

## *An Eltham Childhood*

The following Eltham childhood reminiscences, written by local poet and writer Prue Clark, were first published on the Nillumbik Shire Council website (<http://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au>) in 2005.

Eltham gave me a wonderful childhood.

Dad started a poultry farm here after the Second World War. It was 5 acres in Hillcrest Ave, just down the road from Montsalvat.

Dad was building chook sheds when Justus Jorgensen and his artist friends were building the gallery and hall. They came down to Dad's place for a shower and a yarn. Dad was a bit cynical about the project. He reckoned they were being conned by Justus - everything stayed in his name. He didn't think it would be shared with those hardworking, idealistic young friends.

Dad had been in the war but he hated it. He'd been a rat in Tobruk and he talked of the fear they felt in the jungles of New Guinea where Japanese soldiers lay in wait for them or popped out of fox holes.

He was finally discharged with recurring dermatitis on his hands. I have a photo of him with a group of Australian soldiers, sitting on a donkey in front of an Egyptian pyramid. I know which one is Dad because I can see his bandaged hands.

Back in the 40's and 50's Eltham was semi-rural and we walked, or I should say ran, with bag flapping, down the Dalton Street hill to the state school. Dalton Street was a gum tree lined track that passed Carrucan's dairy. Going home was more leisurely and we dawdled back up the hill. In the spring the plums on the trees that lined the fence inside the cow paddocks opened and we would raid them. We kept a wary eye out for the bull, but in reality Mr Carrucan was more to be feared, because if he saw us, he would come after us, waving his arms and yelling at us to get out of his trees. Then we would find wildflowers on the roadside, dainty white harbingers of the spring and shy Greenwood orchids.

My aunts and grandmother moved to Eltham from Warrugal when I was a baby. They built another poultry farm two doors up from us in Hillcrest Avenue, so we had the benefit of an extended family and maiden aunts who doted on us. We watched and helped them do their chores: separating cream from the milk with a metal machine that needed lots of washing, feeding the

chooks with Aunty Tos, collecting buckets of snails from their beautiful flower garden and being given a penny a dozen for them, going for walks and collecting sphagnum moss for Aunty Jean's floral arrangements (she was a florist), and of course going to their place at Easter and Christmas times for our gifts.

I grew up and moved away, but not for too many years, Eltham pulled me back. I could think of nowhere better to raise my own children. The Aunts were still there and now doted on my children in their turn. Aunty Jean, with minute stitches, made a patchwork quilt for me when I got married, and then for my children when they came. I still treasure and use my quilt. It reminds me of my carefree childhood days, wrapped in my family's love.

Prue Clark 31/08/05