

## Corn Dollies and Cockatoos

My Dad was born in 1907. About a hundred miles away, in 1907, Koorda took roots. Half a century later in the summer of 1952 he moved our family there from Calingiri - I don't really know why, perhaps it was to establish the first dedicated orange school bus run in a little old petrol Austin that rattled across the rutted gravel roads to the north, south, east and west of the Town. Dusty in summer, boggy in winter, these roads were the arteries that fed kids to the school, grain to the bins, farmers to the businesses and agents and travelling salesmen to the farms - the complete community and I am so glad that I was a part of it.

What a wonderful life it was growing up in Koorda with my sisters Kay, Leone and Wendy. The community was brim full of things for kids to do - the complete adventure playground from dodging in and out of railway wagons during shunting, swimming in the mysterious waters of the railway dam to "recycling" the cast offs from the local dump, long before the word ever took on its current meaning. Billy carts materialised out of the scavenging and Paddy Alford and we kids prospered when we carted our bounty of beer bottles to his yard and got a few bob together for cracker night.

And characters? Koorda was rich with them. Who could ever forget Nugget? Nugget "ran" CBH his language would peel the paint off the Post Office, but he was a great bloke to work for. Richard Main and I toiled away on barrow and broom under his stewardship and we learnt how to work, how to swear and where we sat in the pecking order of growing up and taking our place amongst men. A serve from Nugget was memorable! He used to chew PK gum, stick it behind his ear then reconstitute it later in the day, replete with dust, flies and malathion spray - tough old blighter. It would have been a brave man to park under the pepper corn tree over the road from the post office, or scramble up onto the bar stool in the right hand corner of the front bar in the pub - both belonged to Nugget!

Deep in the bowels of the blacksmiths shop dwelt Jumbo, Mr Weymouth - Jim. We feared him and not without good reason. He would emerge black and sooty and fearsome looking from his showers of sparks and scale where the forge had cast his shadow menacingly on the corrugated walls - to young kids, he was own real living bogeyman. As we grew older, we came to appreciate his many talents and good nature but he was never one to take a backward step in our eyes ... as Ashley (Hooks) and I found out first hand!

Hooks and I had caught a bundle of rabbits - it was a Sunday night, summer and we had school the next day. No time to skin them so we put them into a galvanized water carting tank - about a two hundred gallon square tank - that was in for repairs at the shop. We got home from school - A Koorda summer day - and Jumbo was on fire! The rabbits had died in the tank and it stank! Here he delivered his ultimatum: "clean that tank out and get rid of the smell before tomorrow morning, or I will kick your arses until your nose bleeds buttermilk!" I didn't know what a "nose bleeding buttermilk" would be like, but it didn't sound good. So, Hooks and I set to work. We tried water, sloshing it back and forth then

upending the tank with no joy. Then we had the bright idea that we would burn it out, so in went a bundle of petrol - it was getting towards dark by now and after a few "burns" we noticed the soldered seam starting to melt - our noses were really in danger now. To cool the tank we threw in another bucket of water and a match to burn the floating petrol. The jet of flame reached Jupiter, the explosion reverberated around across the town jarring people out of their evening repose and the square tank was now round! He's still looking for us, and though he has gone from this earth, I am not sure that we are safe!

And what of Westy and Julie characters in their own right and Mrs Mc Partland serving pies and icecream in Tanner's after they took over from the Rees family - these people made our childhood and helped to make Koorda. John Rees would deliver Mum's groceries, Mrs Larkman would ladle out pints of milk into doorstep billies and none of us got botulism! I loved the smell of the weekly bread bake wafting across the town and the smell of the butcher shop with its two upright pigs in the window. Leather and haberdashery in the general store and petrol fumes from the pump-up bowsers all added to the tapestry.

And whilst speaking of that tapestry, I grew up with Hooks, Bluey, Uggles, Tickle, Snifter, Eeaw, Oigle, Guzzy, Milo, Boong, Dungy, Peewee, Boysee, Tub, Tum tum and Charlie and more - all of whom had real names, none of whom were ever called them. How rich was this Australiana - how creative and descriptive. Political correctness has stifled the Aussie nickname - Jack becomes Jacko, Bloggs becomes Bloggsy all pretty tame really. The Koorda that I grew up in had spirit - your nickname described and defined you it was bestowed without malice - never intended to demean you but rather to admit you to the fold and I reckon it worked. Mateship was earned and valued. I was Mad Max long before the movie ... I wonder why ... must be a story there somewhere!

How special it was to be a part of the Silver Jubilee in 1957. As school kids we joined in the pageantry on floats and I think that the entire community turned out to celebrate the momentous occasion. The street was closed from Warren's Shop to the National Bank for the parade and I perched proudly on the back of a truck with its painted backdrop, along with a few more kids, trowel in hand, depicting the men who built the catchment on Mollerin Rock. Koorda's history and development played out before the people on those trucks that day and what a rich history it was and will be as long as the will to persevere, protect and preserve remains strong - and it does, sixty years later and Koorda is still on the map.

My Koorda was a main street of banks, stock agents, machinery dealerships and shops, with a functional railway station complete with station master, a post office with a very official and austere post master, a pub and a Roads Board Office. You almost doffed your hat to the bank managers, you were proud of your roads board members and inspired by their statesmanship, respectful of the local policeman and elders and yet free to roam and explore and grow. The farmland blended with the town boundary giving town kids that wonderful exposure to the life blood of Koorda, agriculture. We played amongst Piggy Bill's

pigs and swam in his water tanks and we followed the plows and combines as they tilled the ground surrounding the town. We played in the sheep yards and wheat bins, gathered dead wool to sell to Jacky the Jew and mallee roots for Mum's Metters No 1. We had then what I only wish more kids could have today, the freedom to be kids, and Koorda was the conduit.

But, time moves on and I am no longer a kid growing up in Koorda. Recently I was invited back to take part in a ceremony to bring up to date the plaques on the War Memorial recognizing and commemorating those men and women who gave service, and in some cases their lives, in defence of Australia. My name, along with those of Ashley Weymouth, Colin Rewell and Ian Gray was inscribed on a plaque to record our contributions as veterans of the Vietnam conflict. To a town, the record of its history is its reason for being and its template for the future and I was able to express my gratitude to the Shire and people of Koorda on behalf of my group of veterans for their recognition of our service.

Before the commemorative service, I took the opportunity to visit the cemetery, to visit the graves of my Mum and Dad.

I have visited the Koorda cemetery many times before, sometimes to support a friend in their time of loss, sometimes just to pay my respects to family and friends, but on this occasion, I saw it in a much more eternal way. As I walked around, I became aware that the headstones on the graves depicted a history of this community, its townsfolk and its farmers, permanently and indelibly recorded in time and I felt a sense of community in this solemn setting. I didn't know why they had come to Koorda, nor when, and it didn't matter. Here was the final resting place of the people who had contributed in some way to the history of Koorda - some were there much too soon in their life and others had had long and well-fulfilled lives, but each was part of a family now resting with other members of that family and those without immediate family resting with the broader Koorda family. Mum and Dad lay among friends and will never leave Koorda and so a little bit of me will be forever in Koorda and I like that.

Why did we move to Koorda? I am not entirely sure, but I am glad that we did.

Max O'Dea