

FRANK FARRUGIA



My parents were Catherine and Salvatore "Sam" Furrugia. They came to St Albans in the 1920s when it was a small, rural village. My older brother, Joseph, was born in Australia in 1925 so the family was here then. I think the family came here in 1923 or 1924 and we lived in several houses. The first one was in Driscolls Road, but it was known as Fox's Lane at that time, and we were there in 1923-24. Then we lived in a weatherboard house on the corner of Walter and Biggs streets in 1930-31 and there was only the one house there. Just up from us on the William Street corner was the little bungalow that was the home of Granny Lewis. The Lewis family had a large chook farm with lots of chook sheds on the opposite corner between William and Henry streets and they had a big house there surrounded by Cypress pines. These were the only houses in that little patch. Granny Lewis was a lovely woman and whenever we kids visited her she would always give us a wonderful treat of a biscuit and a glass of lemonade. The Lewises had been in the district for some time and were related through marriage to the Hounslows and Erringtons so they were connected to early pioneers. Then we moved further north to the corner of George Street in 1932-33 which was the only house that was there at that end of the street, and that's what I remember mostly, growing up in George Street.

At first we were renting the property at George Street but my father ended up buying the eight acres where we were living, which was bounded by Alfrieda, Power, Walter and George streets. Power Street used to be Percy Street until Keilor council changed the name in 1935. There were a lot of boxthorn bushes on that property and there was a dam with a boxthorn hedge around it. Frogs and tadpoles were always delights for a young boy. We used to catch yabbies in there – if you ever wanted a feed of yabbies you'd just go up there. There were little dams on all the farms and they were located on the low points and depressions where rivulets would form in the winter but they all dried up in summer. The biggest dam was not far from us on Theodore Street near Fox Street and that dam

was originally known as Padley's reservoir for the St Albans Estate from the 1880s. When there was a lot of rain those paddocks between Power Street to Fox Street would flood and the roads became impassable. Even in the sixties when the dam had been filled in those floods would occur and I've seen photographs of a boat being used along that stretch of road before the proper storm-water drains were installed. Keilor council eventually converted that old reservoir into a nature reserve and children's playground.

On our block we raised chooks, goats and cows, and we had a horse and cart. Of course one of mum's jobs was feeding the chooks in the back yard and I remember whenever she went out there with a bucket of scraps the chooks would come running around her. Everything was all free range then. We had eight acres so you had some space for animals. That's the way people survived during the depression and during the war. Rabbits were good for a meal and lots of people went rabbiting. Many people had a cow for the milk and if you didn't have a cow you would take your billy to a neighbour who had some and buy your milk direct.

There were paddocks all around us with only a couple of houses near us on Arthur Street and it was a longish trek along open fields to the school and the shops where the station was. But dispersed housing didn't mean that you didn't know what was going on in the neighbourhood. As my brother Joe told me, if someone sneezed in St Albans the whole town knew about it, and if someone wasn't on the morning train to work the whole town knew they were sick. The train would not leave the station unless all the regular passengers heading for work were on board, even if it meant waiting a few minutes until the last stragglers arrived.



Catherine Farrugia with Joe & Frank © F Farrugia



I was born in 1927 and went to the school at West Esplanade in 1931 with my older brother Joseph. We must have found it confusing because Mary Stein (now Smith) who came to St Albans about the same time as my parents remembers the headmaster introducing us and saying that we did not speak English. We might have been the only Australian-Maltese children there that year, because even if we didn't speak English we were born in Australia. Mary's family was of German background and though her father became a British subject there was some anti-German feeling that made it hard for him to find work after the war. I think it was the same for the Maltese even though we were British subjects and allies.

The school register indicates that my father was unemployed at the time we enrolled, but I have no specific idea why this was so, as it might have been just the depression in general. Some anti-Maltese sentiments did exist at the time, with one local paper commenting that Australia needed English and Anglo-Saxon migrants rather than the 'brindle' type and some were even more offensive. This attitude probably effected employment opportunities during the depression, because the most recent immigrants normally get the blame for the nation's economic woes. I know my dad found it hard at times and he would not have been the only one. In fact my father worked anywhere he could and that included the Albion quarry and the ARC factory, he was at the ICI factory in Deer Park, he was picking fruit on the farms along the river around Keilor, and he spent many years working at the Angliss meatworks. During the depression he went to work at Werribee and only came home on the weekends. All his life he worked hard as a labourer and process worker as well as doing some backyard farming.

St Albans in the 1930s was a very small place because it had about 400 people, more or less, with a cluster of housing near the railway station and along Victoria Crescent and the rest dispersed between Boundary and Taylors roads – this was the Keilor half of St Albans and that one-sided development continued for a long time. The few small shops were in Main Road (Boundary

Road) west of the railway before East Esplanade went ahead and a few people started small businesses from their homes in Victoria Crescent.

We were one of the first Maltese families in the district and the Salibas arrived soon after us, possibly in 1929, because Rita and Sam Saliba were at the primary school in the thirties. (Sam did okay in the local football and cricket competitions. He enlisted in WW2 and paid the ultimate sacrifice in New Guinea.¹) The Maltese men mostly worked as labourers in factories and the quarries and there were plenty of quarries around. Apart from the one in St Albans² the others were in Albion, Sunshine, Sydenham and Footscray near Kinnears and also where Highpoint was built. My father worked at the Albion quarry for a while. Before long some of these men were trying to make a go with small-scale farming to supplement their wages as many had done before them.

After WW2 many hundreds of Maltese arrived under the assisted passage agreement between Malta and Australia. The Maltese were British nationals and there was an agreement with the British government because they were closing down the naval bases in Malta and assisting the retrenched people to migrate. Interestingly, my dad came to Australia under a Canadian passport. Locally, the Maltese were seen as part of the non-Anglo 'ethnics'. I remember that my father joined an association that was trying to form a Maltese social network in the region and there was a gathering in St Albans of quite a few people interested in the idea. There's a photo of the gathering, supposedly in St Albans, with a big banner featuring the Maltese cross. I doubt it's St

¹ Samuel Joseph Charles Saliba enlisted in 1941 and was appointed Corporal in the 39th Australian Infantry Battalion. He died of wounds on 19 December 1942 in Papua at age 22 years and was buried at the Port Moresby War Memorial. His death was noted in the Age, the Argus and the Weekly Times. His passing was noted by Keilor Council and the St Albans Cricket Club. His name is located at panel 68 in the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial.

² A second quarry opened in Kealba at the end of Main Road East in 1981 and operated until 1999. Since then it has been used as a solid and inert land fill.

Albans because there are some double story buildings at the back of a large sports oval that doesn't look like any local setting.

In the mid fifties, places like St Albans, Sunshine and Altona became common settlement places for Maltese immigration to Melbourne, and over time the Maltese people have been one of the larger ethnic communities in the region. During the fifties and sixties Maltese immigrants like George Attard and George Cini became active in drama and social groups because more people were arriving. Attard lived in Henry Street behind the Conrad street shops and worked with the railways but promoted cultural activities and drama performances for social and fundraising purposes. He was a member of the ALP and during the seventies they held their meetings in the old bungalow in his back yard. George Cini helped establish the Malta Star of the Sea community centre in West Esplanade and that was in the seventies. Harry Moakes helped established the Green Gully soccer club. Once the Sacred Heart church and school were established in the fifties, the Maltese flocked there for religious and educational purposes because they were nearly all Catholics. I think Father Cini (no relation to George Cini) might have been the first Maltese priest here and he was at St Paul's off Station Avenue where a lot of the local community had settled. And so the Maltese people progressed.



Sam Farrugia and children © Frank Farrugia

We lost mum in 1936 when I was about ten years old and we went to St Vincent's Orphanage in South Melbourne for about four years, so there was a break in continuity at St Albans Primary. Of course there was no Catholic school here at the time, that came twenty years later in the fifties. Mum passed away on 15 September 1936. She was only 29 years old and had contracted tuberculosis which was a contagious disease and people with infectious diseases were quarantined in a sanatorium in Greenvale. She was buried in the Keilor Cemetery. This was the time that the people of St Albans rallied around us to provide support

through the Keilor Shire's Public Assistance Committee by putting on a concert and dance at the St Albans hall. A play was presented by the North Essendon Presbyterian Dramatic Society and the entrance fees went to the appeal for the family. Hundreds of tickets were sold, which shows a remarkable level of support. Mr Stenson and other councillors took a lead in this. Despite the help dad was not able to keep us together as a family because it was impossible for him to work full-time and look after six young children at home; and so we went to the orphanage.

I still remember Mum and I still have a few bits of memorabilia that I hang onto to remind me of early St Albans. The postcard photo of the Opie estate sale is interesting because it's from the time we first came here – the mid twenties – and the house blocks in Boundary Road (now Main Road West) opposite the Steven's property were being advertised at £35 per lot on easy terms, no deposit. That sounds like nothing today but it would have been a significant amount back then, and especially with escalating unemployment emerging in the late twenties. Even James Stevens couldn't sell his land in the forties because there were no takers.



Cnr West Esplanade and Main Road West 1920s

I also have a postcard painting of Joe Borrell's farm at Keilor. When you got off the old steel bridge at Keilor, Borrell's farm was just there on the right along the river. I think the family was originally from Spain (the father was Jose Borrell) and migrated before 1910. They became successful in growing vegetables and I remember crops of onions and potatoes coming from around there years later. St Augustine's Church was to the north on the top of the hill. The Maribyrnong river was much cleaner in those days and you could always drink the water. The farmer's dam across the river at Green Gully was always a popular swimming hole but we would mostly go to the one further downstream at the bottom of Stenson's orchard. We used to go rabbiting along the Maribyrnong and also along Kororoit Creek.

Tom Lethlean used to live in the railway house that was on the corner of St Albans Road and Main Road East. His father Thomas Lethlean was a railway employee and won prizes for the best-kept railway house in metropolitan Melbourne.

There were several children in the family and they came here from Mangalore in the 1940s. If you saw that house in the late 1970s it was just about ready for demolition and was being used as a support centre for unemployed youth.

Myrtle Jones married Noel Webb, who was from a large family near the corner of Arthur Street and Victoria Crescent. Stephen and Pearl Webb had a couple of sons who went to the war. Arthur Charles Webb joined the Navy when the war began and was lost when the HMAS Sydney went down in 1941. He had previously served as a stoker on the Australia in the North Sea and was in London during the blitzkrieg. He was only 21 years of age when he died.

After leaving primary school I went to work. In those days you could start working when you were 14 but I started while I was 13 because I had my merit certificate but I didn't turn 14 till April. One of the biggest problems in St Albans was there were few jobs available locally. The quarry in McKechnie Street was about the only place that hired workers and that included men from outside the district. The few local shops were run by families and would rarely hire non-family assistants. The bigger farms such as Taylor's and McRae's hired a few regular workers but the smaller farms only offered short-term, seasonal work – thus you might get a bit of work picking apricots at Milburn's or Stenson's farm, or tomatoes along the river. That's why the people of St Albans depended on their small-scale farming to bolster their livelihood.



Grades 1-2 St Albans Primary 1937 © F Farrugia

Everyone had a few chooks for the eggs and occasionally for the pot. People bought a few young calves and fattened them on their few acres. You might keep a couple as milkers but the others were sold once they'd put on a bit of weight. The problem with raising stock such as cows and sheep was insufficient pasture and that's why there were problems with wandering stock which often meant the farmer had released his stock to get a bit of feed on public land.

Dairies and piggeries were always a good match because when the milk was skimmed for

making butter the skimmed milk was fed to the pigs, and there were a few piggeries around St Albans. There were several piggeries along Main Road West toward Kororoit Creek, including the Dale piggery but also Cyril Clements and the Dodds are mentioned as operating piggeries around there. Nat Dale's piggery was on the Kororoit Creek and was the biggest in St Albans. Nathaniel Dale was the son of John Dale of Maribyrnong who was involved with the Melbourne pig and cattle market that used to be where the Royal Melbourne Hospital was built. Then about 1940 they built the new pig and calf market in Sunshine and that was even closer for the local piggeries taking their stock to auction. Some of the people along Foxes Lane also raised pigs. Even the smaller, local farmers like the McAuleys had sheep which they raised for the wool and the meat and that's why people like Bob McRae and Mick Weibrecht were important because they were sheep shearers. You didn't need big shearing sheds and large shearing gangs for these small-farm flocks. A man on his own with a portable shearing rig could do the job efficiently enough.

My first job at the age of 13 was in the city with Davies Coops who were woolen mills in Swanston Street.³ You used to load the machines with a little tin on your knee from which you replenished the reels. There were six boys working with each having a section and once the women whistled out you had to reload the machines and there were heaps of them. The boss would have you racing each other: "Let's see who's the fastest today, boys." We got paid 19/6 per week which is about \$2 in today's money. I worked there for about a year and then went to Nettlefolds in Albion.



My older brother Joe got a job at Nettlefolds and it was through him that I got a job there as well. Mr Victor Cornhill was a fitter by trade and he was a foreman at Nettlefolds. He lived in St Albans and was on the committee of the St Albans Football Club and knew us all. Everyone knew every-

one in St Albans. The Cornhills were in Percy Street next to the Hales and Hooks and I think they had two daughters, Noreen and Maisie. Anyway, Mr Cornhill said to Joe that he saw me on the train of a night and that I always looked

³ Davies, Coop and Co. established a spinning and knitting factory in Swanston street in 1925 and expanded the business during the thirties. In 1969 they were taken over by Bradmill.

tired because I was always asleep. He told Joe to get me to come to Nettlefolds and speak with him, which I did, and that's how he became my boss at Nettlefolds.⁴ I worked there for 13 years.

At first I used to cycle to work at Nettlefolds. Along that corner of Percy Street where it comes onto St Albans Road on that big corner looking back to St Albans there used to be a big sign advertising land for sale – a pound a month would have bought the whole block – no interest, no deposit, you just started paying it off. Of course a pound a month was a lot of money in those days and no-one had that sort of cash lying around. That corner was where Mr Hewitt had the Ampol Service Station for many years. At first he was a bit further along St Albans Road where Auto Endress was, but he shifted to the Percy Street corner. They had the first coin operated Coke machine in the district and the boys would come on their bicycles just to experience the new invention.

In those days different factories loaned things to each other. One day one of my bosses said "Come with me, son" and we walked up to Wunderlichs, which made asbestos sheets. It was a nice sunny morning and the sunlight was streaming through the little holes in the cement sheet roofing and you could see all this dust floating around – the factory used to make asbestos sheets. I had jet black hair at the time but when I walked out of the building the top of my head and shoulders were all white and the workers were breathing that stuff all day.



(L-R) Keith Straughan, Bill Skrivener, Bill Turner?, unknown, Frank Farrugia, Ronnie Blain

James Leckie, Alf's father, used to work at Wunderlichs and died in 1948 and you can't help but wonder if all that dust had something to do with it. Alf's mother, Lily, died in 1986. They are both buried at Footscray.

Bill Turner was the caretaker of the old St Albans Mechanics Hall during the late forties and also the army hut on Errington Reserve. At first Keilor council was looking to provide some accommodation at the hall for the caretaker, but

⁴ The Birmingham firm of Guest, Keen and Nettlefolds Pty. Ltd., bought 60 acres of land at Sunshine in 1924.

then Norm Self put that first army hut together on the reserve for the boys' club. It was quite substantial so Mr Turner was living in part of it. He retired from his caretaker duties in 1950. There were several Turner families in St Albans but I think Bill Turner was a bachelor boy and he was an engineer. You know that railway line going out of Footscray where one line goes underneath? He worked on that project. He was a good engineer.

Life wasn't all about hard work and when you're a bit settled and growing up you look for a bit of fun with your friends. The boys' club would sometimes arrange for a dance at the St Albans hall on a Friday night. As well as dancing there would be "novelties, supper prizes, Musical Knights' Band, and transport to Sunshine at 2 a.m." One such event in 1949 was arranged by myself and Georgie Power as joint secretaries of the club. George was a member of the Boys Club from the thirties and he donated money to the new club when it was re-formed in the fifties. We were at the primary school in the thirties where George took to sport and when he left school he became a member of the football and cricket clubs. His parents were Stan and Stella Power of Victoria Crescent but George ended up living in Collins Street and is still living there as far as I know. I think he married Patricia Brundell.



Photo opportunity at Luna Park © Frank Farrugia

Luna Park was always a good place for a bit of fun because they had rides and other novelties. They had a photographer there who had set up a fake little bar and would take your photo for sixpence or something. So me and some of the boys had a go behind this pretend cocktail bar which looked like the real thing with its counter and bottles and I still have one photo for posterity with my brothers Joe and Charlie, Ken "Popeye" Brown, Herbie Blain, and Noel Webb. Popeye was our nickname for Ken Brown who was a pretty tough character. A bloke called out to him one day "How're you going Popeye?" and Popeye hit him between the eyes. The guy picked himself up and said "What did you do that for?" and Popeye said "Only my friends call me Popeye."

For entertainment or amusement we would go for picnics around the area. Sometimes we would walk, sometimes we went by horse and cart, and as we got older someone in the group had access to a car and we would drive to places. Stenson's farm at the end of Biggs Street was always a good destination for a walk and I remember being there sometimes with Dorothy Hourahan or Dawn Turner. Margaret Ancrum of Keilor was another girl I was keen on who was a few years younger. Her father John was a mechanic and ran Ancrum's Garage in Keilor. Margaret is still around living in Bacchus Marsh and we talk occasionally on the phone. We used to go swimming in the river down there and it was also a good spot for picnics. When I was with Maureen Turner sometimes four or six of us would set out with a couple of bags of food and just stretch out on the grassy paddock for a nice afternoon of companionship and conversation.



Myrtle Webb, Tom Lethlean, Frank Farrugia, Maureen Turner
 Sometimes my sister and her girlfriends would take the horse and cart and picnic near the church in Circus East. They'd grown some trees around the church so it was looking nice. Even four or five of the guys would go for a drive for something to do and end up in one of the council gardens around Melbourne. When I got my motorbike Roy Turner and I would go for rides either by ourselves or with the motorbike club.

Going to the country dances would be the entertainment for the weekend. The coppers would come around to the halls just to check what was happening, because alcohol was banned at those events but the normal practice was for someone to bring along a bottle or two and hide them out the back among the shrubbery. The police knew what was happening and you'd get fined if you got caught but mostly you got away with it. We would go to places like Sydenham, Sunbury, Melton and Rockbank, anywhere that was within a certain radius. The districts would all take it in turns to hold their dances.



Usually there'd be a dance on Friday night in one place and some-where else on the Saturday. That was your entertainment. At that time I had my 36 Chev so we used to get around in that. Cuddy Doherty was a good one with the transport because he would put a couple of benches in the back of his truck and drive people to whatever dance was happening around the district. One night we were taking Roy Turner home from one of the

dances and he was asleep in the back of the car. He was the first drop off and when we stopped we noticed that his teeth were missing. So next day we went back to Melton looking for his teeth and he was lucky because we found them. We knew where we'd been drinking because we used to take a barrel to the dance.

The Self Brothers' shop in East Esplanade was a good spot because they sold drinks and ice cream and the petrol bowser was up just a little way. I think Ron Harvey used to have that milk bar after Selfs built their bigger store. I was standing there one day in the doorway having a chat with Ada Webb who used to work there when a mate of mine ran into my motorbike with an old T model Ford. The Holden cars were just coming out and a couple of brothers made this Ford look like a Holden. It was a

belt-driven thing and he didn't know how to stop the bastard so he crashed into me. He was only going slow so he didn't do much damage. There were twelve members in the Webb family, but families tended to be larger in that era than they are today.



Frank Farrugia at Self's General Store © F Farrugia

I was a member of the Braybrook Motorcycle Club which was formed in Sunshine about 1947. It was open for riders and non-riding members in the area and operated under the rules of the Victorian Motor Cycle Association. It cost 8 shillings a year to become a member. One of the first activities we did was to support the motorcycle races at the Keilor Speed Track.

In 1950 we merged with the Sunshine Motorcycle Club and the new club name became the Braybrook District Motorcycle Club. I had the 650 BSA which was the hottest thing on the market at the time – I think the brand name was The Golden Flash. It had a previous owner who used to work with me at Nettlefolds and he wanted to sell it. I used to have a 350 BSA that used to go like a rocket too; it had a twin exhaust system and had a beautiful sound. When I first had the motorbikes there was no speed limit so we used to pass the coppers on the road and wave to them. I would travel to different places around Victoria and including Tasmania.

My motorcycle mate was Roy Turner, the son of Albert Edward Turner and not related to Maureen Turner who was the daughter of James and Alice Turner. Bill Scrivener was another guy who was working at Nettlefolds and he was also in the motorcycle club. I think he won a prize in the 350 class in the 1950 competition where Fugal Affleck won something in the 500 class.

My older brother, Joe, was working at Massey Ferguson. He was elected assistant secretary of the boys' social club when it was reformed in September 1945, and that was the start of the youth activities that developed into the boys' and girls' youth club at Errington Reserve.



Catherine Farrugia feeding chooks © Frank Farrugia



Mary, Carmel & Loretta Farrugia © F Farrugia



Carmel Farrugia © Frank Farrugia



Other committee positions from this first meeting included Des Hutson as president, Bill Turner as treasurer, and John Doherty as secretary. At that stage the club was guided by First-Constable William Shaw of the Sunshine Police as instructor and general manager. My brother passed away about 10 or 15 years ago. He was a smoker. All the ones I grew up with in St Albans who didn't smoke are still alive; it's the smokers who have all gone. It's been proved without doubt that it takes 10 years off your life. There was only one lad that's survived, and that's Noel Webb who married that Myrtle I mentioned earlier. Noel passed away before my brother Joe.



Joe Farrugia at Massey Ferguson © Frank Farrugia

Where we grew up in Power Street it was all open paddocks and you could always get a feed. During the Depression we were alright because dad had ducks and chooks and pigeons and goats, so we had a variety of meats and you could always get a rabbit. I could open my bedroom window and pop a rabbit because it was empty paddocks around us. I gave my gun back only a few weeks ago when the police had another amnesty – I didn't really want to part with it but I took it down and gave it to them because I know I'm not going to shoot rabbits any more. Dad bought it for us when we were kids for 10 shillings. I think I was about 13 when we got that. I left school at age 13 after I got my merit certificate and I got the gun after that.

Well, everyone had a gun in St Albans because that was your hobby and a source of food. You'd go rabbit shooting and we'd try to flog rabbits at two shillings a pair. Seen the price of rabbits lately? The St Albans boys' social club even had shooting competitions in the old quarry. I remember about 1945 we were shooting there and my brother Joe and I being among the winners. Kevin Priest was also a good shot. He married Betty Goddard and I think their son Gary was born about 1954. Her family came to St Albans about 1928 but her father died in the mid thirties.

The McAuleys had a farm not far from us

on Taylors Road across the railway line and their children went to the primary school. (Taylors Road used to be known as North Road in earlier days.) After he left school Finlay McAuley worked on his parents' farm and used to bring water in his big iron tank drawn by horse and dray to the surrounding area when the household water tanks ran dry.

On the McAuley property during the war there used to be a searchlight unit set up there and there was an army company looking after that, I suspect because it was a transmission point for communications. I'm pretty sure there was no gun placement there but it was guarding the radio transmission tower. A number of Keilor women were members of searchlight battalion of the Women's Australian Army Corps who were also responsible for protecting airfields. It was a pretty big camp at McAuley's farm and there were a lot of women based there; there were a lot of girls in the army. I remember we would ride past there going rabbiting and they'd give us a whistle. We were about fifteen or so at the time and were heading towards Sydenham because beyond Taylors Road you could get all the rabbits you wanted. That army camp was there right through the war so it must have been a few years. They probably started there after the Japanese military became interested in coming down.

Dad bought the whole eight-acre block where we were living. We were only paying five shillings rent per week and when the war started there was a bit of work available so dad decided to buy the property. He only wanted about half of the block but the real estate agents in Sunshine, that would have been Greenwoods, said he wasn't going to split the property so he had to buy the whole lot. (I think Greenwood's son later took over the business.) Dad gave him £500 and got the house and eight acres of land, but we didn't become millionaires. When it was subdivided it still had only the dirt roads. Dad was the last person in the area who was allowed to subdivide by just putting the white pegs into the ground without doing anything to the roads. The Stevens family over the railway line were the next to subdivide their Stevensville Estate and they had to form the roads with a bit of salamander. After that the councils introduced more regulations where you had to put in kerb and channeling.

During the depression in the thirties nearly everyone in St Albans was on the susso.⁵ Things were so tough that dad even tried to sell some of our milking goats for a bit of cash flow but I can't remember if he was successful. I remember going down to the Mechanics Hall about once a month for a basket of goodies and sometimes if your shoes were worn out you might

get them replaced. Dad's first job was working on the roads. The susso men used to work along Arthur Street because it was that rough that no one drove on the road, you would drive along the side of the road. It was only a gravel road and you would have a gang of men going up and down the road filling up the holes with picks and shovels and tamping it down. It was like working for the dole.

I can remember Agnes Stevens helping distribute aid to families during the depression. She was involved with the local benevolent society for many years and raised a lot of money for charitable purposes. Her husband, James Stevens, was a local councillor and proposed the establishment of the St Albans Unemployed Committee and they provided some support in the depression. Not everything went smoothly though as there were hiccups with personalities and the politics when Lilly Turner, the secretary of the St Albans Unemployed Relief Committee, publicly criticized Stevens. He praised the good efforts of his wife, Agnes Stevens, who had suggested starting the support group in the first place, and it helped many people while it existed, but their resources were small. At one stage the committee was receiving £20 a month from the government relief to support the unemployed families of St Albans, which would not have gone very far at all.

In the depression years they started the sewerage treatment plant in Werribee and hundreds of men were employed there in forming new channels and opening new land for irrigation. My father got some susso work there. In those days Werribee was a long way off and getting there was a problem. I remember dad heading off with a great big loaf of bread and a block of cheese and staying there all week and coming home on the weekend. He would drive there with the horse and cart. There were six kids in the family so mum must have done alright coping with them on her own during the week.

When my mum got sick we got help for some neighbours. My mother had contracted TB and there was no cure for it in those days so it was a death sentence. I remember dad taking us to Greenvale in the horse and cart once a month or so. She was in isolation so you could see her but you weren't allowed to touch. The Dennis family was living close to us on the corner at Arthur Street and there were two sons and five girls in the family. The parents were Charles Arthur and Doris Gertrude and they looked after Carmel, who was the youngest one in our family. Doris would come and baby-sit when mum wasn't around. When we went to the orphanage the Dennises wanted to look after Carmel because they had looked after her when my mother was sick. Carmel was only a baby when mum died so she never really knew her. The Dennises looked after Carmel for four years and were sorry to see

⁵ In December 1933 there were 36 men in the Shire of Keilor working for sustenance.

her go when dad got the rest of us back from the orphanage.

Mr and Mrs Dennis came to St Albans after the first world war and settled in Arthur Street but later moved to Victoria Crescent while some of the children stayed at Arthur Street. Mr Dennis worked as a bootmaker and there were a couple of other men also doing that locally. The children did okay for themselves. Alfred served as a Lance Bombardier with the Field Artillery and was awarded the Military Medal for conspicuous gallantry in Egypt. Reg served with the A.I.F. in the Middle East; he married and moved to Coburg. Nellie married Alex Hassett of Theodore Street. Irene used to play basketball in the girls' club with Maureen Turner and Marion McAuley. She became a hairdresser and worked from their place in Victoria Street. Dorothy married Charles Weibrecht in 1941 at the St Albans Anglican Church.⁶

Dorothy's sisters were her bridesmaids and that must have been a really special occasion as their photographs were included in the Age. That didn't happen too often though sightings of Aileen Taylor at the races and such did appear in the society columns of the Argus. Mrs Dennis died in 1948 and is buried at Keilor.



Dorothy Dennis (centre) with her sisters

I guess dad was able to get us back together because we were all a bit older and becoming self sufficient and thus able to help with the family finances. The boys returned first because they were older. The girls came out about a year later. I think you had to wait until you were thirteen or fourteen after you had finished your schooling and then it was off to work. That would be long after the war. Growing up and working at the time it was usual to give your pay packet to your parents and get some pocket money back. That's how families supported each other – you worked for the family.

⁶ Albert Charles Weibrecht's family is traced back to 1839 in Brandenburg, Germany. He was born in 1912 in Horsham and died in 1997. Dorothy Henrietta Irene Dennis was born in Prahran in 1917 and died in 1985.

The population of St Albans in the early fifties was still village size – about a thousand people – but it was starting to increase with the arrival of the new migrants and noticeably among the Catholic population, so people like the Gavaghans, Steins, Leckies, Hewitts and others pushed to establish a local parish. Fr. Reis was appointed and we were some of volunteers helping him. Previously the church services had been held in the Mechanics hall, but in September 1953 Fr. Reis led the procession from the hall to the new Presbytery in Winifred Street. There were several hundred people in that procession and my father was one of the four bearers holding the canopy over Fr. Reis who was carrying the Blessed Sacra-ment. It was a solemn but joyful event and my father would have been proud to be selected for that task. The first Mass in the new church was held at midnight on Christmas Eve, 1953. There was no roof or floor but there were lots of people.

I eventually got sick of working at Nettlefolds and in about 1954 I went up the bush cutting timber. They had been advertising jobs for wood fellers or cutters out in the country and I decided that would do me. That was in two places in eastern Victoria: in Noojee and a remoter area north of Heyfield known as Licola – once past there you were above the snow line.



Frank Farrugia in work attire, Noojee © F Farrugia

When I was up there they were punching a road through to Jamieson near the Goulburn River so there was a big gang up there with a canteen and everything on the mountain. We used go to the camp and for a couple of bob would have a feed at the canteen instead of cooking our own meal.

The Noojee forest was green after the fires and all the dead trees stood out white amidst the new growth.⁷ We were chopping them up into

⁷ Noojee was a major timber town at the time. The area was settled in the 1860s after gold was discovered. Major destruction by bushfires occurred in 1926 and 1939.

lengths that could be handled by one man. We had a big circular saw on a type of trolley that you would wheel about and you used that to cut the tree trunks to length. It was an enormous blade with no safety guard and in the heat you'd be working in a pair of shorts and boots. Whoever heard of helmets, earmuffs or face guards? You wouldn't get away with it these days. We used to have a splitting gun for splitting the trunks after we'd cut them. You could go to ICI and buy black powder and lengths of fuse and detonators. There were timber mills everywhere around Heyfield when I was there and that was virgin forest where we were cutting big Mountain Ash trees, but we needed timber for building houses and everything.

I was away for a couple of years and when I came back about 1957 there was plenty of work around, in fact there was work everywhere. At one time I was even thinking of working in the brewery.



Frank Farrugia cutting timber at Noojee © F Farrugia

I used to board at the Heyfield pub and a lady and her husband there were sorry to see me go, so they gave me a note to take to the brewery down in Abbotsford. One of their sons was a foreman there so the idea was that he could probably get me a job there. I went down there one morning and the smell of the place was overpowering after having worked out in the open bush. It was about 7:30 in the morning and I knocked on the counter and said I'd come to meet someone about a job. While I was waiting this other guy said "You might as well have a beer while you're waiting" and he gives me a pot of beer. Mind you, I like a beer. Anyway, the first guy returned and said my contact was not in today but would be in tomorrow, so come back tomorrow, but in the meantime it was "Have another beer." Apparently they used to get a beer allowance, but I decided that the job was not for me because with that much temptation around a bloke could easily end up an alcoholic.

St Albans in the early 1950s was a relatively small place but St Albans in the late 1950s was a much bigger place and growing

rapidly compared to what it was like in the twenties when there were two shops and maybe a couple hundred people. Even in the early 1950s it was still a village with less than a thousand people, mostly of British extraction. The Europeans started coming to St Albans and with the increase in the Catholic population they built a small church and a primary school. When I came back in 1957 there were over 6,000 people in St Albans and nearly all of them were migrants of non-British background, all looking for work and land to build their new homes in their new homeland. Locally, it was population change on a scale not seen since the Aboriginal inhabitants were outnumbered by the British. In my two-year absence, another two schools had been built: a new primary school in Station Avenue and the High School in Main Road East. The Sacred Heart school had already discovered that ninety percent of their students were migrants, and then the High School discovered its first enrollment included students from about 30 nationalities. St Albans had become little Europe. The locals probably didn't realise what was happening around them at first, which must have been a bit unsettling and which they acknowledge in the St Albans history book. Suddenly, having Maltese neighbours was not an unusual experience.



I was a bit unsettled myself so I did a stint at Angliss Meatworks on Ballarat Road in Footscray. They employed a lot of people and many St Albans people have worked there over the years. I did a couple of seasons there and then I ran into Austin McMahon who was a mate of mine because he was from St Albans and had been involved in the police boys club. He was also one of Fr. Reis's volunteers with me and my dad and my brothers and lots of others – there were about 50 of us – when we were putting down the foundations for the Sacred Heart church and school in 1953. At that time there were about 400 Catholic families in the new parish and about ninety percent of them were new Australians. Austin said "Why don't you come to Olympic Tyres?" If I stayed at Olympics for three months he got £20 or something like that as a bonus.

I had the old Chev by this time and I started working at Olympic Tyres and spent the rest of my working life there as a fitter. Sir Frank Beaurepaire started the Olympic Tyre and Rubber Company in 1933 and they had a factory in West Footscray near the railway station. They upgraded you pretty quickly if you were interested and that's how I became a fitter. I was with the A.E.U. – the Australian Engineering Union it used to be – for 51 years overall and I was one of the longest servers without a break. Even when I was cutting wood and when I was with the meatworks for a while I still kept up my AEU union dues. When I left they sent me a card every year.

That's when I ran into Austin McMahon who got me into Olympics and he got the £20 after I'd been there three months, but he gave me half of that. That place smelt, too. Anyway, I ended up staying there for 34 years until I retired. When I started, my old Chev was the worst car in the joint. I would drive it into the corner of the car park beside all these other cars that looked very nice.

I started at Olympic Tyres on a Wednesday and basically did nothing. On Thursday I did nothing and also nothing on Friday. The boss came past on Friday and said "Do you want to work the weekend?" Well I liked a beer of a weekend so I wasn't too keen on the overtime. He could see I was hesitant so he said "You know, son, if you want a job here you're expected to work weekends." So I said alright.

I was new to the work so on Saturday and Sunday the T.A., the Technical Assistant, was showing me what had to be done. We were changing the production model but he was forever going for a smoke. At first I just followed him because I didn't know what I was doing. About 3 o'clock not long before knock off he was going for another smoke but I said I'll stay and copy some of the pipe work from the other machine. He said "No, leave that. That's for tomorrow." So we worked all day Sunday on that part of the job. Later when I was familiar with the work I discovered we could have done all the work within a couple of hours.

I don't remember when Austin McMahon left Olympic Cables but I did notice that in the sixties he and Alan Patten were working as managers for the St Albans Building Supplies, which was one of the businesses started by the Stevens brothers. They were all heavily involved in St Albans. I think both Austin and Alan were still involved with the St Albans Football Club but that was at the committee level rather than as players.

I was keen to finish early on a Sunday to have a beer. Do you remember the old bona fides? If you were a bona fide traveller you could be served a beer on a Sunday provided that you

had travelled more than 20 miles.⁸ That was phased out when the pubs started to open later. There was a liquor shop behind Spaldings that was selling some new brew called Richmond beer. It was packaged in something like a cement bag in straw envelopes. They had special licences. I'm not sure whether it was for 1 or 2 dozen bottles or a 2 gallon licence but you could only sell it in that amount. Beer was scarce and even rationed so this guy used to take 4 bottles of beer out of the package and replace it with 4 bottles of four-penny dark, which was local wine but it was terrible. I used to go to a dance on a Saturday and wake up on Sunday with enough straw in the back of the car to feed a couple of goats.

How I got my first car. There was this guy, Mick Weibrecht, who as an ex-farmer from Romsey and strong as a bull, but the farming life was disappearing and he got a factory job. He took over shearing sheep for some of the local farmers when Bob McRae died. He married Doris Dennis, who used to be in Arthur Street and babysat us when mum wasn't around. Mick and I both worked at Nettlefolds and he said to me one day, "Do you want to make some money?"

I said, "Yeah. Why?"

"I have a contract to build a fence around Overnewton Castle and I need someone to give me a hand." So I agreed to help him.

I remember the Colonel saying "You boys are making a lot of money." Everyone called him the Colonel or Colonel James Stewart although I don't know if that was a proper military title or just a nickname.⁹ He was a British migrant himself and had married Aileen Taylor and that's why he was organizing things at Overnewton because at that stage they were living there. He was in the British army in India when Aileen Taylor went there to visit friends, and that's how they met but they married in Essendon and that was written up in the papers because the Taylors were the original pioneers of the district and were the biggest land owners around Keilor and Sydenham. Aileen and her sister Beatrice were third-generation pioneers and lived a wealthier lifestyle compared to St Albans residents, though the McRaes fitted in well in their circle because they were part of it. The Oakland Hounds met at Overnewton when they were in the district and the Taylor girls would hold cocktail parties for four or five dozen guests at the start of the racing carnival.

For fence building you would usually

⁸ Some prohibitionists argued that the 20 mile distance should be increased to 100 miles, because with a motor car people could travel for just half an hour and thus meet the bona-fide definition to buy alcohol on Sundays.

⁹ Colonel James Stewart O.B.E., M.C., served with the Royal Artillery in India. He married Eileen Taylor in Essendon in 1929. They lived in England and India in the 1930s before moving to Overnewton in the 1950s.

quote so much per mile or chain. To build a fence you would put up a big post every chain or so and every 8 feet in between you would put in a smaller one, and that was the basis for the price you quoted. When we were about to start Mick says "Colonel, there's some new-fangled metal posts on the market. Do you want to use them? They are better than timber because they will never rot." So we'd put these big posts in about a chain apart and in between we'd hammer in these metal posts into the ground. It was hard work, especially in 110 degree heat. We would only do it of a Saturday morning and earn £10 each. No wonder the Colonel said we were making a lot of money. We started really early, maybe 5:30 or 6 o'clock, because Mick was a racing man and wanted to knock off at 12 o'clock to go the races. It was hard work, digging in posts, knocking stakes into the ground, running the wires though. We'd do a chain at a time. The Colonel would give us a shot of wine and pay us the £10 and Mick would head off for the races. That's how I saved my £300 for the old Chevy. That was probably in 1950. I drove it for about 4 years and I drove it up the bloody bush when I was working there and drove it all around till I got to Olympics Tyres. I started working a few weekends there and the next thing I bought was a second-hand VW.

I started to get used to working overtime and after about 8 months I bought myself a new Holden. After that I was into new Holdens about every three years. I had plenty of bikkies then, working Saturdays and Sundays. In the big money.



As I said, I was a member of the Braybrook Motorcycle Club and had joined just after the war. Dad wasn't happy with me having the motorbike because I had some accidents. One occurred when I was going to a wedding. Wally Baulch¹⁰ used to work in the Keilor Council and few people had their own transport. Roy Turner had his father's car and I had the motorbike and we were just about the only ones

¹⁰ Walter "Pom" Baulch was appointed Assistant Shire Secretary and Assistant Rate Collector in 1948. In 1954 he was upgraded to Rate Collector.

with a bit of transport. There were about three cars in St Albans and Roy and myself with motorbikes. I liked a drink, as I said, and there was no pub in St Albans, so you had the choice of going to Sunshine or Deer Park. I got to like going to Keilor because there was a girl there I used to like, so I used to head over for a drink there and collect Wally. We were coming home one night, turning from Taylors Road into Arthur Street. We were only going slow but it was a gravel road and the bike slipped from under me going round that corner. It would have been alright but Wally landed on my head and pushed my face into the gravel so I got rashes down the side of the face and had to go to the wedding looking like that.

The next time it was a bit more serious. This motorbike crowd would hold meetings and we were riding to Ballarat this particular time. You would nominate a Captain, who would lead the riders, and a Whip, who would keep to the back of the pack. The Whip was always the last rider and his duty was to catch the leader and call a halt if there was a puncture or one of the bikes broke down. It always helped if the Whip had one of the faster bikes in the club because you knew that at least he could catch the leaders.

We were going to sit on 80 miles an hour so away we go. There were about two dozen of us. Down past Bacchus Marsh or Ballan we happened to see a couple in an MG. We knew the driver because he also had a motorbike. One guy pulled out of our group to ride alongside the MG and have a bit of a yarn with him and the next thing they decide to have a bit of a burn. The rest of us are riding single file – no more than two abreast was the normal rule – so these other two are going to whiz past us at 100 miles per hour. They come to a bend and there's a car coming the other way so they had the choice of hitting the car head-on or running into the back of me. The bike went down and I was skidding along the road and my head was banging on the road. My leathers wore out, my pants wore out, and then I started to wear out. I finished up in Ballarat Hospital where the nurse cleaned me up then plastered that yellow gauze over my hairy leg. This was on the Saturday morning. On Monday I went to the Melbourne Hospital and the nurse decided the quickest way to remove the gauze was to rip it off, hair and all. I must admit I gave the bike away not long after that.

We did some good trips with the club: Ballarat, Korweinguboorra, Colac, Castlemaine, Cowes, Sorrento, Nar-Nar-Goon, Corowa, Adelaide, Queensland, all over the place. During the early fifties I was the Captain on some of the trips with Fugal Affleck as vice-captain and Squirrel Anderson as Whip. They were good fun times. You'd go for the drive and then book into a hotel overnight before riding back. It was a great way of seeing the countryside. Fugal had a quite a role in

the club as he was the secretary at one stage and Squirrel was treasurer at one stage.



Frank Farrugia & Bill Skrivener © Frank Farrugia

The club formed a social committee and occasionally would organize a social night with dancing because we didn't want the ladies of the club to miss out. Even coming back from some of the country runs we might plan to stop somewhere along the way at a country dance. As I said, socialising was always a fun part of the club.



Frank Farrugia, Billy Ritchie, Keith Webb © F Farrugia

There was a bit of dirt track at the back of Sunshine and we would sometimes meet there on a Saturday. There was another spot at Laverton before Werribee off the Old Geelong Road where we would have a flying mile on a Sunday. We would all tune our bikes especially for the event and we were clocked between two flags for the privilege of being the fastest bike for that weekend. You'd be flying along virtually lying on the tank with your feet trailing, no helmet or gloves.

We would also have sessions with the Essendon club at the Keilor circuit where there would be mud scrambles. Sometimes we would do special events such as a petrol consumption test. Each rider was allowed one quart of petrol and the object was to travel as far as possible along Geelong Road. The bikes were classed according to engine size and a good performer might get 145 miles per gallon.

You'd have to say that going to the pub and having a beer was a popular activity for some of the men around St Albans.



We had a good plasterer around here, but he wouldn't start unless you had a bottle of beer for him, especially at lunchtime, or he might disappear down the pub and not show up again for the rest of the day.



Ben Hall from Sydenham was a local character. He was actually Frank Hall but we called him Ben Hall for obvious reasons. He married Emily Stenson who was one of Fred Stenson's daughters, and they were all Church of England parishioners and non-drinkers, whereas Ben was

a boozier. He would come past our house when we were in George Street to borrow Mrs Stenson's horse and dray to go to the pub. It was a flat dray with a bench seat and sides. Ben used to go the Keilor hotel and have his drinks. When it was time to head for home the horse knew the way so you would hear this thing coming past and Ben yelling out "Get going!" but when you looked over you couldn't see anyone in the driving seat – he was lying down in the back. Another legend is that he rode a horse into the old dance hall, or at least as far as the doorway. He was a character.

Winifred Stenson married Jack Honey who became a Keilor councillor. They used to live in Arthur Street not far from the old water tower, which was the high part of St Albans. Her father was Frederick Charles Stenson and he put in at least sixty years if not more in supporting the development of St Albans and a lot of that was through representing St Albans on the Keilor Council. Emily Hall ended up in William Street also near the water tower, so two of Mrs. Stenson's daughters ended up living close to their old Keighlo home.

The McRae's had all that land from Taylors Road just about to Sydenham – that was Farquhar and Annie McRea as the original settlers of the 1900s. They were related to the Mansfield family of Tullamarine. The McRae farm was one of the bigger ones opposite from where the fire station is and down to the Green Gully, and they had the Fox/Driscolls Road property and another one in between there; they owned a lot of land. Sonny McRae was the son of Farquhar McRae, and the other McRae was Farquhar's brother, Bob. Bob also enjoyed a drink and would often walk home from Keilor. Instead of using the road he would take the short cut through the paddocks and one night got so tangled up in the barbed wire fence that he couldn't escape. He was telling us about this and I asked him "What did you do?"

"I slept there all night until the sun came up and I could see how to untangle myself!" He was a tough old guy. He burnt to death in his hut

that was an old railway guard's van, and that was in the early 1960s.



Barbed wire fences in Green Gully © Kon Haumann

I remember planes landing in Sonny McRae's paddock, which was in the area now known as Kealba. I suppose they must have been running out of petrol so they would occasionally land in a paddock if they couldn't make it to the airport.¹¹ I think they would tie the tail to a fence or something to stop it being blown about and you'd see them come back with a can of petrol. In 1934 they had an air race from England to Australia and the prize money was put up by MacRobertson the chocolate king of Melbourne.¹² We were sitting at home and could hear the aeroplanes overhead and saw something fall out of one of them. We went across to the Dennises, who were our nearest neighbours and used to look after us. Alfie Dennis took his motor bike across the paddock and we found a satchel of tools that had fallen out of one of the planes. You can imagine what aeroplanes were like in 1934, all open to the air but who knows if the tools just fell out or were ditched to lighten the load.

Alfie Dennis was older than us and he went to the war and we should probably acknowledge his contribution for his country. He was the son of Charles and Doris Dennis who lived in Arthur Street and helped look after us when mum was sick. Charles was one of the boot makers in town and later he was working from Victoria Crescent. Alf Dennis joined up in 1940 and served in Egypt as a lance-bombardier. He was awarded the Military Medal for bravery in taking command of the field artillery troop after his

¹¹ Ray Gibb writes: "I wanted to see the cottage which was a derelict wreck circa 1990 when I drove up Harricks Road and came across Bernie McSweeney who told me about David Thompson and early aviators practising touchdowns in the paddocks nearby."

¹² The MacRobertson Trophy Air Race (also known as the London to Melbourne Air Race) took place October, 1934 as part of the Melbourne Centenary celebrations. A prize fund of \$75,000 was put up by Macpherson Robertson on the conditions that the race be named after his MacRobertson confectionery company.

superior officer was wounded – apparently it was his second day in the field. He must have been in the thick of it because you have to be smelling gunpowder up and personal to get a military medal. Him and his brother worked at Olympic Tyres and went back there after the war. There was a guy out there getting names for street signs and I told him “Put Alfie Dennis’s name down because he got the military medal in the war and it would be nice to have a street named after him.” I don’t think Alfie ever married. Reg Dennis also enlisted in 1940 and served in the Middle East at this time.

Cuddy Doherty was also with the St Albans Football Club and was the committee president at one stage. He had a holiday house up on the Murray, at Mathoura, and sometimes there would be a trip up there for a bit of fun and recreation. A law was introduced that if you had a house on the Victorian side of the river bank you had to pull it down because they were concerned about the septic tanks polluting the water. The house was originally owned by Sir Frank Beaurepaire and one of the McKays. It was a nice house right on a point on the river on the Victorian side, but I think they later built on the NSW side. There was still one of the young McKays involved, and Cuddy and another guy had a little parcel of land on the New South Wales side that they’d bought years earlier. NSW would give them a building permit provided they went out about 200 or 300 metres out from the river with the septic tank. The Victorians were trying to clean up the river.

I went up there one weekend with Johnny Doherty, the son, and he was also bit of a character. After a night of boozing at the pub Mrs Doherty said, “Cuddy, you are not driving that car.” Cuddy got quite annoyed and she said “I’m not going home with you, I’m going with Frank.” So Cuddy said “I’m not going to drive the car home, I’m going to drive the boat.” He ran straight over the back of the boat and into the Murray. In those days if you ever went anywhere, even a small place like Mathowra, you got dressed up in a suit. We fished him out and got his hat and next day his suit is hanging out on a line getting dry.

Cuddy was a Jack of all Trades and had a van that he used for his work but he also used it as a sort of community bus. He would transport football players to their games and party goes to the dances in neighbouring towns on weekend. One of his regular work contracts was building haystacks. As kids we would help stook the hay at Sonny McRae’s farm for a bit of pocket money in the summertime. Come morning tea time at 10 o’clock the hot scones would arrive with a billy of tea. We’d keep working till midday then go to the farmhouse and there would be roast lamb put on. Then they would give you a feed before you went home, which was great for us because we had no mum. After the stooks were dry Cuddy would

have the contract for building the haystacks. He’d build the haystack during the week and of a weekend he would clean out the truck and take us to the dances over to Sydenham. The truck had a canvas top and there were a couple of bench seats placed in the back for passengers.

Piggy Purchase was another colourful local character, and I’m pretty sure he married (or tried to marry) Mrs Wardle after her husband died. George and Mollie Wardle came to St Albans about 1952 as storekeepers. They bought the Perrett’s store when that was sold off and it became known as Wardle’s General Store. It was the end of an era because the Perrett family had been running that store for over 30 years. George Wardle died about 1962. People remember seeing him in the store in a wheelchair for a while so Mrs Wardle was mostly running the store. I remember Piggy Purchase being a pretty ordinary dresser when he was a single man, but when he started courting Mrs Wardle he was a new man, wearing a suit and tie. I’d usually seen him for ten years in a pair of overalls at the hotel and all of a sudden you see him all dressed up; come up all right, too; he had a nice crop of hair of thick, curly, wavy hair. After Mr Wardle died Mrs Wardle kept the shop going but sold it after a few years and I don’t recall what happened to them. There were several children. I can still recall the smell of the Wardle store because they had stock in barrels and baskets; it was a beautiful smell of different foods and sausages hanging from hooks. When that shop and the neighbouring block were demolished and rebuilt they accommodated the National Bank and the little arcade and that’s where Peter Bevez started his medical practice. He’s another St Albans migrant of the fifties.

Purchase used to live in the same house that we used to live in Driscoll Road. We lived there first when it was Fox Lane, then the Driscolls moved in, then Purchase. Keilor council renamed the road Driscoll Road (sounds better than Farrugia Road) but originally it was Fox Lane or Fox Road, which may have been a bit confusing because there was a Fox Street running from the railway line to Sunshine Avenue. I think that’s the same Fox that took the high jump off the railway bridge. He had cancer. He walked along the railway bridge across the valley. It’s a pretty high bridge and would rattle about when a train was crossing. He took the big leap there.

We called Piggy Purchase “Piggy” because he went and purchased a piggery. This was about 1949 and there was a piggery on Jack Freeland’s land in Foxes lane. Norman Purchase (aka Piggy) and his brother Stan tried to buy that business but at that stage the councils were getting stricter about issuing noxious trade licences in residential areas and Keilor knocked back the application.

Purchase was another man who liked his beer. I used to love having a drink at Keilor

because I was keen on one of the girls there whereas my Olympic work mates used to drink at the Buck hotel down in Footscray. (It was the Buckingham hotel in Footscray but we called it the Buck.) It was near the railway station so I suppose it was an easy way to get back. But I had my own transport so I would hop onto the bike and head for Keilor. I always loved the Keilor pub because there was a girl there I liked. Motor biking was good in those days because the roads were clear of traffic but there's too many cars around these days. Piggy Purchase would also be there at Keilor. One day he rolled his truck. He had a nice head of hair but after that accident he had a split in his head that started on the forehead and went way back. I don't know how he survived. He said "I've got beer in the back so can you throw it away or else the cops will see it and ask questions." I said, "Don't worry, I'll get rid of it by putting it in the back of my car." Another day he ran off the road and he couldn't get out because of some box thorns so he was sitting there rolling a cigarette. I said "Don't light that cigarette!" but he ignored me. When he got out he had one foot on the ground lighting his cigarette and the truck caught on fire. Nearly burnt himself to death.

Bob White's parents were Ellen and William White from Tottenham and came here about 1920; they were living in Biggs Street. After he finished at the primary school Bob became a grocer's assistant and that would have been for the Perretts who had the general store in Main Road West, because he was working there later on. I remember Bob because he did the deliveries. He was about 13 when he started working, which is the same age that I started working. He was later involved in the cricket and football competitions: he served some time as treasurer, secretary and president of the cricket club during the thirties and was on the committee that started the football club in 1946. He gave so many years to the cricket club that they made him a life member. Bob enlisted in 1942 and got his job back when he returned in 1946, and in fact Eric Perrett took him into partnership in running the business. Bob would have been in his thirties at that stage. I remember the name "Perrett & White" but I'm not sure how long it lasted. I think Bob married Mavis Jones sometime after the war.

It was easy for Bob to do home deliveries to our place because the door was never locked because we never had a key to the house and we had no mum and everyone was out working. You'd put your order in to Perretts and Bob would deliver the goods and put them on the kitchen table or in the ice box. No one had refrigerators, they were all ice chests at the start. The ice man would come once a week and stick a block of ice in the chest. We had a butcher shop here and I can remember that dad was pretty poor so he

used to buy the cheap cuts: gravy beef, lambs fry, lamb shanks. Now they are a luxury and if you go to a five-star hotel they will have lamb shanks on the menu.

There were a number of Brown brothers, I think there were about five of them including Ronnie, Wally, Tom and Ken.¹³ The family lived in Theodore Street not far from the Catholic church and we used to go past their place to reach the old railway crossing near the Church of England. Ken joined the Air force and was a flight-sergeant. Ken "Popeye" Brown was a tough nut; he was older than us and joined the navy.

My brother was registered for the army but the rest of us were too young; we were only in the V.D.C., the Victorian Defence Corps. My brother and I went together to sign up. They took me in but didn't sign me up because I wasn't eighteen at the time; I just went along for the ride. We went to the corner of Ashley Street and Ballarat Road, where the shopping centre is opposite the Ashley Hotel. We used to train there on an anti-aircraft gun. If we wanted a live shoot we'd go to Point Cook. You all got a number in the gun post and there might be about a dozen present. The anti-aircraft shells are big shells. It was like a family day and they would bring out a tow plane that they called a drogue, which was about 100 or 200 metres behind the towing aeroplane because you weren't allowed to shoot the aeroplane.

We had a misfire and the sergeant at arms blew the whistle: "Fire again!" So we fired again and shell still didn't go off. After a few minutes they called a number for the man to stay in the dugout. We were in a big enclosure with sand bags. So all the others got out and as it was my number that had been called I stayed behind and had to unload the shell. Well, the shell was about as high as I was so I had to put it on my shoulder and take it down the paddock and put it in a trench to be buried. And I was the only one who hadn't been sworn in, but that was just my luck. Things were serious at the time because the Japanese forces were starting to bomb Darwin and there were submarines in Sydney, so it had to be taken seriously.

Alf Leckie was my brother-in-law as he married my sister Loretta. He was a strong supporter of the Catholic community and of the Labor Party as a member of their Glengala branch. He worked as an organizer with the Building Worker's Industrial Union. Alf's parents were James and Lily Leckie and they came to St Albans about 1910 from Colar in New South Wales; they had eight children and were living on the corner of Station Road and Main Road West.

¹³ Kenneth Lloyd Brown born 26.1.1917. Father was William E Brown, core maker. Lived in Theodore Street.. Flight-Sergeant Kenneth Lloyd Brown married Helen Grey Smith of North Adelaide in 1941.

James Leckie used to work at the quarry but that closed down in the 1930s and when I knew him he was working at Wunderlichs in Albion not far from where I was working at Nettlefolds.

James died relatively young in 1948 or 1949 in his late 50s. Wunderlichs was a very dusty place and I wouldn't be surprised if that was something to do with his health problems. Lily Leckie died in 1986 at age 87.

Alf Leckie stood for Keilor Council in 1964 against four candidates with the two most popular for voters being Robert Huart and Rex Webb. Webb was elected and became Keilor Mayor in 1965. Alf was a Labor man whereas Webb was a Liberal with a number of shoe shops as his business interest.



Alf Leckie and sons 1950s © Frank Farrugia

The Hounslows were in Main Road East opposite Collins Street. There weren't that many businesses in St Albans in the twenties but the Hounslows had a go at making furniture. Raymond Hounslow started that business with his father and used to make nice furniture but with the depression no one was buying anything so he started selling petrol while he was building his house. He sold the petrol-selling business to the Sells and became a storeman at Nettlefolds. He's another one who died relatively young. I've ended up making some of my own furniture around the house but that was just my hobby. I'd done a little woodwork course because there was no TV at the time though there was the radio. I did a couple of seasons at the night school in Massey Ferguson's tech school. They had a woodworking section so I did that as a hobby, once a week. I did that after the war.

The first guy who was an outsider in St Albans (I worked with him later on at Olympic Tyres) built the house on the corner of Alexina and Arthur Street. Prior to him the only people who built in the area might be if you married a local woman, say, and built a house somewhere near her family's home. This new guy first of all squatted on the property and then started to build the house. I went past the corner on my way to work one morning and there was a big wooden box. At this time H.V. McKay was being taken

over by Massey Ferguson from Canada and they were bringing over machinery in huge crates and that house is practically built out of those crates. It is still standing there. It is on the same block as the Catholic church and the church wanted to buy it but the chap wouldn't sell. The guy who built that house has been dead for years. The house now has all that false brick cladding all over it but I don't think the white ants will get to it because all that Canadian timber that they used for the crates was treated. Can't remember his name. The Gavaghans used to live near there.

The Freelands' house was on the Arthur Street and Winifred Street corner. Before or during the war the Gibsons were living there. There were about sixteen of them – when they hit town it almost doubled the population. The Gibsons were on the Winifred Street corner and about 100 metres away near Victoria Crescent were the Webbs who came from Lismore in the mid thirties. The mother was Pearl Anne Webb (nee Routley) and the father was Stephen Arthur Webb, who was a railway employee and became involved with the St Albans Progress Association as treasurer.



There were about 14 Webbs and about 16 Gibsons. Since then only one Gibson was lost but there is only one Webb left, and they all died of cancer, except the eldest Webb boy, Arthur, who went down with the Sydney at the age of 21. He had enlisted when the war

began and had served on the "Australia" and was in London during the blitzkrieg. We buried Wally Webb, who was a returned digger, in 2009. His brother came down for the funeral from Queensland but died about six months later. There is only one girl left from that original family.

The Gibsons came about 1940 from Sheep Hills in the Woomera; the father was Stan Gibson who was a motor mechanic and the mother was Evie.¹⁴ The daughter Beryl married a chap from Werribee. Ivan Gibson is the only one of that family who has passed away, and we buried him last year. Ivan should have been dead when he was eighteen. He was riding his motor bike when there was only one car in Main Road West near the doctor's place near the chemist in Main Road West and he hit the car head on and it was the only car that would have been on the road for that hour. I happened to be passing and saw him laying on the road with his head split open and

¹⁴ Miss C. Evelyn "Evie" Schmidt was the eldest daughter of Mr and Mrs Charles Henry Schmidt of Kellalac and Mr Stanley R. Gibson was from Sheep Hills.

the doctor wouldn't move him. The doctor said "If you know his mum, go and get her because this boy won't be alive when the ambulance gets here." That boy lived but though he was a bit effected by that brain injury he worked, he married and he had kids. He died only last year or the year before and he was the first of the Gibson kids to have died.

Ben Hall's family had property at the end of Biggs Street near the Stenson's property.¹⁵ Just over the road from there used be a woman who would camp there periodically and she used to call herself Lady Collingwood. She used to come to our house and have a chat with dad. I remember as a young lad sitting on her knee. One time I noticed she had something tied around her neck but when I wanted to have a look at it and tried to touch it she never came back. She was a wanderer, a swagwoman rather than a swagman, I suppose. Ben Hall went past there one time and poked his head in the tent and she pulled a gun on him so he took off. Ben could be a nuisance when he'd had a drink.

St Albans wasn't Lady Collingwood's home town because you mightn't see her for twelve months. A lot of swagmen used to come through during the depression years and some of them would stay in the old sand caves near the river. A bloke got killed there when they were sand mining; there were no safety barriers or anything. Dad would always say don't go near the sand caves. What did we do? We'd take matches and candles and light the candles and walk through the caves.

Horses and carts were still being used earlier. Mr Tong would be delivering bread in the baker's cart. His daughter, Doris, is still living in the old family home in St Albans. Mr King was originally delivering milk with his horse and cart but after that Ivan Skinner was running the Croftbank Dairies' place in Main Road East and they were still delivering milk early in the morning by horse and cart. I would sometimes be there watching a bit of TV with Ivan when someone would ring in sick. Fred Barlow was always willing to fill in. He was another one who served his country and that was through the navy. Fred and his wife and several children came here after the war and were living near the high school. My brother Charlie used to work for Croftbank in the days when they were still using the horses. I remember one time getting up in the old house to go to work and one of the milk cart drivers had a kid on board; it must have been school holiday time. It was a muddy day and the kid fell off the cart and the cart ran over him. He was covered all over in mud so I couldn't tell how hurt he was but there was some blood. I was on my way to work early in the morning and was asked to take him to

the doctors, so I put him in the car and took him to the doctor and woke him up. The doctor wasn't too happy about me disappearing but I said I was on the way to work and the kid was hurt but I didn't know where he lived.

We only had tank water for domestic use and that would sometimes run out and Finlay McAuley would top it up. St Albans was always short of water in the summer because we were in a rain shadow and that's why crop farming was difficult. The farmers along the Maribyrnong were better off because they could pump water from the river onto the orchards and that's how Millburn, Stenson, Borrell and others along the river could keep their farms going. At the start everyone in town survived off water tanks. We had an iron roof and it was painted, probably with lead paint. The roof had pigeon poo all over it and all the water drained off it and ran into the tanks and we all drank it happily. Tank water was used for all your domestic needs, including bathing, and you had a bath every Saturday whether you needed it or not. Now we have filter companies convincing us we need to buy their water purification products to further clean the treated water from the taps.

As kids we used to live outdoors. The first radio we got was in 1947, prior to that there was nothing for entertainment, so we'd go out. We'd get up in the morning, have breakfast, and go outside. There was nothing at all to do inside and you only came in when your mother called you for dinner. After dinner you'd go outside again and come in for supper when it was dark and go to bed.



You could go to one of the old St Albans stores in Main Road and buy a few cigarettes in a lolly packet. Vinny Carr, who was a bit of a card, tried to teach us to smoke. He bought a few cigarettes and we went to sit under the old railway station drinking a bit of wine and I had half a cigarette and that was just about my only contribution to the tobacco industry. Vinny was the son of Henrietta and Setton Carr who was the boot maker; they came in the 1930s. Vinny and his brother Jim served in the A.I.F. and then after the war Vinny married Christine Tong.

I remember John Perrett because his father was the president of the football club when it was started. John's parents were Eric and Effie Perrett who ran the general store in Main Road West in the 1940s, and his grand-parents were John and Elizabeth Perrett who were running the store when my parents came here in the 1920s. The young John Perrett could have continued in the family business but he decided to become a chemist and opened a shop near the railway

¹⁵ Frank "Ben" Hall married Emily Stenson in 1942.

station. Father and son both liked the horses. Mr Perrett retired to Gisborne after his wife passed away in 1960 and took to breeding and racing horses. John also went into horseracing though he had trainers looking after his horses. He never married and he's still living in St Albans.



Myrtle Webb passed away the week before Christmas in 2012; she was Myrtle Jones who married Noel Webb. I think they raised six girls and a boy. Herbie Blain also passed away recently. They came from Ballarat in 1942 and Herbie was another St Albans primary school boy

who went to work in the Albion factories. He and his wife passed away within a couple of months of each other. He was a good friend and I don't know why he isn't in any of my photographs. They moved to Portarlington and joined the bowls club. His wife passed away in September and he followed a couple of months later. I remember when he met his wife-to-be, which occurred on a footy trip to Ballarat. He and his brother Ken were people I used to see seven days a week but after they married I could count on one hand the number of times I'd see them during the year.

Aileen Farrant used to live in the railway house near the corner of Princess Street and St Albans Road. She's also passed away. Her mother was Lilly Anne and her father was George who used to work for the railways in the gangers' shed, going up and down the line checking what repairs were needed. Arthur Farrant was a good cricketer and would have been from the same era as Wally Baulch. There were two or three weather-board houses built on the St Albans Road and Main Road East corner for railway employees, but they were pretty run down in the late seventies and I think one of the last ones was being used as a support centre for unemployed youth. Unfortunately the very high, post-war employment rates did not survive into the seventies.



There's Skipper Hassett who played footy. In the forties Kevin Priest was in the team with the likes of John Doherty, Hobo Simpson, Colin Missen, Des Hudson and Georgie Power. All star players, you could say. In the cricket that same year, Colin Missen won a

trophy for batting and Kevin Priest won one for bowling. I remember Kevin because about that

time we took part in the first rifle shoot with the newly formed boys club. The shoot was held at the old quarry near the station. On the first shoot Kevin came first and my brother Joe came second, then the next month Kevin came first once again and I came second. It was hard to beat Kevin when he was in form.



Ron "Boofa" Priest and his brother were also with the football team. There were four boys and a couple of girls in the Priest family. Alan was known as Mousie Priest. The boys were all good footballers and all played for the St Albans football club in its early days the on Errington

Reserve. Wally Webb went a couple of years ago.

My brother Joe started work at Nettlefolds and then went to the flour mills. Do you remember the Darling Flour Mills at Albion? Those silos dominated that side of the railway crossing and they had lots of men working there. A fire in the 1920s caused much damage but they rebuilt. Gavan Aitken has that story. There were a few places to work at along that stretch of Ballarat Road. After leaving Darlings, Joey went to Massey Ferguson, and that's where he finished. He worked in the foundry and worked there until the place shut down. He married Moira Rohan and had six kids – everybody around here had six kids at that time. They built their house next to my dad's place in George Street. The Rohans came to St Albans just after the war and lived in the Station Road area. Joey and Moira had six kids and they've all done well for themselves. They also started off in a bungalow and built on when they could. Everyone did that. Joey passed away about 20 years ago. He was a smoker and all the smokers I grew up with are all gone – takes ten years off your life.

My brother Charlie worked as a carpet layer but he was mainly a contractor working for himself. He worked in a factory for a while but mostly Charlie was a Jack of all Trades and worked more as a carpet layer. He married Anne Hewitt and they had six kids. He lives not far away and we get together of a Sunday for a drink and a chat. We all used to laugh about everyone having six kids, but Johnny Doherty went one better and had seven. The Hewitts lived near the church in West Esplanade going to the old school and they were connected with the Sacred Heart Catholic church from the beginning. The Hewitts came from Ballarat after the war and Hewitt was into every-thing and ran the fire station in East Esplanade opposite the old public hall. Next door

was the little pre-fab police station. We used to have the dance in the hall on the Friday night and mass on Sunday. Mrs Stein and her two girls Mary and Elsa used to prepare the altar. Most of the old halls had a little vestibule at the end and just in there was a bit that would fold out and they'd put a cloth and flowers on that and that was the altar. We'd be sitting outside the fire station waiting for the priest to come from Sunshine on his motorbike.

My sister Loretta got engaged to Alfred James Leckie in 1949. They married and raised one girl and a cricket team of boys: a daughter and twelve sons but one died in childbirth, so they ended up with a cricket team of boys. Alf done a good job because all the boys finished up in a good trade. My old girlfriend Maureen used to work at the high school in Main Road, and she would always say that Loretta's kids were always nice and tidy when they were at school. With so many Maltese in-laws of course Alf became familiar with their circumstances, and when he gave a talk at the St Albans History Society during the late seventies or early eighties he reminded the group that the history of Maltese migration to St Albans went back to at least the twenties but had been unrecognized or forgotten by the rest of the community. Loretta and Alf used to live in Les King's old house, which was in Kings Road. The Leckies are another family with a street named after them and that is in Albanvale.

In those days it was expected that you'd marry someone from you're own ethnic background, and dad was pretty strict and religious, but Loretta broke that tradition when she married Alf Leckie. Mary married a Maltese man by the name of Bill Cassar and they went to live at Bacchus Marsh; they still have a few acres there. Joey married an Irish lady by the name of Moira Rowan. Carmel married Joe Xuereb.



Painting the town ... Johnny Doherty, before he went into the navy, was working at the Perret's store and had access to some paint, so to celebrate the start of the 1933 new year we decided to paint the town. We painted the railway gangers' shed with "Bludgers Retreat" and we also painted the

front of the Presbyterian church in Victoria Crescent, where Johnny Stevens used to sing, but we didn't paint anything blasphemous, it was just "Happy New Year" or something like that. On the way back through the paddocks we still had some paint left and tripped over Mrs Gavaghan's cow, so we painted the cow as well. If we'd used normal whitewash it might have been

okay because it was easier to clean off, but we had oil paint which was hard to remove once it dried. Mrs Gavaghan laughed about it in later years but she wasn't happy at the time. However, we did get caught and had to go to court in Sunshine. The judge made us put ten shillings each in the poor box and we had to repaint the front of the church and the railway shed. We never got a conviction recorded against us but after a blasting from the judge we were not game to do anything like that again. We had a good policeman by the name of Mr Shaw and if anyone was doing something wrong he would say: "Well, if you keep that up I will tell your father." In those days you were more frightened of your father than you were of anyone because you'd likely get a good belting, and in those days a good belting to teach you a good lesson was never considered to harm anyone.

The family had a cow, chooks, geese, a horse, and earlier on we had some milking goats. Paul Spiteri was dad's mate and he had a bit of herd. Paul used to live in the Keilor valley. He had a few cows and would let them wander along the lanes at the back of McRae's property ... what they called the long paddock. He'd lean up against a tree with his hat over his eyes and go to sleep while the cows were feeding on the grass, then he'd walk them back to Keilor. Colin Missen recalls that Paul Spiteri, the Walkers, and Darby Rockett had battles with the council ranger who attempted to impound wandering cattle. Wandering stock was a problem in Braybrook and Keilor shires. Colin should know because his brother Mervyn was the Keilor ranger during the fifties.

The Hewitts ... they named a street after them in West Footscray but that was work related and not church related. I worked there for about 34 years at Olympic Tyres and there were about seven members of the Hewitt family who went through there. There was the old man, Tom Hewitt, and his son, Kevin, who worked in the garage, Mary worked in the office, Peter was an electrician, and Tommy worked in the tool shop. Two of Tommy's sons also turned up there. They were looking for street names when they pulled the factory down so that's how the Hewitts have a street named after them in Footscray. The Hewitt Reserve playground on East Esplanade near the Presbyterian Church is named after the family. One of the Hewitt daughters still lives in Biggs Street.

Mr Charles Dennis was a shoe maker and the family used to live near us. They were diagonally across the road from us on the corner of Arthur Street and Taylors Road. When we were kids we had no radio so we'd run across there to listen to the kids' shows: Superman, Dad and Dave, and all the other serials that would continue next week. Before you went into the house you'd put your feet up and pull out all the Bindi Eyes,

because your feet were that tough from running around with no shoes on.

I was going down Green Gully one night from Keilor – well I was there nearly every night, actually – when I saw a car coming round the corner and going through the boxthorns and rolling and rolling down that steep hill and after he got through the boxthorns sort of closed up. It was a Volkswagen and I saw a body fly out and the back window went out and the front windscreen went out and there were bits flying everywhere. There was a woman at the top of the hill who said “I was following a car but it’s disappeared.” I said “It’s down there, so I’m going down.”

I grabbed a blanket from the car and went down there and could hear him so eventually found him. He was a young man on our football team who later ended up joining the police force. He was badly shaken up but could walk so I took him home where he was boarding with some people. After that I went back to Keilor but when I was going home again there were all these people there – it was the time of the media so there were reporters and cameras from several television channels wanting to know what was happening.

I pull up and there’s tow trucks everywhere looking for a body. I happened to know one of the drivers because he worked at Lynches in Sunshine so I went up to him and said “I know where the guy is” ... because they couldn’t move the car until they found the body. So I took him there and they arranged to tow the vehicle out. Green Gully was a dangerous place for cars because either they would go off the road going down or overheat and burst into flame going up. Cyclists have also lost their lives along there.

There were four Priest brothers and two sisters; Kevin was the youngest of the boys. The boys were all good footballers and played for St Albans. Ron might have worked at ICI the ammo place because there were a lot of people who worked there. I don’t think any of them worked too far from home, because in the old days there were factories everywhere in Sunshine. Starting at Ballarat Road you had Nettlefolds, Spaldings, McKays, Wunderlichs, etc.

Alan “Mousie” Priest had an unfortunate car accident. He was coming from the Working Man’s Club in Ballarat Road with his other brother when he put his arm out to indicate a turn and hit a post. The doctors wanted to take his arm off but he didn’t want that, but the arm was not much good after that despite the operations. Kevin Priest married Betty Goddard, and we buried them two years ago; they died within four months of each other.

The Goddards and Dohertys used to share a house (because the wives were sisters¹⁶) along the Esplanade on the west of the railway

line. I was friends with Johnny Doherty so we would often go out together. You didn’t have much to do at home so you more or less brushed your teeth and took off and went to a dance or whatnot. In the old days you dressed up to go to the city and you even dressed up to go to the football. Afterwards when we were coming back Johnny used to take us home because “Ma will have something ready.” His mother and auntie never knew who he was bringing home but they always had something on their big stove, a roast or something like that, and they knew we had no mum so we got looked after. I’ve always been impressed how supportive the St Albans families have been over the years. John Doherty and I joined the committee of the reformed St Albans Boys Club in 1940s and my brother Joey was best man at John’s wedding about 1952.

I know that sometimes migrants were looked down on but occasionally it went the other way. I remember Nettlefolds had a sign up one time advertising job vacancies with the comment “Australians need not apply.” I know that dad had come across some anti-migrant attitudes after the first war, but after the second war the economy expanded and factories hired lots of migrants for their production lines and some places ended up accommodating their languages. Spaldings¹⁷ was just across the road from Nettlefolds and a number of Maltese people from St Albans worked there on the rubber moulding presses and their notice board had messages written in Maltese.

We were friends with the Puli family. They moved from Tasmania to Werribee in the 1950s where they established the George Cross Timber and Hardware Supplies. They later moved to St Albans and became involved in real estate. Don Puli was the father and Allan Puli was the son. Don had an office in Alfrieda Street and he was also a Justice of the Peace and it was a convenient place for people to call. He supported a number of community associations, including the Maltese groups, and he would always encourage people to donate to whatever the current cause happened to be. Allan joined the local Keilor Rotary Club and through their business networks he also supported many community projects. They do a lot of fundraising. The family was living on the corner of Alfrieda Street and McIvor Road which was the first double-story house in the area. It was built by Eric Alan, wasn’t it?

Eric Alan was a Polish immigrant who came to Australia in 1950 and settled in Alfrieda Street. He married a beautiful woman – I think she was a Miss Victoria or Miss Australia or something like that. Eric was a businessman rather than a factory worker and started the

¹⁶ Ida Holmes married Michael Doherty. Agnes Holmes married Alfred Goddard.

¹⁷ They were an American firm of sporting manufacturers on the corner of Ballarat and McIntyre roads in 1925.

bicycle shop in Alfrieda Street and was well known for that, but it was bit of a general store as he sold household electrical appliances, radios, car accessories, there was Mr Kuc a jeweller and watch repairer working there for a time, and there was even a gun shop at the back. Eric was also interested in boxing and worked a bit in promoting some matches at Festival Hall. He was elected to Keilor council in the mid sixties and was mayor in 1968. A lot of people would have respected him for getting the position. All the Keilor councilors lost their positions when the council was sacked and replaced by Commissioner Holland in 1975 and it wasn't till the eighties that we got new elections. Something similar happened with Sunshine council. I think Eric left the district some years ago but his brother John is still living in Collins Street near my sister.¹⁸ Some Italian people bought St Albans Cycles. Mr Kuc moved to the Princess Arcade so a pizza oven replaced his jeweller's counter and that became one of the first pizza places in St Albans.

George Eisner was another migrant from that era who settled in Collins Street. He was of Czechoslovakian background and also came here in 1950 and soon obtained his naturalisation papers as well as real estate and business agents licences. He started off working as an agent with Frank Horsfall of Horsfall Homes in Footscray but then set up his own business, which was selling land and building those classic St Albans one- or two-roomed bungalows that he advertised in *The Age* as "small houses". You could buy one for £100 deposit, move in within two weeks, and pay the rest on monthly repayments. A three-room bungalow might cost you £500 and take two years to pay off at £5 per week.

Eisner wasn't a builder himself but would sell you the land and bungalow package and have other people erect the building. You could just about do it in a weekend if you had a good team because with the smaller one-roomed structures as soon as you got twelve stumps into the ground you were off. There are stories of them sometimes building on the wrong block because of confusion with the boundary pegs and sometimes they were built across other people's land. With the larger designs there was a kitchen in the middle and a bedroom at each end. These weren't even half-houses, they were more like quarter-houses at most, but they were a start and people moved in and extended when they could, sometimes taking many years.

There were other builders who were doing similar work and of course it provided employment for the migrant men and the returned servicemen who went into the building trade. Jimmy Knowles says that George Eisner was a clever business-man because if he had options

on several blocks of land in a street he would build on every second or third one and thus increase the value of the vacant lots in between. He moved away in the eighties but the name might still be remembered because there is a street named after him.

The Stevens brothers ended up in real estate because their father bought lots of vacant blocks that he couldn't sell in the forties but they sold okay in the fifties and sixties. At first you would think that that they were well off because they had a big farm and held respected positions in the community, but they also had trouble in paying off rates and mortgage repayments and it wasn't until the fifties that their farm was paid off.



By that time Mr Stevens had already died. I can remember Mrs Stevens driving her car around St Albans in her eighties and by that stage the family's hard work had paid off. All the sons had married, built new homes, and established their own businesses; their children in turn were running the businesses. They had the hardware store in East Esplanade but they also took over Bert Moffat's old shop near the Mechanics hall and turned it into an electrical store in the late fifties. They also sold real estate.¹⁹ After Mrs Stevens died, the old Edenhope family home in Main Road West was eventually bought by a local investor who didn't want to spend any money on it but rented it out "as is". The house gradually became more and more run down until it became a derelict. It was still there in the nineties but it burnt down about ten years ago and that last little block of the original Stevens' farm has been vacant ever since. I know the St Albans History Society was hoping it might have been preserved in some way as part of Brimbank's early farming heritage but that never happened.

After the war, many years after my mother died, my father married Angela Desira, who was a widow, and I had a stepmother for quite a while. Her son, Angelo, was living in Deer Park and I remember he and my father would go rabbit hunting. My dad died in 1976 at the age of 82 and is buried at the Keilor cemetery, where my mother was buried in 1936 at the age of 29 years.

I lived in the old family house on my own and when I left Joey's older son moved in. I was a bachelor there for about ten years so you can imagine the state it was in. It was a double block and we sold it to the younger family. There were six of us older family members and we sold it to

¹⁸ Eric's brother, John Polotzek, died in July 2016.

¹⁹ The Stevens family story is included in *St Albans Pioneers in 1905*, to be published in 2018.

Joey's children. They wanted to build units where the house was but they didn't pull the old place down, they burnt it down. They got permission from the council so we had a bonfire. They wouldn't let you do it today. We had to tell all the neighbours what was going on and it was like a big bonfire. These days you're not even allowed to burn a few leaves in the gutter.

The biggest public recognition that the family has ever received was in 1988 when my brother Joe was interviewed by Caroline Overington²⁰ for the local paper the Advocate. That story was about the family's migration in the twenties and how we had settled into the community. They had photos of Joe and me as infants with Mum, and also ones of Joe and Dad in later life.



Salvatore & Joe Farrugia in The Advocate, 20 July 1988

I married pretty late in life. I was single for a long time and then met my future wife in 1983 in the Philippines. I'd been going over there for several years on holidays before we met. We have a daughter and a son who is a cameraman making movies out of Docklands. I'm living in Kings Park on land that was part of Les and Ethel King's old dairy farm, not far from where my sister Loretta and Alf Leckie were living some time ago.

Frank Farrugia 2012.



Frank Farrugia died in January 2018.

²⁰ Caroline Overington is the granddaughter of German immigrants Fritz and Inge Schwab who came to St Albans in 1955. Her uncle Laurie Schwab was a reporter and editor with the Age.