

## Be it ever so humble, there is no place like home

Once Again I have been strolling down memory lane and I have decided to make this a work in progress and add to it as time goes by.

Anyone who comes across this item will be either bored and just leave it or will find it interesting and carry on reading.

Actually it doesn't really matter much to me which group you belong to because I just want to put my memories down on paper for posterity.

This time the memory lane is in fact **Markhouse road** and the humble abode where I lived with my parents from about 1940 until 1960.

The dwelling number was (and still is ) number 101 and I have to admit that it was a slum then (and probably still is) and I was so terribly ashamed of living there that when I finished school every day I would walk straight past the place as though it didn't exist.

Actually I got a friend to drive past the area about ten years ago and the place was virtually unchanged in appearance, I hope at least they would have added another W.C. to the place.

I think the main problem was that the only access was via an alleyway that runs along the back of the shops in Markhouse road between Ringwood road and Queens Road and the alleyway was also the entrance to a factory of some sort that was located somewhere near the end of the cobbled section.

Some cheapskate had constructed a fence from the back of Davis' Dairy (CNR Markhouse and Ringwood roads) along several of these properties and the fence was constructed from a series of standard house doors all fixed together, so it was about 6' high and extremely ugly to look at.

All sorts of nasty things went on down that alleyway under the cover of darkness and probably they still do, but I don't think we ever had a murder down there.

Once you got past the gate fence you were confronted by my fathers home made lean to shed that housed all of our bikes and his tandem and the bench and tools that he had accumulated over the years.

I have to say that like father like son I too have a good collection of tools and a great bench in my garage. These days our shed is kept for the lawn mower and other gardening tools.

To give you an idea of what this humble abode was like I shall explain that our part of the accommodation comprised of a scullery and a small living room downstairs and a large bedroom above the shop at the front.

My father had constructed a partition wall in this room which unfortunately was not sound proof but it did enable me to sleep in a separate room of a sort.

Also as there was no sanitation upstairs, one had to rely on a bucket or a jerry for any night time calls of nature.

I do recall that on one occasion that my parents had friends around for the evening and I had gone to bed without the bucket, so you may imagine how I felt when I was desperate for a pee. I am almost ashamed to tell you that I was so desperate that I peed out of the window above the shop, thankfully there was no one going past at the time.

Of course had I ventured downstairs I would have had to go through the living room and the people therein to get to the outside W.C.

I was also lucky that the double hung window didn't crush my man hood when it came sliding down.

The other part of the building was occupied by another family and that comprised two parents and two children.

They had an outside staircase up to the upper level and they too had a scullery and a living room and a bedroom that was accessed from a landing that was common ground with our bedroom.

Both of these dwellings and the Lamp Shade shop at the front on Markhouse road all shared the same W.C. that was at the side of our front door.

To be honest the shop had a washbasin, that I am sure doubled as a urinal when the lamp shade maker was taken short.

The lamp shade maker could also access the W.C. via a small yard behind the shop, the yard had another use too because my father had an arrangement with our insurance man.

That was that he would drive his little car to Ringwood road and leave it there, and do his collection and selling rounds on a bicycle that he left in the yard. He would cover this up with a tarpaulin so that it was not on view and it kept his saddle dry.

I recall that it was just as well that he was insured because a huge slate fell off the roof one windy day and it embedded itself in the earth just near where he left his bicycle.

Now I may have mentioned in an earlier memory that my father was always rowing and arguing with the people upstairs, about noise usually, they even came to blows on one occasion. Once I actually made a hole in the ceiling one afternoon when I banged on the ceiling with a piece of wood in retaliation to the din that was going on upstairs.

So can you imagine what it was like during the war when we all had to share the same Anderson air raid shelter that was constructed in our part of the garden?

Those things were about the size of a small garden shed and were not designed for comfort at all. We were all so glad when the war ended and we could demolish the monstrosity and my father could once again grow his Dahlias etc.

I suppose they had a sort of truce during the hours when the air raid was going on; I think fisticuffs in a confined space like an air raid shelter would have been awful.

Using the W.C. was a problem too as because there was such an awful lot of animosity we never used to really have it cleaned up properly. However there was always a wad of newspaper on a nail in a convenient location. There were no lights in there either so one had to take a torch at night time.

It was a good idea to whistle when in the W.C. so that if the people upstairs came down they would know that it was being used and just wait for a while.

I recall that in the scullery at our place there was a large Butler sink and a gas hot water system and my father had put a huge cast iron bath in there with a removable wooden top that also served as a work surface when the bath was not required.

There was an electric hot water boiler that was for heating the bath water and when I was young it would be me in the bath first, followed by my parents and so we had our weekly bath regardless of whether we needed it or not.

After the baths the water was scooped out and put onto the garden as it did not have a drain like a plumbed in bath.

When I reached my teens I made the pilgrimage to the Leyton Slipper (strange name) baths for a real bath once a week, this was a sociable afternoon and the atmosphere was punctuated by calls for “more hot in number ten please’ and other similar pleas.

If you were a regular and were known to leave a good tip one could get extra towels and bars of soap and no questions asked.

Also in the scullery was an electric cooking stove and a small fridge and that was odd because in all the years that I was married and lived in the United Kingdom we never had a fridge and to be honest we didn’t really need one.

It is a different story in Australia of course where we have a huge fridge to accommodate the stuff that would otherwise go off.

Another thing in the scullery was a huge cupboard that was used for housing junk of all sorts and even as a ‘den’ for me and my mates sometimes when we would sit in it and read and swap comics etc.

The living room had a fireplace and a few cupboards, including one that my father found one day when he was decorating and discovered that there was a communication hole between the shop and the living room.

By arrangement with the lamp shade maker my dad kept the shop side closed and opened up our side and made a cupboard out of it.

In the 20 years that I lived there my father wall papered the living room many times and he never ever stripped the old wallpaper off the wall, hence the room got smaller and smaller with each new decoration.

He was also a wizard with electricity and it was awesome the way we had all different types of plugs and sockets piggy backed to provide a power feed to the various items such as the shed and the electric fire etc.

I later became involved in the electrical industry and I was amazed that we never had a fire as a result of his DIY stuff.

Beyond the living room was a passageway that led to the always locked door to the shop and also to the stairs that went up to the bedrooms, theirs and ours.

I used to literally fly up those stairs in my pyjamas on my way to bed just in case my ascent coincided with the people upstairs emerging from their door.

Along the passage way was a door to the storage area under the stairs, this housed the electricity meter and that was a stupid place to put it as we had to be home so that the meter could be read.

In Australia the meters are by the front door or on the side of the house in a locked metal cupboard that has a window for the meter reader.

This cupboard under the stairs was also used to store the coal that the coalman would deliver and he used to carry these huge heavy sacks in and just dump the coal straight onto the floor of the cupboard.

After a few years all of the floor boards rotted away and the floor was replaced with concrete poured straight onto earth below and levelled to form a new floor.

At certain times I would have the job of walking to the Gas Works in Lea Bridge road with my trolley that my father had constructed for the bag wash and I would get a sack of coke for the fire.

I know this must have been quite a walk but I did it without question as it was my after school task.

I wonder if the bag wash laundries still exist as they were in those days, one would take all the washing both coloureds and whites and magically when I picked them up still damp they were all clean and smelt of washing powder.

At a later stage this floor reconstruction also had to be done in the living room and this was quite an upheaval at the time as we could not walk on it for days. I still can't recall how we managed to overcome that period but we did.

Our Landlord lived next door and his name was Mr Cohen and he was a Jew who was a very tolerant man and so he had all of these repairs done as they were required.

I think there may have been some form of compensation from the government due to bombing damage because he also had the bedroom ceiling replaced and it was done in plaster and the plasterer finished it off in fan like patterns all over it. It never did get painted though because that was just too big a job for my father who only had one eye and he couldn't see very well out of his eye at the best of times.

Mr Cohen lived next door with his own family and his daughter in Law opened their shop as a dress shop and his grandson was apprenticed to a hairdresser in the West end I was told.

When I was about 22 years old I purchased a Ford Thames 5cwt van so that I could transport my bike to races and also go out with Pam who was to become my wife (50 years this year).

Because parking was so difficult even then in Ringwood road my Father helped me to make several of the fence gates into one wide gate that I could open and thus get the van into the garden.

This was quite a feat of engineering but he didn't mind and we managed the job quite well even though actually getting the van from the alley into the yard was a problem.

Better than get the treatment I saw delivered to one car that was obviously parked in someone else's spot one day just near where Mrs Golding's grocery store was situated.

Someone had anonymously up ended a pot of bright yellow paint onto the roof of the car and it was quite a sight to see the paint running all over the roof and doors of the car.

During my childhood days we had two dogs and the first was a cute little mongrel named Mickey, my dad made a trailer out of a plywood tea chest and he fixed it to the back of the tandem and my parents had me on the child seat and Mickey in the trailer and we would get up as far as High Beech. I think that was quite an achievement for a couple who never owned a car.

It was on one such excursion that my right leg went into the wheel of the tandem and I almost lost the use of the foot.

I did write about that accident elsewhere in my earlier memoirs so I won't dwell on the subject.

Unfortunately Mickey was killed by a car when I was about 12 years old and we didn't get another dog for a few years.

The next dog was another mongrel named Duke and I think he was with us for quite a few years, but I can't remember when he died. It was my job to walk him after school every day.

I think now that living in that type of accommodation all of those years ago made me envious of all of my friends even though most of them lived in rented Warner flats.

My father stayed in that place until my mother passed away and then he got a rented flat in a high rise block after being on the housing list for donkey's years.

I do know that I couldn't wait until we owned our own house even though that didn't happen until we were about 50 years old.

The first form of accommodation we had when we married was a caravan at Waltham Abbey and of course that was even smaller than the place at Markhouse road.

But it was a means to an end and from those modest beginnings we have progressed from house after house both in the United Kingdom and in several states in Australia.

And we now live in a nice house (Bungalow to you) in a rural area in Perth situated on a ¼ acre plot which gives us enough ground to potter around on in our old age.

And so that is all I have for now until we get another rainy day which means I have some spare time to fill in.

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