Jerusalem. I am impressed that, as a 23 year old, he was so interested in and took much trouble to record descriptions of the places relating to Biblical times. I guess a contributing factor was his thorough Christian education.

So many troops from France, Belgium and the Middle East to be transported home to Australia, New Zealand and Canada at the end of the war created great problems, the number of ships available having been depleted by the German Navy. Due to this situation, and to relieve the dire shortage of manpower in Britain (thousands of Tommies having been killed), some Australian troops were to spend time in Britain working and gaining experience in their chosen vocation.

Dad was shipped to London (according to a Leave Pass I found) in about December 1919. I recall, he was in London for six weeks before being entrained for Strathaven in Scotland to work on the farm of Miss Corson. We corresponded with Miss Corson until her death (possibly 1940s). She visited Australia in the 30s and stayed with us as well as with a number of other men who had worked and lived on her farm. She was a kind lady, well educated with, of course, a broad Scottish accent. Army records show that Dad returned home on ??? (Feb 4th, 1919 ... jcm)

The family background of my mother Annie Fairbairn Myers is quite well detailed in both the "John Myers" record and "Our Scottish Families" books prepared by Jean Charlton (nee Lester). There are copies in my file. Being the youngest daughter of the family of twelve, and probably spoiled, she was sent to Essendon to stay with her older sister Al Plummer and to attend a nearby Anglican Girls College.

I have little information as to Mother's activities upon leaving school except that, probably in about 1915, at the age of about 18, she went to Kooroomon (Leongatha) to live with and serve as housemaid for her older sister Madge Lester, and to assist care for their three children - Alan, Jean and Frank. It would have been during this time that she met my Father. They corresponded

throughout Dad's absence overseas. The Myers history states that my parents were married in 1922. Shortly after this, Dad purchased the farm he named "Strathaven" from his father and had a neighbour George Gardner build a new house. The timber for the house was delivered by bullock wagon by Jim Hill, who still contracted with a bullock team in my memory.

Mater (My step-grandmother), Lal and Annie purchased, took up residence in and operated the shop and premises at 153 Cochrane Street, Elsternwick. Having borrowed the eighteen hundred pounds to effect the purchase from the Soldier Settlement Commission and used his Army Deferred Pay to build the house, I believe he and Mother had a minimum of resources to improve the property and carry on farming.

The priorities were bracken-fern control, rabbit control, mainly by digging out the burrows, clearing, fencing, cropping and sowing to pasture a small acreage each year. Most of the live, green gum trees were left for shade and shelter, but there were a lot of stumps of trees blown over or cut off waist high for post splitting. A trench was dug around a stump, sticks stacked in the trench, set alight then the sods of soil replaced. The fire would burn along the dead roots until they were all charred out. We were often allowed to go with Dad after tea to cover any fire that had burned into the open.

In those days, the carrying capacity of the farm was only about thirty cows and replacements. It was in September and October (early spring, time) when lactation began. Milking was by hand, of course, the milk separated using a hand turned separator, the skim milk fed to pigs bred on the farm and the cream taken in cans on a small sledge (a flat tray on skids, pulled by a horse) to a "cream shed" on the roadside to be picked up three times a week by a butter factory truck - a British Albion driven by Gordon Watson, the oldest of the Watson family of Mardan. Gordon was a kind, friendly, happy man. My brother Tom and I used to get a ride on the back of the truck as we got older, to stay with our Uncle Frank and Auntie Madge Lester.

The cows were joined with the bull in the summer time, timed to calve in the early spring, when fresh grass grew to maintain milk supply. They were grazed for a while each day on half grown crops of oats, the oats were then let grow on to make hay about Christmas time. Maize, rape and millett were sown in the spring, to provide green feed for the cows as the grass seeded and dried off.

In March or April, the cows began to be milked only once a day, selectively, according to when they were due to calve. They ceased to give milk within a week or two and were turned out to rest. The maize grew up to nearly two metres tall in the virgin land. It was cut with a fern hook, dropped in heaps, loaded on to a sledge, taken to the shed and cut into chaff in the chaff-cutter to be fed to the cows in a manger in front of the bails. The oat crops were harvested with a reaper and binder, usually by contractor Bill Jordan. Neighbours, usually Steeles, used to help with the harvest, then Dad would help them in turn.

Mother used to serve midday dinner to all of them, also afternoon tea. She used to make big scones - as big as a bread and butter plate, lashed with butter and jam - and a billy of tea, which we would take to the men in the paddock. There were pigs on the farm. Two or three breeding sows were kept in a small paddock, joined with a boar also kept. Dad was keen on his pigs and used to endeavour to afford purebred "Large Whites" to fatten to bacon size. The sows and boar were fed a little skim milk, supplemented by reject potatoes, stalks of maize and grass roots from rooting in the paddock

When weaned from their mother, the young "porkers" were locked in a small yard with a shed to grow on, then later moved to a small sty to fatten. Pollard, a by-product from flour mills, was stirred into the skim milk with a stick, to hasten fattening. My early memories were of Dad yoking two draft horses in the four-wheeled wagon, loading the fat pigs under a net and driving the wagon to Leongatha to market. He used to take a bucket to dip water from the Tarwin River (half way) to pour over the pigs if it was a hot day, and give the horses a drink. Later, he used to pay neighbour George Gray five shillings to take the pigs to market.

There were very few changes in methods of farming, or methods of doing anything in fact, in those days. Those procedures above are from my own memory, but I know it was the same years before.

Chapter 3

My Memories

My earliest memories are of when I was about four years old. My brother Tom (two years older) and I were each given a wagon with steel wheels, a timber floor and galvanized iron sides. They had a wooden pole with a tee-piece at the end to pull them by. We were not allowed to ride in them, but we played with them a great deal, and they were especially used to cart fire-wood from the wood heap to the back door for the stove, also for the open fire in the dining-room when required.

I used to be fascinated to watch Dad cut firewood. A log (a fallen gum tree) perhaps half a metre thick and five metres long would have been dragged from the paddock to the wood heap by two horses, attached by a thick chain, (formerly the chain that linked bullock yokes to the wagon). Dad would chop a "V" out of the log, then with the axe split wood the thickness of the "V" along to the end. The split off spar was then chopped into lengths about the size of the stove fire-box.

He often used to complain about the amount of wood burnt, especially when Mother's sister, Aunty Vic, was staying with us - she used to stoke the fire to almost red hot all day. He also used to complain to Mother about the amount of cream dipped out of the cans for house use when Auntie Vic was there. He would say "Is she having a bath in cream?".

Auntie Vic was the only member of the Myers family who never married. She trained as a nurse at the Ballarat Hospital and was an Army nurse towards the end of WW1. She devoted her whole life, first to her parents until they died, then to her brothers and sisters and their families. She moved from one to the other, giving care and qualified attention whenever there was an illness, injury or a new baby. She was strict with all of the nephews and nieces, and used to give us terrible treatments (castor oil etc) when we were sick, sometimes even if we were not sick, and it was not until I was much older that I realised what a heart of gold she had. She used to "bully" Mother - probably because Mother was much younger.

Our house, whilst being one of the newer ones of the district, was fairly basic in equipment. There was the usual large kitchen with a porcelain sink in one corner, surrounded by a wooden draining board, supplied with one cold water tap. Another corner of the kitchen was walled off as a pantry with shelves and a metre square cellar, accessed by lifting a trap door in the floor. The cellar kept food cool as well as providing residence for plagues of ants from time to time, and cockroaches. In the summer, Mother would make junket and set it in the cellar for us when we came home from school.

The walls were of vertical Baltic lining boards up to a dado a metre and a half from the floor, then horizontal lining boards. There was a large dining lounge room with leather arm chairs and couch, also a dining suite. This room had

plaster lining with cover strips. The two bedrooms were lined with wallpaper pasted on to hessian. On windy nights the wallpaper used to move and whisper as the wind blew through the weatherboard joins. The bathroom had a wooden bench around the basin and a bath on legs.

One of the worst jobs as boys was to have to clean the bath with kerosene - it used to develop tidemarks quicker in the summer time when there was less water and more bodies bathed in it per 10 cm of water. Like all families in those days, bath was a ritual on Saturday nights only. On weeknights we sat on a stool on the verandah, with our feet in a dish to wash hands, face, feet and especially knees, before tea. There were often fleas around the sheds and dog kennels. When they were bad, Dad would undress and shake his clothes over the bath so the fleas could be caught and cracked between his thumbnails.

On Sunday nights in the winter, we would have a fire in the lounge room, Otherwise we would sit in the kitchen, in front of the stove if it was cold. The Aladdin Lamp (a fancy affair with a mantle, which burned kerosene) was put on the table behind Dad so he could read the paper. There were three or four candles to take to the bedroom; Mother and Dad had a small kerosene lamp that was carried around.

When the Test cricket was on in England, Tom and I were allowed to sit up late to listen on the battery wireless in the lounge room. Dad would stoke up his pipe, using tobacco (Havelock) that he would cut into shreds from a "plug".

Occasionally, Mother would take us to Melbourne on the train. We would travel to Caulfield Station, then catch a tram to Elsternwick to stay with Aunties Lal and Annie. The train trip used to take about three hours - taking on cans of milk and all sorts of farm produce at stations, many of which don't exist today. It was a steam train, of course, and the smell of the smoke recalls lots of memories if ever I am in the presence of one. I can recall saving some pennies in a gramophone needle tin for one trip, but when we got on the tram, Mother had to use them for fares as all she had was one of Dad's cheques to be cashed at the shop.

The shop fascinated us. It was on the acute angled corner of Cochrane and Ebdon Streets - the walls were the street frontage - and the building angled like the street corner. The shop was small, with the door at the point of the corner. It had a baltic timber floor which Auntie Lal used to scrub clean and almost white. The shop had a beautiful smell, I guess of sweet things and spices. The Ebdon Street wall was almost all taken up, floor to ceiling, with biscuits, in tins about 20 cm square and 30 cm high. They included Chocolate Royals and all sorts of iced biscuits. Auntie Annie would take a plate into the shop and load it with biscuits for afternoon tea.

Auntie Lal used to buy large cheeses for sale. When customers asked for a piece of cheese, she would take the large block from under a muslin cloth, put it on a scrubbed board with a length of fine wire - one end fastened to the board, and a wooden handle on the other. She would then pull the wire down,

cutting the cheese where required. She bought sugar by the bag of about 35Kg and would spend a lot of time weighing it out to 500-gram bags for sale.

The breakfast cereals were kept on the very top shelves near the ceiling and there was a light ladder to climb to get them down. The customers were almost all people who lived nearby and were all well known. They came to the back door if the shop was closed and poor old Lal would interrupt her meals to tramp to the shop and back to get some small item.

The lounge room was the first room behind the shop, and often the floor was covered by half unpacked boxes of groceries. Lal used to bring money into the lounge and even into the breakfast room at the rear to be counted when she had time. We never touched any, but were fascinated to see it lying around - there was never any money in evidence at our home.

The bath heater stand, which now stands in the 9 Aylmer Street sunroom, used to stand at the back door for the baker to leave loaves of bread for sale in the shop. There was a gas bath heater in the tiny bathroom - it used to frighten us when Auntie Annie would light it - I imagine she used to have the gas on too long before striking the match because it used to let out blue flames with a loud bang. There was a small, narrow back yard, with a small shed for the delivery bike etc and a narrow garden which gave Auntie Annie great joy. She collected cuttings from everywhere she went with the result that every square inch of the garden produced a plant.

The back (or side) gate opened on to Cochrane Street. It was sad in about 1975 when first Auntie Annie and shortly after, Auntie Lal, became unable to carry on and moved into a Nursing Home where they subsequently died within a few months of each other.

Sometime in the late thirties, Dad had an extension built to the north side of the house at "Strathaven". A kitchenette was built, also a cement verandah and a bedroom for Tom and me, and later for John. The pantry was removed to provide access.

The toilet was, of course, not sewered and located twenty metres away near a large oak tree, which the chooks used to roost in. Sometimes as she came up from helping with the milking, Mother would say "I think we will have a chook for tea". She would pick out one that was not laying (by the lack of red in her comb), and we would catch it. I would hold it while Tom chopped off its head, then we would pluck it in a dish of hot water, and it would be in the pot with a minimum of delay. Similarly, if we had been rabbiting, we would have a rabbit for tea. We learned at an early age to skin a rabbit. We would stretch the skins over a piece of fencing wire to dry and subsequently sell to the skin buyer.

I can recall my first day at school. It would have been in 1932 when I was six years old. I went for the afternoon only, and was sat in a desk by the sewing mistress Miss Lena Richards, the middle aged sister of Bert Richards, a migrant from Bath, England, whose children attended school with us. Miss

Richards was a Sewing Mistress, an untrained person who taught the "Three R's" to grade one and sewing to all grades. She used to ride to school on a tall old horse that had a permanent limp.

I think, at first Tom and I walked to school (about 3 KM) but it was not long before Dad bought a mature aged white pony called Mona. I have not forgotten my first ride. Mona took off as soon as Dad let her head go, and I panicked and either fell or jumped off. I was, of course, put straight back on.

The attendance at State School No 3166, Mardan South varied from low twenties to mid thirties. One teacher taught all grades with the assistance of a sewing mistress, all in the one large schoolroom. On Monday mornings when we lined up in the playground, we would recite a pledge of loyalty to King and Country, salute the flag and sing the then National Anthem - "God Save the King". First lessons every morning were spelling, mental arithmetic (we were asked questions and had to write down the answers after making mental calculations), and written arithmetic.

Other subjects were nature study, history, geography (my favourite), health, drawing and grammar. We were taught singing - the words of new songs would be written on the blackboard. Most of the kids had good singing voices in those days. In the wintertime, every family would bring a bottle of milk to school. It would be poured into a kerosene tin and heated on the hob of the open fireplace, cocoa and sugar added for us to drink at playtime. I well remember one day, some parent mistakenly poured the milk into a bottle which had contained kerosene kept to light the kitchen stove. The cocoa was undrinkable - we never found who was the culprit. Two of the biggest boys were given the job of digging holes and emptying the "dunny cans" every Friday. They were paid, I think, a shilling (ten cents) each for this contract.

The teachers of those days taught sport as part of their duties. There was a dirt cricket pitch behind the school building which was used every playtime in the summer. In winter we kicked a football near the cricket pitch at morning play, and played matches in the horsepaddock at lunch time, even though the ground was on the side of a hill and there would be only about ten on each team. Rounders was another game played.

On Sundays, Tom and I would ride Mona to Sunday School, another 3 KM on past the school. When we got as far as the school, Mona would "jib" (walk only backwards). Tom and I would jump off her, then I would hold the bridle while Tom switched her around me in circles with a branch from an apple tree. We would then lead her to the mounting stump in front of the school, get back on her and she would trot obediently on to Sunday School.

We were most fortunate in our Sunday School education. When the new Church was built in 1934, a Sunday School was established by Mrs Les Miller. They lived on the highest point of Mardan South, near the Nicholls Road - Loves Lane junction. Mrs Miller was formerly Alice Rosling, a school friend of our Mother. She had school teacher skills and was well informed on the Church of England. We learned many Sunday School songs, but, more

importantly, we learned not only the Catechism, but also the Creed and the Ten Commandments, and had expert instruction in Bible Study. There is no doubt that, in addition to the influence of my parents, Auntie Annie Morter (who would have had me an ordained priest) and Auntie Vic Myers, Alice Miller's presentation to me of a religious background resulted in me (sinner tho I am) remaining an adherent to my Church.

Prior to us going to Sunday School, we used to go (not every Sunday) to Church in the buggy (four wheels, iron tyres, leaf springs, and a leather seat, pulled by Jess, a half-draft kept for that purpose, but occasionally ridden by Dad). Tom and I sat on a cartridge case at Mother and Dad's feet. Sister Alice, on arrival, was nursed by Mother. Church up to 1934 was held in the Mardan Hall, a Communion Table was set up in front of the stage, Marion Coulter, later Marion Smallman played the piano for the Hymns. The building of the Church on Dick Coulter's property opposite the hall, is described in "They Were Not Featherbed Men" (Page 132).

We were allowed to go to the working bees held to lay the foundation for the Church building. The building site gave a magnificent view southwards - over Wilsons Promontory almost to the sea but unfortunately, when we visited it recently, the view was completely obscured by trees. At some stage, I think in about 1939, Mother began to play the organ at the Church. It was really a harmonium, which had bellows driven by pedals, donated, I think, by the Coulter family. Mother played for many years, often when she was really not well enough to do so. We used to stand around the piano on Saturday nights and sing as Mother practised the hymns for Sunday. After the war, German pianos were in great demand, and Mother sold hers for something like for hundred pounds, a lot of money in those days.

As we grew old enough to set off on our own, Tom and I used to visit neighbours on Saturdays, to play with other kids and to enjoy a sumptuous afternoon tea. We would go to Hawkers, (Alan was only a little bloke, but mad on motor cars even then) to play with Joan, Jim, Stan and Ruth, (Ruth died when about 9 years old, sad for us all), also Roy, Les and Ivan Matthies to Frank and Ivan Gray, and to Reg, Dave and Rosie Jackson, who lived at the end of Kuhne's Road.

Tom and I had ferrets and a day of much enjoyment was to go ferreting with the neighbouring kids - including Jack and Bob O'Malley. There would be say, six boys, a dozen ferrets and many dogs. Some of the large rabbit warrens on McKinnin's property had up to six outlets and with so many ferrets there would be rabbits bolting into nets everywhere. Eventually there would be a dogfight and the rule was for each boy to grab the tail of his dog and pull. Much snarling of dogs, hair flying and laughter.

Other highlights were stays of a few days at Lesters as mentioned above. It was a big farm, with red dirt which fascinated me, lots of interesting farm implements, a tiny separator in a dairy next to the laundry, a wool shed, a windmill and so many things we didn't have. They had a car (first a Rover Tourer then a Buick) and sometimes we would get to go to Leongatha in it,

shopping or to Church. Frank and Mary were considerably older than us, but they gave us a good time. Auntie Madge and Uncle Frank were kind to us. Uncle Frank always seemed old to us (probably because he wore a moustache). When we were small, he used to play his accordion for us to play musical chairs. The accordion found its way to my home and it is now a most valued possession. Young Frank taught me to play the mouthorgan and used to give me his old ones.

Mary had an old pony named Billy and she used to visit us, with her saddle, something else we would have loved to have had, instead of a jute bag held on by a strap around Mona's belly. We visited other adult neighbours sometimes, to take some peas Dad had grown, to pick berries or apples they had, or deliver a message. Mother would warn us to be polite and to say "thankyou" when given a piece of cake, as we always were.

Trips to Leongatha were rare, by buggy in the earlier days, then with Tom Gray, who used to go every week, in an obscurely named small English tourer. The buggy trip took a long time. The horse would have to be unyoked, given a drink and tied in a stall at the rear of the old Co-op Store with chaff brought with us. Our bread and butter and many other items were delivered in the empty cream cans, Dad always killed lambs for meat so, whilst our meals were monotonous, we did not need to shop regularly.

The killing of the sheep was quite a lengthy business. First, Tom and I had to yard the sheep. They knew that every time they were yarded there was one less turned back out to the paddock so they took every opportunity to break away as they were driven up to the gate. Having been yarded they were left to settle before Dad selected one and cut its throat. After having been left for a while to bleed, Dad began the skinning with a sharp butchers knife. A double sided butcher's hook was then hooked in the sinews of the back legs and the carcass was pulled up to a branch of the blackwood tree by a rope through a pulley. A clean lined bag was used to cover the sheep then it was left a day or so to harden before being sawn down the back bone and each half butchered as was required.

Sugar was bought by the 70 pound bag, flour also by the bag. We always had home grown potatoes, but not many other home grown vegetables. Dad used to give Don Chalmers a bag of potatoes for a bag of onions. Mother made heaps of jam, mostly plum and pear, the latter of which I hated.

We had a number of fruit trees, apple, plum, pear, quince (which I also hated) mulberry, apricot and some gooseberries, strawberries and loganberries, none of which were well tended. The jam was bottled in used bottles that originally had a neck. The operation of removing the necks from bottles was pretty exciting to us. A steel rod with a ring at the end was heated in the stove. When real hot, it would be pressed down over the neck of the bottle. There would be cracking noises, then the top of the bottle would be dipped into the wash-up dish full of cold water. The neck would drop off the bottle, converting it into a jam jar. When there was a great lot of jam, usually plum or pear, it would be put into large brown demijohns and kept in the cellar that was under

the kitchen floor. The cellar was often infested with ants and cockroaches, upon which Mother continually waged war.

Whenever we went to town, Mother would bring home sausages for tea and they were considered a great treat after mutton and, quite often, rabbit. Mother was quite an economiser and improviser and like most others, a good cook. She made Hypol, a horrible mixture containing cod-liver oil, which we had to have a spoonful of each day in the winter to ward off colds. She made soap for the laundry, using mutton fat that was poured into a kerosene tin when meat was cooked. The fat had to be well covered so the rats wouldn't eat it when stored in the laundry. We had a dish of mutton fat, melted on the side of the stove every morning to be brushed onto our boots, to preserve the leather and keep it waterproof. I used to envy the kids at school with shiny boots.

Mother used to make some of our clothes, mainly trousers. We also wore a number of garments handed on by relatives. Mother always seemed to be on the lookout for things like that, and didn't mind asking for something someone did not seem to need any more and we could make use of. I guess all of these economies helped my parents to carry on, and to meet payments on the farm.

The Great Depression was at its height when I was four, and sister Alice was born then so, whilst we never went without plenty of good (if monotonous) food, there was no money for any extras. This was accentuated by the fact that most of the neighbours were on land selected by them or their parents – so they were, I suppose, debt free, had a motor vehicle and many other things we didn't have.

A great boon was the Shire's action in having the telephone connected to the home of every returned soldier. We were one of four on a party line, so Mother could ring three neighbours for free. Dad used to complain about the size of the phone bill and it was never used needlessly.

School was OK. I was reasonably interested in the work at primary school and progressed reasonably well. We played cricket on a pitch behind the school and football in the horse-paddock. Hide and seek and cops and robbers were popular.

Saturdays were though, the good days. After milking, which we always helped with in some ways - more each year as we became older, we joined in with whatever Dad was doing. In the summer, it would be hay-making - following the mower and watching the grass fall behind it, riding on the sledge-loads of hay to be stacked, watching the reaper and binder spit out the sheaves of hay, bound with twine and wondering how the machine tied the knot. Riding on the loads of sheaves. Driving the old, bossy cows away from the trough, so the heifers could get a drink. Watching Dad draw water from the covered well at the back of the house, with a rope on a kerosene tin, for the horses and the bull, who drank from an old cream can tied to a fence post. Admiring a snake that Dad had killed near the creek when he was getting in the cows.

Autumn was clearing time - fun to help light fires to burn logs, try to push over tree-ferns, and to watch Dad plough with a single-furrow, mould-board plough pulled by two horses. The plough would polish the damp, rich soil, making it shine in the furrow, and worms would wriggle out.

Winter was the time for digging out rabbit burrows and was a lot of fun. It was also the time when hay was chaffed, shovelled into a large space in front of the cow bails and fed to each cow as she was milked. Bracken ferns were cut at that time of the year and fences were erected or repaired to render them rabbit proof. The farm on the west side was neglected and, with a torch at night, hundreds of rabbits could be seen running, scampering and feeding on the little grass that there was.

As we grew older, we participated more and more in all these activities. In the late thirties, until such time as we acquired electricity connection and milking machines, we would milk eight cows by hand before school and again at night. Some of the cows were difficult to milk, and we had to take it in turns to milk them.

There were, from time to time, functions at the Mardan Hall - a concert, a dance, a Church fete or a visit by a Church Missioner. The latter were good. The Missioner would set up his carbide projector and show slides (printed on glass) on a screen. Before electricity was connected to the hall, there was a gas lighting system. A heavy weight, suspended from a tower similar to that of a windmill, was wound to the top to force kerosene through pipes to lamps in the hall. Under pressure the kerosene would be converted to gas to burn on cotton mantles - giving a soft, white light.

At the dances and balls at the hall, the making of coffee was a bit of a ritual. Very few people drank coffee regularly in those days. Milk was heated in kerosene tins over the open fireplace in the hall kitchen, coffee grounds were mixed as a concentrate in a flour bag before being mixed in the hot milk. People would first take cups to everyone seated around the hall, the cups in clothes baskets. Tea and coffee was then brought around in kettles and large jugs and the cups filled. There was always a mountain of food - sandwiches and lots of cakes, especially sponges.

There was usually a ball at the hall on Cup Eve and New Years Eve. Often there was organised a busload of dancers from Leongatha. Pranks were often perpetrated outside the hall on those occasions. It was not uncommon for someone to find at home time that their horse had been unharnessed from their buggy or jinker and yoked again with the horse back to front in the shafts, facing the conveyance. Ernie Matthies had a model T Ford truck, the performance of which he loved to brag about. One night it was connected by wire to the picket fence. Ernie was urged to take off with great power and removed a considerable amount of fencing as he left.

It was in 1939 that I suffered an accident with a young pony Dad had bought for us. I was riding her to Sunday School and Alice was with me, riding an old black horse called Lil. My pony, while cantering, jumped sideways when she

saw a snake on the side of the road. I fell off her but held on to the bridle, as Dad had told me never to let her go, or she would continually try to throw me to get away. Being frightened, she kicked me a number of times - smashed a watch in my shirt pocket, broke four ribs, crushed my left lung and ruptured my spleen.

We both rode old Lil part of the way home, until Dave Donaldson, who worked for us, came and piggybacked me the rest of the way. I was taken to hospital, first at Leongatha, then to the Bethesda Hospital in Richmond, where I was operated on, the spleen removed and I spent four weeks recovering. Throughout that time, Mother's sister Auntie Al Plummer of Essendon, visited me almost daily and was very good to me. On the doctor's recommendation, I spent a month with Auntie Jean and Uncle Norman Bissett at Serpentine, a drier climate for the good of my lungs.

The years 1938 to 1940 were eventful. As well as electricity, we had a well dug, with a pump to provide stock water and water to the shed and garden. War broke out and Dave Donaldson, who had been with us for seven years and was in the local Militia, enlisted in the A.I.F. Dave was six years in the Army, went to the Middle East, Greece, Crete then New Guinea, but came back an alcoholic. He worked for us for a while, then at other places around the district, but was never the same person again.

Tom went to High School, and we bought our first motor vehicle - a 1936 model Chevrolet Utility. This was very exciting - Alan Lester taught Dad to drive, after which we often went for long drives. Tom made a seat to fit in the back of the ute for we three, John (born 1936) in the front with Mother and Dad. We drove to places like Mirboo, Foster, Buffalo and Dollar, always with a picnic lunch.

There were many bush and grass fires in 1939 - in the ranges (Noojee was completely destroyed except for the pub) and a grass fire burned over much of Mardan South. Driven by a hot north wind, it destroyed Tom Coulter's home, and moved just north and east of Strathaven. All the locals fought it and were successful in saving a number of other houses and sheds. The fire is described in "They Were Not Featherbed Men".

In 1940 I went to High School at Leongatha. Roy Matthies and I boarded with Mrs McKinnon, near the Police Station. We rode our bikes to school on Monday mornings and rode home after school on Fridays. Mrs McKinnon was the Mother of Daisy Bacon, who was a teacher at the school when John and Stephenie attended there. The school had an attendance of about 120 in those days. It was headed by a deputy principal after the retirement of Arthur Mesley and was poorly administered. There was a shortage of teachers, thousands having joined the Army.

I did not progress well, especially in the second year, and failed to pass the external examination then called Intermediate - in fact, probably due to the low ebb of the school in general, there was only one student of the class of about thirty who passed. I played tennis and enjoyed it - I used to play with

Keith Wightman on the public courts after school, but did not excel at football and cricket. At that time I was resolved to be a farmer and looked forward all the week to being at home, sometimes skipping sport on Friday afternoons to set off early for home.

In November 1941, the old Sports Master, Ivan Nocolas, told me to go up to the State Savings Bank, together with four other boys of my Form. Ivan used to drink at Bairs Hotel with the Bank Manager - Cyril Ball. We were told to complete an application for appointment to the staff of the Bank. My parents were delighted at the prospect, they did not want me to come home on the farm for two reasons - that Dad thought the farm would not support another income, and that my injury and operation might result in me not being fit for manual work.

Dad was a very independent person and asked favours of no one, but in this instance he went to his A.N.Z. Bank Manager Fred Harvey, asking that Fred recommend me to Cyril Ball. Possibly as a result of this, I was duly appointed. At no time was I asked by anyone if I wanted to work in the Bank.

After a medical exam, and cousin Alan Lester signing a guarantee that I would not steal money, I commenced work on 2nd January 1942, coached by Lionel Couper, who was waiting to be called for service in the R.A.A.F.

January 2 was a Monday, and the first time that, due to the war, the first day of the year was not a public holiday. It was also the first week that Banks were not to open on Friday nights (our Bank used to open from 7pm until 8.30pm to receive deposit only). My junior clerk duties included getting the mail from the Post Office, making ink from powder on Mondays, changing the blotting paper in the public portion, sand papering the nibs to last a little longer to conserve steel for the war effort, turning unsealed envelopes from the inward mail inside out to conserve paper for the war effort, postages, recording transactions on the correct sheets, recording cheques lodged as deposits and lodging them at the Bank of Australasia at the end of the day.

Manager Cyril Ball taught me with patient discipline, and I respected him greatly, as I did Robert Boon, the teller. Helen Harvey, daughter to the above-mentioned Fred Harvey, commenced work with me. She is now Helen Spencer, wife of Frank. My pay was One pound thirteen shillings and ninepence per fortnight, (Ninety pounds per annum) from which I paid One pound five shilling board.

Wartime was a sad time, however. The vacancy that I filled was the enlistment of Max Taylor in the R.A.A.F. He used to visit the Bank when on leave, the final visit being when he "passed out" (completing his flying training) being granted a commission for being one of the three top graduates. Max was posted as a Pathfinder, flying a Spitfire over German targets and dropping flares to guide the bombers. He went missing not long after arriving in England and was never heard of again.

A number of Leongatha men had been killed in the Japanese invasion of

Rabaul in New Guinea, including Tom Sangster, father of Tommy - a school friend. Cyril Ball's oldest son was missing in Amboyna when I joined the Bank. Cyril used to regularly give me letters to post to his son, then they would be returned "addressee unable to be traced". I used to hate to have to hand them to Cyril. His second son, John was a navigator in the R.A.A.F. also lost over Germany. The youngest son Ray, with whom I went to school joined the Navy but thankfully, was spared. Mardan neighbours were being killed at the war - Ron Watson, a militiaman in New Guinea and Bert Kuhne, also in New Guinea, to name two.

There was an ongoing round of "send offs". A local dance was held to farewell a soldier, sailor or airman when he was home on final leave. There would be speeches and presentation of a gift from the community. These events provided a social life for young people like me. A group of people from the Banks, including Cyril Ball, had formed a band and provided music for a lot of these dances. There were always a few men (and girls) in uniform around the town - on leave.

I left Mrs McKinnons to go to board at 110 McCartin Street, Leongatha at Gostelow's boarding house. It was about 10 rooms, a beautiful old Federation house with eight boarders, run by old Mrs Gostelow and her daughter Elsie. Most of the boarders were in Banks and it was a good social life. Butter rationing was still on so each one of us sat at the same place at the long table with our own quarter pound of butter in front of us. One of the boarders - Tony Loundes, a baker, established a relationship, and later married Elsie. Tony was a little bloke and Elsie was big, and at night we would see Elsie sitting by the kitchen stove with Tony on her knee.

Dances were the entertainment in those days and Bob Hancock (who worked at Post Office), Cliff Spargo, (who worked with Gippsland and Northern), and I used to ride our bikes to some of the dances in surrounding country halls. Some nights I would sleep at the Post Office when Bob was on the overnight exchange. Some evenings I would help Cliff balance the cash at the G. & N. office after a clearing sale, Cliff would claim twice the overtime and give me half. When we got short of money we would give what we had to Bob and he would invest it at the pool table and double it by winning. The poor bloke died of Leukaemia a couple of years later.

A plane spotting station was established in Leongatha, on the site of the present Anglican Church. It was manned night and day to identify and report by phone any aircraft seen overhead, I manned a weekly two hour shift on this procedure. I joined the Air Training Corps, to prepare for Air Force training between the ages of 16 and 18. This was good, we wore a uniform, trained in navigation, electronics, did drill and Phys Ed. (instructed by an ex British Army Sergeant) and had trips to Air Force bases. I did a flight in a Lockheed Electra bomber from Essendon. It was natural, therefore, for me to go to Melbourne to enlist in the R.A.A.F. on the day after my eighteenth birthday - 29.9.42.

I was called up a few weeks later and travelled from Melbourne by train to the Shepparton Showgrounds - the large initial training camp. It was about two

months of drill, drill, and drill, together with rifle maintenance and shooting (old 303's from W.W.1), bayonet training and practice, grenade throwing, gas mask orientation, route marches out in the bush.

It was hot (summer) and we became fit and tanned. We had leave on Saturday afternoons and part of Sundays, and at one stage, were given leave to help local fruit growers to pick apricots - hot, difficult work but earned some extra money. After a "Passing Out Parade" on a stinking hot day, at which a number of the men literally passed out and fainted, before the C.O. and other "Brass" of the station. It was then back to Melbourne for entrainment to Adelaide. We had an evening meal on the Ballarat Station platform and breakfast at Murray Bridge, then to 4STT, an Airforce base in the old Exhibition Building in North Terrace, Adelaide. From the base, we marched each day through to city to classrooms in city buildings for classes. A drummer drummed the march, and we saluted to the War Memorial in King William Street on the way, roared at continually by a drill sergeant.

There were no new Air Crew being trained at that late stage of the war, and I was drafted to train as a clerk. Weekends were good in Adelaide - a few of us spent a lot of days at Glenelg Beach (lots of memories when we went back there recently). Enjoyed the Adelaide Gardens on the hot weekend evenings.

They must have decided they had enough clerks after a few months and sent us back to the Melbourne Showgrounds R.A.A.F. Base 1ES to train as Wireless Telegraphist Operators. We had fairly intense training in Morse Code receiving and transmitting together with wireless technics. Eventually passed out as a Aircraftsman 1 - W/T Operator ready to go to war. Not to be for me however, I contracted measles at the final stages of the course, lost time in Hospital on the base and was put back to the next course.

The originals with whom I trained were posted to Morotai, one of the final stages of the Pacific War, and came home a few months later, the war having ended, and enjoyed full returned servicemens privileges. Consequently, I was in Melbourne for the celebrations of the Armistice, having spent some time riding a bike around the showgrounds at night, stoking boilers at shower stations, then posted as a records clerk in Temple Court, Collins Street, City.

From that posting until discharge I lived at a Boarding House in St Kilda. It was a pretty grim time - there was never enough money to pay board, fares to and from Melbourne and meals. Our entertainment was derived from going to the service clubs in the city where there were often free tickets to dances at the Masonic Hall, City, Trocadero St Kilda Road, Leggetts Prahran, Railways Institute City and Earls Court St Kilda. On Sunday nights we would be given free entry to the "Aspro Show", which was broadcast over 3UZ, sponsored by Nicholas and featuring Bob Gibson and his orchestra.

We were on leave every weekend and most times I went to Aunties Lal and Annie at Elsternwick. The upside was that I was able to do my washing and ironing there and have free meals, the downside was staying home on Saturday nights and although I didn't mind it too much, going to St Clements

with Auntie Annie on Sunday and being "shown off" to all her old friends. Uncle Fred was fairly newly married to his second wife, Gwen in those days and they often came to Cochrane Street for Sunday lunch. When cousin Alf (my age), now of Eaglehawk, was home from country school teaching, we would go to Elwood Beach on Sunday afternoons.

Some weekends, I would catch a train to Ballan to stay with the Chambers - Auntie Jessie (Mother's sister) and Uncle Bert, Margaret, Bon, Joan, Enid and Bob, a noisy, happy home - noisy mainly as everyone had to yell at Uncle Bert - deaf from gun blast in France. A wonderful, gentle man who idolised Jessie, kept a cow and chooks and grew vegetables. Sometimes there would be a Saturday night dance at Ballan. Sometimes we would go to Ballarat and walk the gardens at Wendouree, other times we would go to the pictures. Another cousin Donald Bissett of Serpentine - now of Croydon, would also be there. He showed me how to starch and iron my summer khaki uniform to look "real cool".

On Sunday night, Bob would walk with me out on to the highway, then Main Street, Ballan, and I would eventually get a ride back to Melbourne. Once it was in the dickey seat (open) at the back of a single seater car, another time it was on the back of a tray truck, hanging on to a rope so as not to fall off the tray, and so freezing cold as only that country can be, that when he dropped me off somewhere in Ascot Vale, I couldn't stand. I wonder now how I managed to find transport to get back to St Kilda. The uniform ensured me a ride. Nearly everyone had a son, nephew, brother etc overseas and would help anyone in the services.

I was discharged from the R.A.A.F. in about February 1946, and I started back at Leongatha Branch of the Bank shortly after. Lesters had bought a house in Koonwarra Road and at first I boarded there with Auntie Madge Lester and Auntie Vic Myers. They moved back to Koorooman some time later so I took up residence again at Gostelows until a few months later when I bought a motor bike from Alan Hyde of Koorooman so I could travel into work from "Strathaven". It was called an OK Supreme 250 CC (an English bike, as they all were post-war except for a few Harley Davidsons ex Army).

It was good to be living at home again. Whilst I had good waterproof gear, including ex-Air Force gloves and helmet, riding in the wet and cold was pretty uncomfortable. Later I bought a 350 Ariel, 1939 model, a very nice bike, well equipped and comfortable to ride. I would be home from work at about 4.30 pm. Sometimes I would go to the shed to help with the milking, especially at harvest time or when Tom was digging potatoes. Weekend work like throwing bails of hay on to a truck or loading bags of potatoes were hard for me because I was not used to that kind of muscle exertion and used to become stiff and sore.

For a number of years, even well after I was married, I persisted in asking my parents if I could live and work on the farm. I used to pore over advertisements for kit homes and plan where I would erect one on the farm.

My brother Tom took more of the responsibility of the farming as he got older. In about 1948 he was married to Hilda Cull, who then worked as a housemaid at Coulters farm. Dad had a small house built for them - between the house and the milking shed. I think their first three children - Rosemary, Lynette and Philip, were born whilst they lived there, prior to their purchase of a kit house and its erection up the track towards the road.

Dad took his place in community affairs – He was secretary of the local hall committee for many years and on the Church Vestry. It was he who organised the construction of a WW2 Honour Roll in the hall and the function for its unveiling. Everyone of the district who served in the armed forces (including me) is named on the roll. I think it was during the fifties that he accepted nomination as a director of the board of the Leongatha Butter Factory Co-operative. It was a role he took very seriously, and served for a number of decades, eventually becoming Chairman of Directors. It involved a monthly meeting in Melbourne. Tom would drive him to Leongatha to the train and he would stay a night with his sisters at Elsternwick - an arrangement in which they took great delight.

I used my motorbike to go out at nights and weekends. I played badminton at the Mardan Hall for a while but ballroom dancing was my favoured outing. Some Saturday nights I would go with my third cousin Ken Hulls and others to a large dance hall in Wonthaggi with a big band. Some of the boys would walk girls home before we set off for home, so it was a late night, and when we got to Hull's place, Ken would cook eggs and bacon for us, then I would ride my bike home at about 4 am.

There were balls held in the Leongatha Memorial Hall and most outlying districts. Monday night dances were held in the Parish Hall and Catholic Hall at Leongatha. Looking back, they were good days - all of the people attending these functions were known to each other, most went to school together.

Concerts were held occasionally. My sister Alice had some singing training, had a good voice and sang at some of these performances. She used to sing "Mother Macree" and "The Girl in the Alice Blue Gown" among others. For one concert I was in a group of Mardan boys who dressed in veiled costumes and performed dances from "The Desert Song" produced by a local lady - Mary Morton. We took the concert to Dumbalk and other places.

Don Capuano was a Leongatha boy who was in my form at school. He worked at the Gippsland and Northern Co-op Co with Cliff Spargo, also with his sister Hazel Capuano. I was later to be best man when Cliff and Hazel (now of Korumburra) were married. Don was sent by his employer in about 1947 to Malaya to take some cows and a bull to assist establish a milking herd under some sort of foreign aid policy. His parents and all of us were so pleased for Don to have such an opportunity. He was a fine young bloke - a good sportsman, with a good future in the company. There was some communist rebel group active in Malaya at the time. The story was vague but the tragedy was that these rebels came upon Don when he was tending the cattle, tied him up to a tree and shot him. A sad event when there were such

hopes of peace after the war.

The time was to come that I met the lady of my life. One Wilma Millett of Leongatha South, petite of figure, long dark curls, dancing brown eyes, had been chosen as "Belle of The Ball" at a ball at Leongatha South. She was qualified to compete in the "Belle of Belles" at Traralgon some time later and invited me to be her partner. It was quite a trip in those days - we travelled with Ken Hulls and my sister Alice came with us. Wilma looked magnificent in a pink ball gown that she had made herself. There were about fifty girls competing from all over Gippsland. We paraded and danced in front of a panel of judges. We didn't win but I didn't care - I could hardly believe that I was partnering such a beautiful girl.

Wilma was the youngest daughter of Charles and Lilian Millett of Leongatha South. Charles was a Gallipoli veteran and he and Dad were well known to each other as fellow R.S.L. members. Lilian's brother, Bill Mewburn had accompanied Dad and Don Chalmers throughout their War Service. Bill met a sad death in a tram accident in the 1920s leaving a wife and two little boys - Bob and Don. Wilma and I were, therefore, not strangers to each other.

The romance blossomed, highly approved of by all parents. Alice had been at school with Wilma and they got on well with each other. I became good friends with Wilma's brother Stan and used to help him with the milking when visiting Wilma. Wilma was a teacher's aid at the Leongatha South Primary School and used to come in to Leongatha after school with the school principal and we would meet.

We continued to go dancing - at Koonwarra, Leongatha South, Mardan, Leongatha, and we used to go to balls at Hallston with Albert Dawson, a brother of Wilma's aunt, in their Buick sedan. On most Sundays, after going to Church with Mother and Dad, I would ride my motor bike to Milletts and stay for tea. Wilma's sister Glenda's boy friend Geoff Bethune was usually there. Mrs Millett would prepare a special meal and we had happy times on those evenings.

I think it was late in 1950 when the Bank transferred me to the Drouin Branch of the Bank. I boarded at the Family Hotel and took up Teller's duties under Manager Bill White, working with whom I was very unhappy. The fellowship with other boarders was very good. That was where I shared a room with Alan Markby, a close friend to today. Alan and I worked at night in the Drouin Cheese Factory, earning some extra money being pretty important to me at that stage.

We became engaged to be married at about the time of Wilma's twenty first birthday in 1950 and were married on 7th July 1951. The marriage took place at the old St Peters Church in Leongatha (prior to the new Church being built) and the reception was at the Woorayl Council Chambers. Wilma's brother Stan was best man, and my sister Alice was the bridesmaid. There were about sixty guests, mostly relatives of us both. I don't recall much of the wedding - I was nervous and seemed to have been in some kind of a dream. I

am sure, though, that it was a very happy wedding. We had hired a photographer from Wonthaggi, to take photos in a room in the Otago Hotel. He arrived without his spectacles, was unable to read his light meter, resulting in the photos being less than perfect. I remember making an extremely poor speech at the wedding.

We caught the late afternoon train to Melbourne and stayed for the first night of our honeymoon at the Alexandra Hotel in Spencer Street. It was to us a beautiful and luxurious hotel - a magnificent dining room where we had dinner and breakfast. My wedding day is still recalled as the greatest day of my life. I couldn't believe that such a girl wanted to be married to me. We spent the Sunday in Melbourne (went to the zoo) travelled to Warburton for a weeks stay at a guest house, then by train to Bendigo where we stayed for a week at the old City Family Hotel. Returning to Melbourne, we saw snow for the first time on the Woodend railway platform.

It was a great joy for us to set up our home in Drouin. With a staff loan I had, after Wilma coming to Drouin to look at some houses, we bought a two bedroom timber house at 20 Railway Avenue Drouin for two thousand three hundred pounds. The person who had it built had lived it in for only six months. It was on land sloping down from the frontage, and high off the ground at the back. There were blinds but no floor coverings. I lived on my own in the house for about four months before we were married. There were no concrete paths, front fence or garden. We selected a bedroom suite when in Melbourne but it was not delivered in time so we slept in my small single bed for the first three weeks or so.

We had no electric power (connection thereof was still delayed following war-time restrictions). A local trader Mr Bell who was known to Dad lent us a kerosene pressure lamp, we used candles, and had, of course a wood fire stove. The electric HWS not being workable, we heated water on the stove for baths. Using Hire Purchase for one item at a time, we gradually acquired a lounge suite, radio, fridge and later on a washing machine.

I had bought a kitchen table and four borer infested wooden chairs second hand from a bloke at Longwarry. It was a big day when we bought lino for the bathroom floor and a product called Feltex to cover the floor of the hallway. It was a blessing that Wilma had a most substantial "Glory Box" with all the linen, crockery etc we needed. Poor and happy was the order of the day. I had sold my car to pay the deposit on the house. We used to go for long walks on Sundays and catch the bus sometimes to Warragul to shop or go to the pictures. I spent a lot of time, before and after work, digging up and establishing our garden - I grew so many vegetables that we were able to sell some to the local fruiterer.

The neighbours over our back fence - Fred and Addie Thompson were very good to us. Their daughter Ada had also been recently married. They were great gardeners and gave us lots of cuttings etc. Mrs Thompson accompanied Wilma to Dr Hamp and introduced her when Wilma believed that she was pregnant. To our great delight, she proved to be so, and it was time to think

about buying baby clothes, bath, bassinet and all the necessary gear. I remember those months as being happy ones - having no car we went for long walks, especially on Sundays in fact, it was after one of those long walks that Wilma began her labour.

Mr Thompson drove Wilma to Warragul Hospital where John was born on 8th August 1952.

I hitch-hiked to Warragul after work to see them. I suppose words are not adequate to describe ones feelings on seeing ones child for the first time. I can remember being so proud of both Wilma and John and immediately making all sorts of plans for John's future. It seemed ages to wait until they came home. It was August and Wilma used to wheel John outside the front door to catch the occasional winter sunshine. I kept on getting my annual salary increments that, whilst being modest, allowed us to have the things that were necessary for a family. Our parents came to see John of course, and my Mother stayed for a few days to help Wilma.

Occasionally we used to travel with Laurie Wilson (of Mardan but who boarded at the hotel with me and was the Accountant at the Cheese Factory) to Leongatha on a Saturday afternoon and return on Sunday evening. I used to borrow the car from whichever parent we stayed with and we would visit the other parents on the Sunday morning. We both enjoyed those weekends very much. I would get old clothes on and be helping with the milking as soon as possible.

John was fond of his sustenance and Wilma was up feeding him during the night for many months. My working hours being fairly short in those days, I was able to help to look after him before and after work, and do the shopping.

My cousin Alf Morter was the Head Teacher of Athlone Primary School at that time. I often used to meet him after work on a Saturday, have a couple of beers at the hotel and take him home for lunch. He was most interested in John's progress and always respectful towards Wilma. Sometimes he would stay the night. He helped me paint the outside of our timber home. We became friends with the Smethurst family with whom Alf used to board. They used to invite us to stay for a weekend on the farm at Athlone.

I was unhappy at work in those days - no matter how I tried, I was unable to please or get along with the manager - Bill White. Bill was popular in the town but I had no regrets when he was transferred. I was the first teller at that branch and he seemed to resent my contact with the customers.

Stephenie was born on 15th May 1954 - when John was a year and nine months old. I remember feeling so blessed with now a son and a daughter that I used to fear that I was not deserving of such a family and feared we may have one taken from us. Stephenie had hair the colour of a new copper penny. She was a placid baby and slept a lot, especially if she was not well.

When Wilma became unable to breast feed her, Stephenie had difficulty in

digesting the cow's milk formula and would vomit after every feed. At that time, there was a relieving manager at the Bank and he persuaded me to buy a goat to provide milk for Stephenie. I built a goat and fowl shed in the back yard and we became the owners of Sally, a high producing Saanan goat. She used to be tethered during the day, mainly beside the railway line. Stephenie thrived on the goat's milk and there was enough for the entire household. We bred kids from Sally and kept her for quite a few years.

John didn't always appreciate all of the attention given to Stephenie but loved her all the same, often showing it with a bite on the toe or similar. Wilma made the clothes for the children and, as can be well imagined, they were beautifully dressed. It is good to remember the happy weekend days, working in the garden or walks with Stephenie now in the pram.

As we learned from our parents, we used to buy stoned fruit, ordered and delivered by rail from Shepparton, for preserving in Fowlers jars. Sometimes the fruit arrived in good condition, some years we would have to give over-ripe ones to the chooks, but we would finish with dozens of jars of fruit for the rest of the year. We made jam also, and used to call ourselves squirrels. We had to buy wood for the stove and for the open fire. We would get a "cord" of blocks about 40 cm long and I would split it and stack it under the house. By paying the plumber a little every fortnight, we had installed a kerosene water heater, which worked very well.

When Stephenie was only a few weeks old, I had the opportunity to buy a one-owner 1924 model Dodge Tourer - 2 years older than myself. It was in mint condition and we proudly loaded the kids in it and showed it off to our parents and families. It ran beautifully and had plenty of room - we even took the goat with us sometimes, standing in front of the back seat breathing on our necks. The new wheels allowed us to go on trips to Lang Lang beach, to Melbourne to visit friends and on holidays - one to Lakes Entrance, taking Wilma's Mum and my brother John with us. Shopping in Warragul was also possible, and visiting Glenda and her family in Warragul.

With ambition to have a bigger and better house, when Stephenie was about a year old, we sold our home and bought another two bedroom timber house at, I think, 210 Princes Highway, Drouin. It was on a larger block, owner builder, with a garage and a well-established garden on level land. It was a pleasant house, with three ducks, a fowl yard and concrete driveway and paths for the children to play and ride their pedal car and bicycle. The kitchen was larger, there was carpet in the hall, lounge room and bedrooms, built-in cupboards and wardrobe and a slow combustion room heater in the kitchen, which was great in the cold climate of Drouin. We had fruit trees and a passion fruit vine. It was further for me to walk to work (I rarely drove the car) but there was a milk bar close by.

Robert was born on 3rd April 1956. He had brown eyes like his Mother and darker hair than the other two. We were pretty busy then, with three children under four years old. One of my jobs was to bath them at night and it was always a lot of fun. Our parents took great delight in the children. We travelled

to Leongatha for the weekend quite often and the children loved to be on the respective farms.

Wilma's father used to call John, Jack and my Mother called Robert "Brownie" - brown eyes being rare in the Morter family. My Mother was a bit horrified at Stephenie's name but Dad liked it, saying that Stephenie was the name of his first girlfriend. The children stayed on the farms on a number of occasions. Later on, John and Stephenie attended Mardan South school with Tom's children while Wilma and I had a brief holiday. In the wintertime, travel home to Drouin in the old Dodge was a pretty cold trip. In the gale force winds in the Korumburra hills, wind would whistle in between the side curtains and the canvas hood. The kids would be asleep in the back under mountains of blankets and rugs.

In about 1958, we bought from Stillwells of Kew a 1937 Studebaker sedan, the same model as the one then owned by Wilma's father. It had done a lot of miles, but it was good to have a later model car, especially being a sedan.

In 1959, I visited Head Office whilst on holidays and was told by Branch Secretary Mr Edyvean to sell our home for a transfer to Melbourne. After some months, we sold the property to Mr & Mrs Brown (whom we used to meet at Church at Rye in later years), and bought a new house on the corner of Husband and Stephens Road, Forest Hill. Once again, we set about acquiring kitchen floor covering (we had by then a carpet square for the lounge room) and venetian blinds. In due course, we had installed a gas room heater, curtains and carpet for the lounge-dining room. Later, we had a sunroom built on the back of the house and a carport on the side. During school holidays we used to hire a TV for the children.

It was then that I had my first and only taste of Branch relieving. Upon moving to Nunawading, I was sent to Malvern Branch in Glenferrie Road. It was a large Branch - I worked on the withdrawal side and acted as paying teller at lunch times. When the paying teller ran short of notes, the receiving teller would throw bundles to him, the length of the office. After a few weeks, I had to travel out to Footscray to the Barkly Street office. This was a larger Branch again and quite a new experience for me. Once a week, a few of us would go by taxi to the meatworks and set up an office to cash pay cheques and receive deposits. We were supposed to cash cheques only upon identification of the payee, but there was no way we would refuse to oblige a large, fat slaughterman with blood dripping off him and a butcher's knife in his hand. After a couple of months I was appointed to Hawthorn Branch as teller and later on as an ungraded Accountant.

John and Stephenie went off to school at Vermont. I think they handled the transfer pretty well, Stephenie perhaps better than John. It was a fairly long walk for little kids that they were. Canterbury Road then had no footpaths - they walked a narrow track - past a poultry farm and a flower farm. Robert also started school there in due course.

The house at Husband Road, being new, had no garden or paths so it was a

lot of weekends of heavy work, mixing concrete, laying bricks, levelling the soil for lawns, carting filling etc. The garden came up pretty well, with a terraced front lawn and flowerbeds filled with cow manure from the farms.

Our neighbour opposite - Joe Fanning helped me finish the concrete paths. Joe was recently married to Maureen, was studying boiler making at the time and also busy establishing his property. They used to invite us over on Saturday nights and Joe and I used to drink a bottle of beer and watch Elliot Ness and "The Untouchables".

Joe and Maureen remain our special friends to this day. Highlights of our year are to meet in Melbourne in March and in Brisbane in August. We have met by chance at a service station at Mission Beach, Queensland, also in a rough caravan park at Coober Pedy (an opal mining town in Central Australia). In 1996, we arranged to meet at Tennant Creek, N.T. and spent the next nine weeks travelling in tandem with our respective caravans to Darwin, Katherine, down the west coast to Perth and across the Nullabor.

Joe, of a large Catholic family told us his old Dad used to say to them "Always go to Church, boys" and he and Maureen always do, wherever they are. When we are together, they accept that we will also go to our Church, and often find out the Service times for us. In fact, once when we were staying at Yarraman, Queensland where there was no Anglican Service, they phoned for details and drove us some 40 Kms to Nanango.

(Dad wrote this history in spurts over a number of years while teaching himself how to use a computer, firstly on one of my old cast-off DOS PC's and then later on his own Win98 "multi-media" PC.

The last two paragraphs above were written in the last few months of his life – and the original document ends here. To complete the story I have appended another short history, written I believe with the help of one of his grandchildren, which summarises Dad's life through to retirement.

Son, John Morter, 1999)

KEITH MORTER

Born at Leongatha, 28th September 1926.

Grew up on parents' dairy farm. Attended small local country primary school, then went to Leongatha High School.

On 2nd January 1942, was successful applicant for appointment to staff of the then State Savings Bank of Victoria, and began training at the Leongatha Branch of that Bank.

As was common among young people in country towns in war-time, we filled the gaps left by enlisted men in roles such as assisting with harvesting outside working hours, bush fire control, rostered aircraft observance at the towns

spotting station. Underwent cadet training in the local Air Training Corps. Fund raising for the War Effort. Enlisted in the R.A.A.F in September 1944, serving for one and a half years in Australian states after training in Clerical and Wireless Telegraphist Duties.

On 7th July 1951, was married at St Peters Church, Leongatha, to Wilma Millett, met as partner in a "Belle of the Ball " competition, she was a niece of one of my father's WWI Lighthorsemen mates. I had been transferred to the Bank's Drouin Branch, where we began our married life.

Adherence to our Church having been part of our upbringing, I became involved with the Anglican Youth Group and later served as Church Treasurer for a number of years.

To the parents' extreme joy, children John, Stephenie and Robert were born during those years in Drouin. They were busy, happy years, involving bringing up the children, home gardening, fruit and vegetable growing, keeping of fowls and ducks, duties at the Church and community efforts such as fund raising for the town's first kindergarten.

In 1959, transferred by the bank to Melbourne - bought a new home in Nunawading and set about landscaping its garden. Spent a brief term on the Bank's Relieving Staff prior to appointment to Hawthorn Branch. In due course, promoted to Accountant status at Hawthorn but didn't learn much because the old Manager, afraid of Head Office repercussions, wouldn't let me carry out any unusual procedures.

Treasurer and recorder of St Marks, Forest Hill - much consternation when the books were taken to the office to be added-up on the new fangled Burroughs Listing Machine, and left behind on the train on the return journey.

The Bank having established a number of new, small Branches when State Bank cheque accounts were introduced in the early 60s, an application, supported by claims of knowledge of the dairy farming industry, for appointment as Manager, Meeniyan Branch was successful. A "most impressive edifice", part of a very old timber shop - the rear wall of which was kicked in some months later, the face torn from the Cash Safe and packed with gelignite.

Following much difficulty in learning managerial procedures, knowledge of so many of the local farmers, (went to school with many of them), and dairy farm knowledge enabled the securing of much new business by way of the granting of Farm Loans which, at that time, were most suitable for purchase and development of country such as Meeniyan.

It was good to be living within easy distance of both parents - the children revelled in the times on the farms with their cousins. Together with Wilma, became very involved in Meeniyan's community life - bowls, golf, football club Treasurer, Progress Association, Financial Adviser to local farmers' group and again, Treasurer of the tiny St Davids Church, in addition to raising funds for

and assisting to erect a Youth Club building and a Scout Hall.

A busy five years at Meeniyan, embellished with pets from guinea pigs, birds, fowls, mice, calves to a pony. It was a sad day when the local Policeman's Golden Retriever was found licking his chops after having eaten the favourite guinea pig.

A big change in 1967 as the family packed up to take the position of Manager at Casterton in the far Western District. Misgivings about being so far from families, good medical services and the general unknown. Horrified upon arrival to see Casterton in the grip of one of its worst droughts in history. Cattle reduced to skin and bone, pastures absolutely bare, the large meat works at Portland threatening closure, and top Merino flocks, bred over generations, offered for sale for 20 cents each.

The small town was over-provided with Banks, with very little opportunity for the securing of new business, although assistance to the few dairy farmers along the Glenelg River flats in completion of Government Drought Relief applications assisted the State Bank to make some progress, together with loans to farmers for connection of electricity.

Eventually recovered from drought, Casterton prospered again. Seeking friendships among itinerants, the local graziers, some of whom had seen Bank people come and go for generations, were most hospitable - in their beautiful country homes. It was a pretty laid-back four years - kids settled at the local high school, nice residence upstairs over the Bank, dinner dances, bowls, golf - especially 9 holes after work with the ANZ bloke next door.

With family nearing completion of secondary school, it was time to exert pressure on the Bank's staff people to get us back to Melbourne. May 1971 therefore found us in our newly purchased home in Aylmer Street, Balwyn North. Appointed shortly after to 186 Bourke Street Branch without a single clue as to the workings of the Burroughs punched card accounting system. Some anxious moments, but eventually learned some sort of control. An interesting Branch, as far geographically and culturally as possible from Casterton - but gained good business with public servants, shop owners etc, and got to know the city better and made some good friends.

The next promotion was to Queens Parade, Clifton Hill. It was a difficult Branch to manage - the lay-out of the recently erected premises were like an architect's nightmare and whilst valuing the experience in dealing with migrants from so many countries, interviews with assistance of staff interpreters not easy. The Branch progressed well, however, with opportunities for loans for new housing in the outer suburbs as the migrants became established, and for local businesses. The loyalty of those people is well known, such that some of them make contact to this day.

Promotion after four years to Bulleen Branch was welcome. Close to home, a compact community, with a great potential for business promotion. A very busy office but with a great staff, a number of whom have remained life-long

friends. The migrants, of Venetian origin, once their trust was established, became not only hospitable friends but an ever increasing source of new business. The warmth of the personalities of all of the Bulleen community is unforgettable. It remains a pleasure to walk down the shopping mall and meet them, even after so many years. The Branch became known as one of the big lending offices, especially as the State Bank overdraft facilities were developed and extended.

Having been a Rotary member at previous locations, an invitation to become Charter Treasurer of the new Templestowe Club was accepted. The twenty years membership provided great friendships, opportunities to serve the community with other busy people and a wide knowledge of the Templestowe area.

Appointment as co-ordinator in the early eighties of a Rotary sponsored program to assist young people obtain employment resulted in nearly 300 young people securing jobs. (*This was in the early years of Dad's retirement - jcm.*) The subsequent bestowing upon the co-ordinator of a Paul Harris Fellowship, the highest award in Rotary, remains a life-time highlight.

Meanwhile, the usual welcome was extended at St Silas Church Nth Balwyn, resulting in opportunities not only to share in its wide fellowship and make so many good friends, but also to apply previous experience gained in serving on Vestry, as Churchwarden, and for the past few years as Treasurer.

The next Bank promotion was to Box Hill. An old Branch I always wanted but it was found to be dull, unchallenging and unchangeable. The change to 315 Collins Street a year later was welcome - an extended hours Branch - one of the eleven largest in the Bank, with a staff of thirty seven. A big job though and, 43 years from the date of joining, the option to retire was taken. A rewarding career - and so many friends to remember.

Retirement enabled new experiences - more time with family - lots of travel overseas (a highlight of which was to Holland to meet Robert's bride and witness their marriage), but mainly caravanning to the four corners of Australia - part time jobs such as gardening, debt control, hotel cashiering, youth employment, payroll.

The great God-given gifts however, have been a devoted, adorable wife and life partner; the unreserved love, devotion, loyalty and understanding of three children; the love, respect and consideration of their partners, the simple love, respect, acceptance, and friendship of 8 grandchildren; family outings and weekends away, lazy family days on the Rye beach, outstanding displays of skill on the Eildon Golf Course, the warmth and happiness felt in each of the family homes, the easy conversations in the Hobsons Bay boat yard, sailing on vessels large and small, the family working-bee days, the joy and laughter at meals together - surely these are examples of Heaven.