



WAVERLEY COUNCIL

MEMORIES OF MY CHILDHOOD

By John Gannon

INSPECT: Sat. & Thurs. 1-2 p.m.

Solid Federation style house offering 3 bedrooms, spacious living area with high ornate ceilings, modern bath and kitchen on generous parcel of land. Ideal for extensions and/or pool. Located in popular tree-lined street amongst fine homes, close to shops, transport and synagogue. Delayed settlement possible.

FOR DEFINITE SALE

Details: Ron Doff Bondi Beach Office, 309-2222. A.H. 327-7323

Images from top:

Images from a sales ad for 5 Northcote St. Home with front facade and description.

Waverley Council held a Seniors' Storytelling Workshop at Waverley Library in 2009 to collect and celebrate the memories of Waverley's seniors.

Most of us sometimes like to look back to times past, when the world seemed simpler and slower moving – “the good old days”.

I have lived all 82 years of my life in Rose Bay/Dover Heights, indeed in only two streets – Northcote, a short very steep street, which runs off Old South Head Road into Gilbert, a long undulating one. My Father's family came to live in Dover Road, Rose Bay, in 1906 and Mum's family lived in Ruthven Street, Bondi Junction, from the 1890's – over 100 years in the Waverley Municipality. Mum and Dad bought land and built their dream home, with a significant mortgage, in Northcote Street, in 1925. I was born there in 1927 and my sister in 1931.

It is now April 2009 and the

world is in the grip of a major financial downturn, or a recession, or a depression, depending on which so-called expert is informing us. So often now my mind flashes back to the time of the Great Depression of the late 1920's and 1930's, when I was a little boy.

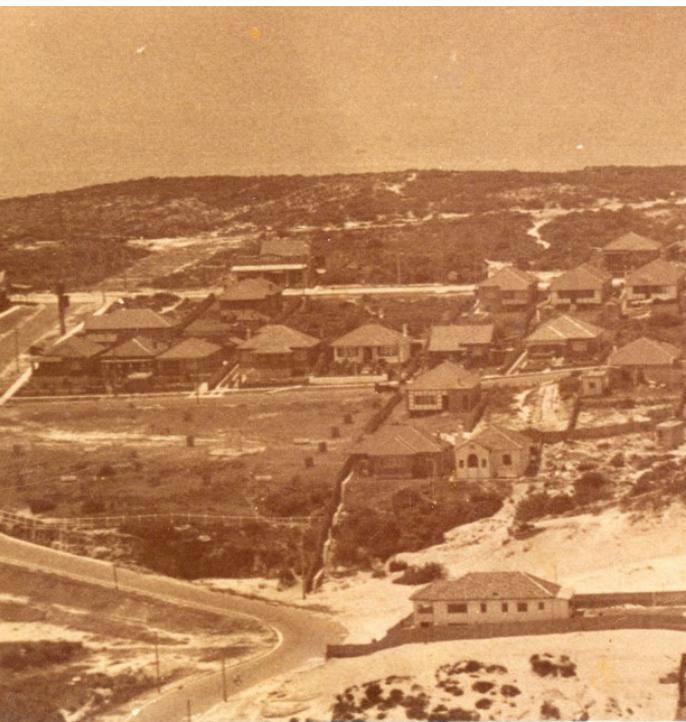
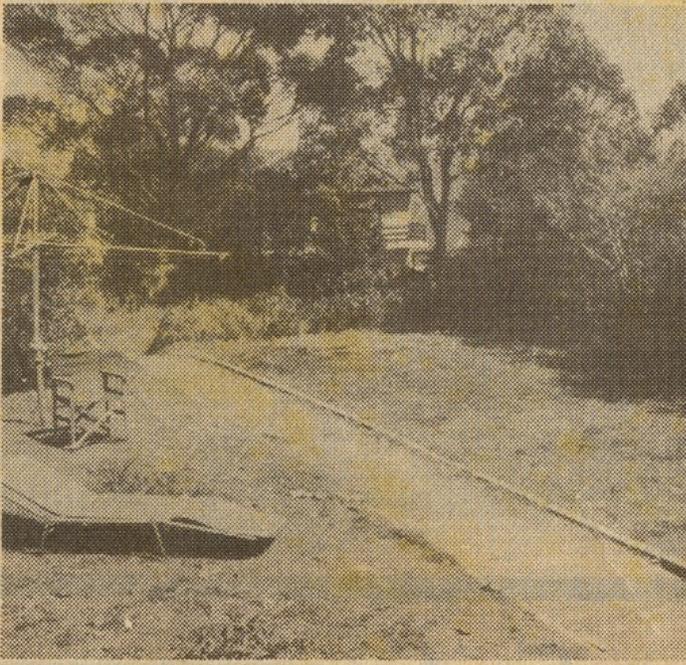
Certainly, the period was very tough for most people but despite the difficulties of the time there were many examples of people becoming more resourceful and helping one another for the common good. The comradery that this produced helped them survive and, equally important, enjoy the simple pleasures of life. Let me recall some of my own memories of growing up in this time.

Our street was, and is, a small

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Images from a sales ad for 5 Northcote St. Home with part of the backyard in 1986 – not as well maintained and the Hills Hoist is a hazard!

Moverley Harbour View Estate in 1932, showing Victory and Blake Streets – Military Road and southern end of Gilbert Street not yet constructed. Few homes and only 4 east of Military Road.

one, comprising only 16 houses, a corner store that sold most things and next door was a butcher's shop. So it was very easy to know all our neighbours and their children, and to shop.

My bedroom, after the arrival of my sister, was really a closed-in verandah overlooking our very large backyard which became for me, our family, our relatives, our friends, our neighbours, and my playmates a much used and loved piece of land. Before giving some idea of its social uses let me tell you of its very practical use.

Towards the far end a fence, half wood and half wire, was built to separate the chooks and ducks from us humans – at any one time there were up to 30 hens, three roosters, some bantams, and a few ducks. All excess eggs not given to relatives and friends were sold to the corner store, not for money, but for necessities like milk, butter, tea, sugar, biscuits, etc. – we didn't need bread because Dad was a baker. Many chickens were also produced and we kids eagerly looked forward to their arrival

and their early lives. When the hens no longer laid eggs they were killed; so we had lots of chickens to eat. That's why I haven't eaten chicken or too many eggs (other than chocolate Easter ones) for years!

Next to the fowl-yard were two garden plots for the growing of vegetables and flowers, none of which were sold, but sometimes given away as gifts. There were six steps leading from the back of the house and a concrete path, with copings on either side, leading to the chook pens. The immaculately kept lawns were great playgrounds for kids and we certainly made great use of them. Many "test matches" were played including football, tennis, basketball and cricket – the pitch for the cricket was the path and the stumps were the first four steps. To give authenticity to the game, the batsman (or batswoman, as girls were allowed to play) took guard on an old mat which had a couple of holes in it and which often gave the ball a sharp break. There could be up to eight or ten fielding at times.

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The betting ring, Randwick Racecourse. Photograph by Frank Hurley, 1910-1962. Image courtesy of the NLA.

Electric tram waiting for crowds at Randwick Racecourse, 1920s. Part of the Vic Solomon Collection, image courtesy of Randwick Library.

We were in trouble if the vegies or the flowers were damaged; so fielding kept on improving. In accord with world standard rules over the fence was six and out!

My close friend Bill was an excellent athlete, in particular a high jumper. He practised often in the yard where he had plenty of room for his run-up before the jump. My job was to pick up and replace the crossbar if he dislodged it. Actually, he became the under-14 and under-15 school boy champion of New South Wales. He also helped greatly with my ability to tackle in football because when he got the football I had to tackle him quickly; otherwise I couldn't catch him!

I must not forget to recall a unique use of the sloping path as a horse racetrack. The 'horses' were coloured marbles of various sizes and each race was started at the foot of the steps. They were kept on the track by the copings on either side of the path, the finish being when they hit the gate at the entry to the chook yard. Bill and I would take it in turn to call the

races – we both had ambitions of becoming race callers. Our interest in horseracing came from an uncle of mine who had been a very good jockey on the Kensington Racecourse and who sometimes took us to the races. Needless to say, neither of us became race callers, but I did work on this track for 43 years – it became The University of New South Wales.

The area was often used for birthday parties and "workers' drinks" for friends and neighbours. There were no barbeques in those days because all the cooking was done indoors and brought outside. The toilet ("dunny") was outside, not inside as it is today!

There was a real cross section of trades and professions represented in the street including a plumber, a carpenter, an electrician, a school teacher, a bank teller, an architect, the two shopkeepers and, as I said before, Dad was a baker. All wives, with the exception of the school teacher (whose husband had died at an early age) didn't



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Images from top:

Oxford Street, Bondi Junction in the 1930s.

The completed Sydney Harbour Bridge as photographed from Rose Bay, ca. 1932. Photography by Fairfax, image courtesy of the NLA.

work at paid jobs. It was amazing the way they helped one another and those in the street and the area who had fallen on the bad times of the Great Depression.

Dad was very active in the local branch of the St Vincent de Paul Society and it was good to see the gifts of food, clothing and money for shopping vouchers that were given to him for distribution to the needy. This included the tradesmen giving their time for maintenance and repair work on the homes of such people, either at no cost or reduced rates.

From the age of 12 years I was able to help Dad as a “baker’s boy” delivering bread to homes in the Waverley area. The bakery was *Kubler’s* in Bronte Road, Bondi Junction. On many weekdays in the school holidays I worked in the corner store. I really enjoyed those jobs because, besides giving me much needed pocket money, they also gave me the opportunity to meet many interesting people of different ages. Without really being

aware of it, I gained confidence in communicating with people – a most important skill needed in my later working career.

Other fond recollections of my early life include playing hidings and “Cowboys and Indians” in the sand hills among the tee-trees of Dover Heights. There were few houses. We also enjoyed swimming in the Rose Bay Baths (now no more), at Bondi Beach, Nielsen Park and Watson’s Bay, after riding our scooters or bikes to those places. The Gap and Vaulcluse House were often visited.

I saw the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in March 1932 – what an undertaking during the Depression and correctly described by the author, Robert Curtis, as made of “Steel, Granite and Guts”. Attending school on the opening day of the Christian Brothers College, Rose Bay, in late January 1935, was really memorable. Being able to complete the Leaving Certificate there in 1944 was some reward for Mum’s and Dad’s sacrifices in keeping me there – none of my

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Images from top:

Rose Bay Flying Boat Base, 1930s. E.A. Crome collection of photographs on aviation, image courtesy of the NLA.

A crowd inspecting shelling damage at a Woollahra shop, 1942. Image courtesy of the AWM.

cousins went on to the L.C. All 19 who sat the exam, passed it and went on to tertiary studies, enjoying successful professional careers. We still meet a number of times each year for lunch.

All 16 houses have been replaced by two-storey concrete dwellings now, most with swimming pools. Sad for me, but I hope the new occupants of that street are as happy as we were in similar times all those years ago.

Seeing the first flying boat touch down in Rose Bay on Christmas Eve 1937 was another highlight. The Bay was used as a base for the Catalinas of the Australian and American Armed Forces from 1942 to 1945. How our classrooms shook every time they came in to land! The shelling of Rose Bay by a Japanese submarine on 7 June 1942 was a frightening experience, but I have to be honest and admit we slept through the historic event – we never got to use that air raid shelter we prepared!