

Things Past

Newsletter 57

November 2012

Mount Evelyn History Group Inc

PO Box 101 Mt Evelyn VIC 3796 A0051327F



Dates for your diary

Tour of historic log cabin 'Appin', 122 Commercial Road, Saturday 24 November, 1.15pm for 1.30pm start. RSVP Paula Herlihy 9736 2935, email pherlihy@alphalink.com.au.

A Mt Evelyn Icon

Graeme Watkins has written this tribute to his sister Gwen.

Gwenda Olive Watkins (who preferred to be called 'Gwen') was born on 11 September 1936. She attended Mt Evelyn Primary and Lilydale Higher Elementary Schools.

Gwen lived all her life in Mt Evelyn. She liked to look back to when life was less complicated and Mt Evelyn was a quiet country town. Growing up on her parents' property in Silvan Road, she enjoyed the sense of freedom that it gave. Because we were part of a line of relations in this area there was plenty of room to play and explore.

Back in those days times were tough. Also for some time we were without electricity and had to make do with kerosene lamps. There were times when we went to the poultry farm down the road to get cracked eggs or to the store for broken biscuits, as money was scarce. Dad grew a lot of raspberries and some other berries and we helped our parents pick them for 1 penny a punnet.

Gwen was a home person and liked to read and play board games such as Monopoly and



Alan and Bev Watkins commissioned this painting from Mooroolbark artist O. Armstrong. It depicts Gwen dispensing petrol at the Evelyn Service Station.

Checkers. We also looked forward to hearing episodes of 'Martins' Corner' and 'Dad and Dave' on Dad's old Wireless.

The Olinda Creek was along the bottom of our property and we loved to explore the bushland and the paths along the creek. One day we followed the creek upstream until we came to a little waterfall and we had a picnic using the pack of Army rations we had brought.

Another venture was to produce a local Newsheet, which was mainly about our family, friends and neighbours and which we sold for

Continued p.2

From p.1

½ penny a copy. Later we increased it in size and raised the price to 1 penny.

Gwen left school when she was 15, thinking of a job using her shorthand and typing, but was offered a job at a small General Store on the corner of York and Silvan Roads, which was to become a Service Station. She enjoyed the opportunity of meeting people and always greeted them with a warm smile and a friendly word. What was to have been a temporary job lasted for 45 years and she was kept on by two further owners. Because of this long association, someone referred to Gwen as an 'Icon'.

When Dad died in 1980, Mum sold the property and bought a little cottage with a large garden near to the town. Gwen being single lived with Mum and devoted much time and energy in the garden, planting many flowerbeds among the camellias and azaleas. The garden became a showplace and even some passers-by remarked on the lovely garden.

Another interest of Gwen's was her cat. She always had a cat which received great care and affection. Gwen had a large collection of

cat ornaments, with cat pictures on calendars, cushions and many other things.

Above all these things, Gwen had a strong faith and commitment. She taught Sunday School for over 10 years and was a faithful helper and worshipper in the Methodist Church, later to become the Uniting Church. Following the closure of this church, Gwenda worshipped at the Montrose Uniting Church.

Gwen made many friends with her quiet unassuming manner and she reached out to a number in the community following her retirement. Gwen will be greatly missed especially by us, her family. She was a wonderful and loving sister. We are comforted by the fact that she is at peace and with her Lord.

Graeme Watkins. Photos & painting courtesy Bev and Alan Watkins

A reader remembers

Gwen was such a lovely lady who I remember when I was a young girl, always having a chat to us kids when Mum and Dad filled up the car with petrol at Bishop's Service Station. Years later, when I moved back to Mt Evelyn, I would often see her when out walking and she would always say hello and remember our family.

Elizabeth Gibson

Miller's Homestead

I see you are getting into the horse season with the articles. I guess you have been to Miller's Homestead in Boronia. Apparently in its heyday the owner had a race track, probably where Miller's Park is now, or in the vicinity.... I have an idea there were some connections to the Victoria Racing Club (VRC), maybe the owner was on its committee. **Robyn Taylor**

John James Miller was a bookmaker and publisher of Miller's Racing guide. He built up a racing stud on over 1,000 acres at The Basin. The area, now in the City of Knox, was once part of the Shire of Lillydale (Ed.) See:

http://www.knox.vic.gov.au/Files/Millers_Homestead_2011.pdf

Historical certificates

Joan Vanderhorn refers us to this petition by the Narre Warren History Group to standardise the cost and availability of Birth, Death & Marriage Certificates in all states. They are cheaper in Victoria than some other states but the index is harder to consult online. See: <http://nwfhg.org.au/australian-birth-marriage-death-certificate-petition/>



Evelyn Service Station and Store in the 1950s. Above, Gwen out the front; below, Ron Collins Junior on bike.



‘Freedom from Fear’

The Yarra Ranges have enjoyed a rich diversity of migration since the 1800s. Most early immigrants journeyed from Europe to develop new lives through agricultural and horticultural endeavours. In the past decade a new wave of arrivals has trickled into the shire, many of them refugees. Families, predominantly from Asia and Africa, are settling in Mooroolbark, Chirnside Park, Lilydale and surrounding townships.

Completing an Art History degree in 2007, I signed up with Australian Multicultural Education Services. A six week course set me up to impart weekly English sessions to refugee students in their own homes; a GPS for people trying to find their feet in a very different land! To date my students have included a Sudanese mother in Lilydale and a Chin (Burmese) family in Chirnside Park. Volunteering for the Ames weekly sewing group I have also become friends with a number of other families.

As a community artist, I offered my experience in art practice to my Ames co-ordinator. Within a few weeks she rang: Maroondah Council required refugees to paint along an alleyway in Croydon to celebrate Refugee Week in ten days' time and she urgently needed help! The artists (of the Chin and Karen people from Burma) blew me away; they depicted gut wrenching, beautiful work, having only just arrived from years on the run with little English and no socialisation within an Aussie suburb. Following on from this I have been happy to help a number of Karen artists with entries to the Ames art competition for refugees.

In July 2010 I noticed an advertisement seeking art projects for Mooroolbark Community Centre. I believe art provides a brilliant platform for social interchange and personal growth, ideal for refugees exploring new homelands. I drafted a proposal and sent it off. Dialogue with Mooroolbark Community Centre evolved. The Migrant Information Centre (MIC) from Box Hill joined the team, providing support, advice and



Above, participants at the opening of the ‘Freedom from Fear’ exhibition. Refugees from Burma and Somalia have enriched the cultural mix of the Shire of Yarra Ranges.

practical help. By February 2012 there was a plan: Yarra Ranges offered the Red Earth Gallery from 20 June until 7 July, including an opening night. I committed to workshopping art with individual refugees and groups.

I set off to access bargain art materials and began working with families I knew, encouraging them to develop their ideas for the Refugee Week theme, ‘Freedom from Fear’. Workshopping produced a variety of ideas and outcomes. The Ames sewing group joined with me making a mural from material, threads, quick unpicks and other sewing instruments. To begin with some were confused as to what we were doing but the unfolding melange of bright colours and textures which they created thrilled them. Sudanese primary school friends had fun painting themselves against the backdrop of Lilydale Lake. Sitting beside me a Pakistani asylum seeker, who had never painted before, developed a beautiful simple effigy of a figure sitting on a beach watching the sun set.

Jane Curry from Swinburne worked with her language students to construct a Tree of Life. The tree was used as a metaphor for dialogue, understanding and reflective study of the refugee experience. Students depicted their past experience and alienation from homeland alongside strengths, passions and hope for the future.

Continued p.4

From p.3

Christopher Htoo's 'Birds of life' tugged at emotions. 'The Yellow Bulbul bird that I knew in my thirteen years in the refugee camp in Thailand lived always in fear. We had to catch and kill these beautiful birds to cook and eat. So they were never free – never free from fear. Now in my new homeland, the Kookaburras laugh in the trees. They are free. Hearing them reminds me of the poor yellow bird, imprisoned by fear, but now I know that I am free and I laugh with the Kookaburras.'

MIC runs health programmes for recently arrived families. I was invited to workshop two hobby sessions. Faced with a large age range and life experience I provided as many alternatives as was practical. Some chose crayons or paints to depict themselves on the beach or in a garden. A number of women embroidered rice, flowers and other motifs on felt, gluing their work onto canvases painted in a favourite colour.

One major objective was to produce work for the exhibition which could then be taken home and displayed. Refugees arrive with few belongings. Day to day furnishing is an imperative and personal decoration takes a while to accumulate. The creations from our project not only helped artists to explore themes which were important to them but also provided them with a meaningful image for their homes. The part that Yarra Ranges, MIC and I played within this scenario was a symbolic way of offering welcome to our country.

Past Mayor Terry Avery opened the exhibition on Monday 20 June, highlighting the benefits of happy cultural exchange. Most artists involved have come from situations where officials treat individuals with hostility, so Terry's delight in posing for photos with participants was met with awe! I felt deeply grateful to Robin Kilpatrick from MIC and Megan Rowland from Yarra Ranges who worked so hard to make a dream become reality.

An evolving tradition has seen Refugee week celebrations within the Eastern suburbs. As Yarra Ranges' preparation for the Freedom from Fear exhibition progressed, representatives from other municipalities and organisations became involved; a multicultural festival was planned for Saturday 25 June.

A number of recent arrivals lent beautiful textiles from Sudan and Burma and these were draped around the artwork to provide a

stunning backdrop. Choirs, dancers and an exuberant Tibetan string player set the mood for mingling, meeting and shared participation. A year on, it is wonderful to see connections forged during the FFF exhibition leading to meaningful integration between local entities and recent arrivals. **Janet Wilson**

Community History Awards

Kevin and Karen attended the PROV/ RHSV Victorian Community History Awards at the National Gallery on 23 October. Historian Richard Broome gave a great speech on Victorian history, community and identity. He likened a community with no knowledge of its history to a person suffering from amnesia. They wouldn't know who they were.

Histories on Aboriginal themes are becoming increasingly common. Mick Woiwod's *Coranderrk Database* won in its section. The overall winner was Maree Coote's book on Melbourne as seen by artists, from early colonials to contemporary, *The Art of Being Melbourne*. For the full list of entrants and winners, see RHSV: historyvictoria.org.au.

Carrum to Warburton shared trail

The project is being scoped by State Government and no decision has been made on the route. It is likely the Mt Evelyn Aqueduct will be used in part.... There are 3 or 4 options for this trail and the route will likely be the most feasible and cost effective. Basically, the section we are talking about is from Dorset Road to the Warby Trail. **Ben Bainbridge, SYR**

From Kev's rain gauge

Rainfall for October 2012 for Mt Evelyn, McKillop, Melbourne and Melbourne average.*

Mt Ev	McK	Melb	Melb Av
51.1mm	65.25mm	29.0mm	66.4mm

* McKillop readings courtesy Jean Edwards. Melbourne figures from Bureau of Meteorology website. **Kevin Phillips**

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