

Life's Reminiscences

(By Harold Flett)

What is your earliest memory? Two or three things I can remember from just prior to or around my fourth birthday.

I can remember seeing my grandfather ill in bed, a frail man; this was some time in late 1948. I can also remember being "looked after" in a car at his funeral, in the December of 1948, as children "did not go" to funerals. This was at the North Laen Presbyterian church, and to the North Laen Cemetery. Granddad was 81 when he died. He had never returned to England, which he left when he was 13.

Probably my earliest memory is of being at a football match, held in Henderson's paddock, just north of some timber west of the North Laen cemetery. In later years we have figured that it was probably to see Uncle Bill play with Laen-Cope Cope-Litchfield, and as 1948 was the last year he played, it would be winter time some time in that year, so I was not yet four. Bill would have been 34.

Childhood

Memories of childhood tell me I had an easy life. During school terms my sisters were at school, so I would have happily filled my days with whatever I wished, in around the house with Mum, or out and about the farm with Dad.

Teams of draught horses I can just remember in the stable, and Uncle Bill's tapes told me that the Flett brothers, Hugh, George and Bill, bought the first tractor in 1944 (a drought year when horses had to be agisted down south) and Bill worked their last team in 1949.

The last draught teams were sold in September 1949, and George and Bill each bought a Fordson (E 27n model Kero - I think). As Dad was always the mechanical one, the little Case model "C" had lived at our place, and Dad took it over completely when the horses left. I can remember its "stall" in the east end of the stable! Through the wall was the loose box; Jenny can remember her school pony being housed in it. I guess a horse team, either Uncle Geo's or Bill's, was only at our place occasionally - in my memory, at least!

My sister Ruth can remember an oft repeated question in the morning, "What are you going to do today, Dad?" - followed by - "Can I come with you?"

Dogs

I was taken to kindergarten in Donald, but not often, as I think I did not appreciate the company of others my age, much more preferring my own play and company.

I remember the farm dog, a border collie type, "Tip" as being my constant companion if I was outside the back gate around the farmyard. After "Tip" (and I can't remember his passing), there was a fox terrier cross - also about border collie size! - who an-

swered to "Pup" all his life. He got a boxthorn spike in one eye whilst chasing a rabbit, recovered, but lost the sight in that eye, and died when I was in Higher Elementary School.

My last boyhood dog was a border collie named "Lassie". One of the hardest things I've ever done in my farming life was to shoot my "Lassie" to put her out of her misery, probably at about 11 years of age. She had some growth in her abdomen, and was obviously in pain, and as well as drinking copious amounts of water.

That was some time before Jan and I were married, but Jan can remember her, so that puts pre-1970 as a date for that. I guess that the thought of taking her to a Vet was never countenanced. I had been raised seeing animals "put down" if there was no chance of them recovering.

The skills of childhood that you never forget! Leaning to ride a bike was a case of Dad running with me a little, holding the back of my seat, then, when he let go, learning to balance quickly or falling off! No training wheels in them days!

School

Mum- an ex-school teacher - prepared me for school at home, and I started at Laen school, Grade one, mid way through 1950, so I was approaching 6 years of age.

A recent visit (2013) to my first schoolteacher, Harold Holloway, was wonderful. Laen was only his second school, he having been transferred from his first placement after only a month or so - circumstances at Laen were the "trigger" I believe.

Sixty-odd years down the track he could name all his Laen pupils, but he said he only has vague memories of those who he taught thereafter.

He also told me this story. One cold winter's day, I asked

if I could eat my lunch with him in his car, where he could eat as well as watch his pupils playing during lunch hour.

He said I told him the mileage on his speedo, and he laughed at the thought that here he was teaching me two plus two is four, and I could already understand thousands! Harold Holloway died in 2015.

Concert

At the school concert at the end of 1951, I can recall being involved in a short play "It was a gas pipe, Mate!", and doing acrobatics including a diving jump over my kneeling classmates and doing a somersault on a tumble mat upon landing. Also doing a running dive off the stage into Harold Holloway's arms!

Class mates were Darryl Westerland, Joyce and Stewart Landwehr (cousins), Gwen and Ray Funcke (cousins). Others in the Laen school were my sister Ruth, Dawn and Lindsay Wood, Lynette Westerland, Alan, Ivan and Colin Landwehr, Roslyn Funcke, and Graeme Funcke. Dale Funcke, Gwens' brother, started the year after I did.

Horses

While my father and his siblings had walked the two-and-a-half miles across country to school, Ruth and I rode bikes. Ruth (5 years older) and Jenny (8 years older) had prior to that ridden ponies, but the last horses were gone by the time I was to start school. Maybe the riding ponies went at the same time as the draught teams.

I can remember a photo of Dad on horseback - probably early days of marriage, but cannot remember seeing Dad on a horse. I don't think I was taught to ride a horse! Not sure that I wanted to either!

Also, I never went to school with Jenny, who was at



• Harold, with his constant companion of pre-school days, "Tip", a faithful multi-breed, mainly Border Collie/Kelpie dog.

Donald H.E.S. when I was at Laen, boarding during the week with our Aunts, Alice and Gertie, and had gone to MacRobertson's High in Melbourne by the time Ruth and I went to Donald, when Ruth started Form 1 in 1952.

Vivid Memories from Those Bike Rides

Once, when the water ranger in his horse and cart had been along the road, we were going down the hill from Loats's, dodging in and out of the horse prints. Must have picked up a bit too much speed, as my 20-inch bike and I parted company. I went head first over the handlebars and took considerable skin off

knees, elbows and probably my nose. Nothing for it but to get back on and continue home! The dirt road would have been a more forgiving surface on which to land than gravel or sealed roads, so in that respect I was fortunate.

Another time I must have been ready with my bike to go home before Ruth came out from school. Others urged me to go without her, and race her home. This I did. When Ruth arrived home only a few minutes after me, in tears, I can remember getting one of the few hidings my Dad ever gave me. I always waited for her thereafter!

Another hiding was when, in a moment of frustration, I

hit Ruth's backside with a tennis racquet. That hiding was to teach me to respect, as in never, ever hit, for any reason or with anything, any members of the female brigade!

A story from Dad's generation. (1900s) Floss, Dad, Nellie, George and Mary set a few rabbit traps on the way to school, checking them on the way home.

One trap had a goanna by the rear leg, and the front end was fairly angry! Uncle George reckoned the 4 minute mile was broken by those kids, long before John Landy did it. (? 1950s)