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KANGAROO GROUND CHRONICLE

Newsletter of the
ANDREW ROSS MUSEUM INC

www.andrewrossmuseum.org.au

Email: wcleeson@primus.com.au - 9712 0801

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THE FINAL TENANT

Some memories of living in the Kangaroo Ground Primary School Residence

(continued)

Eventually Bob left the school and I confessed to Kevin Berry the district inspector that I had been keeping the residence warm for Bob who had been keeping his options open. With the help of Kevin and possibly others behind the scenes, to my relief I was given official tenancy.

Because the residence was on school grounds it was handy for setting up activities at the school out of hours. On one occasion I colluded with teacher Kay Hawkins to sneak over to her portable on several evenings to write a code on her classroom window using a marking pen. The code was inspired by the Sherlock Holmes case of *The Dancing Men*, involving stick figures in different poses, each representing a letter of the alphabet. The children had to use deduction to decipher the mysterious messages.

At another time Ric Lloyd was running a technology course that consisted of a combination of field outings to places like the museum and practical demonstrations at school. The shelter shed/storeroom became a temporary classroom where I could easily pop across with gadgets from my own workshop to set up in preparation for Ric's next technology lesson.

Ric also introduced the first computer to Kangaroo Ground Primary School. I bought a similar one and lent it to the school during school hours, then brought it back to the residence to experiment with at night and weekends. These were early days for the home computer, and aside from one or two third-party programs a computer owner had to write or copy programs from a magazine to make it work. As I tapped away with one finger at night, preparing something educational for my

next emergency teaching lesson, I was oblivious to the fact that all of the teachers to live in the residence, I was there at the right time in history to be the first to use a computer within the bounds of its historical walls.

In 1982 my then girlfriend Annette Mullinder and I used to pop next door once a week at night to borrow the school's movie projector and the week's consignment of movies, to watch in the residence. To achieve the desirable sized image the projector had to be placed in the kitchen and shone through the doorway onto the lounge room wall above the fireplace. The Visual Education Department used to supply movies covering quite a variety of interesting topics. An evening of these reminded me of the Hour Shows I had watched in the city with Mum when I was a kid.

For a few months of the year my lawnmower was a sheep called Hunza, kindly lent to me by Veronica Holland. Tethered via a long chain to a post, Hunza methodically nibbled its way around the side lawn. Hunza wasn't the only animal to appreciate that grass. One night I was awoken in the wee small hours by someone wanting to temporarily place a horse there that had been found wandering around on the road. On another occasion a cow came across from a paddock to prove to itself that my grass was greener.

As the school residence is the first visible house on the main road, I began to get used to travellers knocking on my door trying to ascertain where they were. The most asked question was "Have we gone past the St Andrews hotel yet?"

Although it had been an honour to be the school's locum emergency teacher, eventually there weren't enough teacher absences to pay my way, so I supplemented my income with a combination of teaching at the school when required and night duty as a psych nurse at Larundel. Both jobs were immensely fulfilling, but after a year of chronic sleep deprivation during which I was probably not doing either job well, I temporarily ceased teaching and swapped to the day shift at Larundel.

During this period I continued with caretaker duties at the school and was involved with occasional activities like darkroom developing and a photography course for some of the children. Alas, my role of caretaker failed one night when I was in bed and heard a car backfire, thinking no more of it. Next day it transpired that what I had heard was in fact a gunshot and someone had fired a bullet through one of the school front windows and into a classroom fish tank. I don't suppose I could have prevented the incident, but might at least have been able to note the car's registration number had I realised what had happened.

The Teacher Housing Authority painted and performed some minor maintenance on the residence while I was there. There were six colours to choose from for the internal painting; three of them were white! I was keen for the walls to be white to highlight my dark varnished furniture from a previous era. That created a dilemma for the ceiling colour. In the end we went for a white ceiling of a different shade to the walls, and surprisingly it worked.

I was a little innocent about the foibles of tradesmen during the renovation, so before I knew it the historical art deco door knobs and faceplates had been replaced by modern ones in an act of blatant opportunism. If I had my time over I would take more assertive action regarding protecting such history for people in the future to enjoy. I requested finials for the gables of the residence and the old building next door, but disappointingly this was not granted at that renovation.

On the Graham Road side of the house there was a lawn and the remains of an old flower garden, which I cherished. Just beside the driveway was a small spreading deciduous tree which I was also very attached to. When the school proposed to rezone this side block for a bird hide I supported the plan. The Education Department and Teacher Housing Authority teamed up to build a fence between the residence and the hide area. I knew the tree was in line with this fence, but naively thought they would build around it or up to both sides of it. I came home from work to find they

had unceremoniously cut it down. It was a sad day. Eventually the bird hide plan was scrapped and the fence removed, so the loss of the garden and tree were for naught.

I wanted to plant some vegetation between the driveway and the house, so I popped down to Andy Avard's Native Bush Landscapes, which at that stage was on Inglewood Estate near Pitman's Corner. I bought four Melaleucas from Andy and planted them. Three of them remained a nice shrub-like size in their shady spot, but the one at the end of the veranda had greater ambition with its generous quota of sunlight and eventually soared up to the roof line. They lasted for ten or more years but their roots may have become problematic and have all been removed in more recent times.

On Tuesday 8 February 1983 I stood in the front veranda of the residence and marvelled at the red dust storm that had taken over the sky and darkened it so much that the nearby streetlight came on. I had not seen anything like it since the last daytime eclipse. The dust had resulted from a prolonged and severe drought. It was quite a surreal thing to be experiencing from my veranda.

Eight days later on Wednesday 16 February 1983 I again stood on the front veranda of the residence and noted that this time the sky had been replaced by smoke. I was unaware that the fire could easily have reached Kangaroo Ground and equally unaware that many CFA volunteers from Kangaroo Ground and nearby towns were furiously fighting the fires as I stood there casually surveying the smoke. This day of course became known as Ash Wednesday and we soon learned that, tragically, crews on both a Pantan Hill and a Narre Warren fire truck did not return.

There had always been a heavy concrete trough in the backyard, so in 1983, using a little inspiration and a lot of perspiration I was able to get it around to the front and up onto the veranda. I filled it with soil and Kay Hawkins planted it with the prettiest flowers you ever saw. After giving me much pleasure over a long period it remains there today as a part of the museum which the residence eventually became.

My eight years at the residence saw four principals come and go at the school: Bob McDonald, Lindsay Chandler, Ken Linton and Gary Milne; all of whom had a positive influence on this friendly little place of learning amongst the hills.

Beginning with Andrew Ross, there must have been many teachers and their families who have lived in the various incarnations of the Kangaroo Ground Primary School teacher's residence. I have no doubt their stories would all be interesting to read – reflecting the steady changes in cultural norms and advances in technology and creature comforts that make up our local history. I'm willing to bet they all loved it and found the associated opportunities and responsibilities as fulfilling as I did.

Alan Bluhm 17/7/2019

THE LUXURY OUTHOUSE

In September 1979 I had been commuting from Fitzroy to Kangaroo Ground on a regular basis for emergency teaching at the school and was given the opportunity to move into the school residence.

The house, attached to what had been the original school building, dates back to about 1879, with renovations along the way, including a bathroom in about 1937.

Curiously by today's standards, but normal for the time, when the bathroom was added it did not include an inside toilet facility. So, on my arrival almost exactly one hundred years after the house was built, it still had an outside dunny at the end of a path in the backyard.

No doubt the toilet technology had been upgraded once or twice to reflect the norms of the various eras in which it served, and by the time I came along it had been fitted with a modern cistern and bowl, connected to the sewerage system.

In the course of using my outdoor loo the first few times, some of its shortcomings became apparent. The nights were still chilly in September, so at some point during each evening I would leave my lovely warm oil-heated lounge for a trek to a very cold outhouse. Fortunately there was a solution in sight.



I'd been carrying around a cheap single-bar radiator for years, first using it in my nurse's hostel room at Royal Park and later in my room at the Burwood Teacher's College students' halls of residence. I dusted off the heater and mounted it on the inside of the toilet door, at knee height. I replaced the heater plug with a bayonet cap and, using a two-way light socket fitting I was able to have light and heat at the same time. (Not recommended for circuits with less robust wiring and no available earth connection!)

The toilet light switch had been very sensibly placed inside the back porch of the house, so by the time I switched it on and walked from the back door down the path to my loo, my tiniest room already had the ice taken off. It was so cosy in there with the heater going I didn't want to leave! There was another interruption to my life when leaving the lounge to go out to the toilet. The call of nature invariably struck in the middle of a favourite TV program. In those days even a modest television receiver was a large square box and my little loo had no spare space for such a thing. But an extension speaker above the door – plenty of room for that. So a line was run from the house, and toilet tannoy (type of public address system) duly installed. Now I had David Attenborough talking in my toilet, along with Sam Neil as Reilly, *Ace of Spies*, Andrew McFarlane (*Patrol Boat*) and Mollie Meldrum on *Countdown*.

School principals used to call early in the morning when an emergency teacher was required – more often than not while I was in the shower or toilet. Clearly both locations needed a telephone handset. Of course, this was long before anyone had a mobile phone. I ran another cable to my outhouse and crammed some telephone bits into a small disused first aid case, with the handset hung on the side. I mounted it on the wall next to the toilet seat and the problem was solved. The action of undoing the latch and opening the case connected me to the line and also revealed the dial for any outgoing calls. I accepted many a teaching job while seated on the throne.

The final little bit of luxury in my outhouse convenience was provided by Scruffy, one of my cats. She used to seek me out when I was in there, and meowed until I let her in. I'd lay her on her back stretched out along by bare legs, while I rubbed her tummy. A toilet with a heater, TV audio, telephone and feline leg-warmer, what more could a man ask for?



A description of my luxury outhouse would not be complete without a mention of greenery from a leafy tree that grew behind it and over it. It seemed appropriate when responding to the call of nature to be surrounded by nature, and I found its wild presence quite appealing. One evening in the course of a visit from a friend she came rushing inside from my outhouse and insisted I remove a Leaf-curling spider from the bush above the toilet's privacy wall. She was petrified and refused to pass under it no matter how desperate she was to go!

Some nights later my cat Stormy's namesake was visiting. She too came back inside after a visit to the loo. She said excitedly, "Come and look at how this clever little spider has curled a leaf for its Home!"

Different people respond to the great outdoors in different ways, but my outhouse with its creature comforts inside and creatures outside added an enjoyable dimension to my life in the eighties that I otherwise would not have had, and I remember it with great fondness.

It's still there, as part of what is now the Kangaroo Ground Museum. I removed the luxury items when I left, and the tree is now kept trimmed. However, as a museum visitor you can always sit there and imagine its former glory if you like.

Alan Bluhm 17/07/2019

The BASSETT-SMITH FAMILY STORY WRITING COMPETITION

Titled “**My Place**,” it is run annually in conjunction with grade six students of Kangaroo Ground Primary School. Students are asked to hand write about why they enjoy where they live. The stories are read, enjoyed and judged by a panel of four, chaired by Dr Peta Heywood, a published author and former university trainer of both primary and secondary teachers. Following are the two 2019 winners’ stories for you to read and to enjoy their positive outlooks on their lives.

MY PLACE by Joel

Hi, my name is Joel, I live with my family: Mum, Dad, Adele, Ringo (my dog) and my seven fish.

I live in Smiths Gully, every morning in the winter I wake up to the sound of the birds and frogs. In summer the noise of the magpies and the soft hum of the crickets. In Autumn the large maple in our back yard goes orange and the leaves start to fall, in spring pair of king parrots come, we give them apple slices but they don’t eat it.

My house is made of mud brick and dark brown timber, in the winter you can hear the house creak, I love listening to the sound of the rain on the roof and in the morning, the smell of the damp soil. Down the block a creek runs through a thick forest, deer and other animals run free.

At night in spring you can see termites, hundreds of them, flying and searching for a new home. I love the fresh air and the noise of the birds, When I go to sleep I can listen to the crickets and the frogs.

When I wake up in the morning I feel refreshed. My neighbours are very nice, they make us gluten free brownies and meatballs. They have a lovely garden and when we catch up my sister and I play for hours there.

My driveway is long and sometimes I like to walk to the road and back, with gravel crunching under my feet and the feeling of peace. When I need quiet, I climb up the large pine tree at my house and when I’m up the top I contemplate life’s big questions like whether white chocolate counts as a chocolate.

My house is a greenhouse with tonnes of plants, that’s my Mums passion. Our pool is as green as emerald, Dad says he will clean it but that never happens. We had a sheep called Nipper but she had to be put down, now the thistles grow there.

My place is our happy place so where’s your happy place.

MY PLACE by Serena

My place is the most wonderful place ever. It reminds me of a beautiful gingerbread house sitting on a small hill surrounded by mostly trees and wildlife. In my home we have a beautiful little kitchen and two tables, one for special occasions and one for everyday life and of course our dog Teddy’s dog bed. Next to the back door is a little table with our sweet Cleo’s puppy photo, two candles and a gift our neighbours made for her. Downstairs from the kitchen is our lovely lounge room with a cute cosy fireplace which lights up the room and makes us feel warm inside. Our

lounge room also has a beautiful black leather couch which my Mum, brother and I sit on when watching a movie. Up from our kitchen is our cute laundry where I go to look outside to watch our parrots fly by. Next to our laundry is my Mum's room, her room is full of mysteries, I'll end up finding something random every time. At the back of my Mum's room is another set of stairs that leads up to a short hallway, the first room that you will see is our old study with a Mac computer, some Christmas and Easter decorations and some of my Mum's jumpers/jackets. When you walk down the hallway there are then two rooms if you go to the room on the right you walk into a large room which is our new study with a large desk, a big shelf and a couch which also folds out to be a bed. If you turn to the left from the hallway you walk into an equally sized room with a bookshelf, two beds and one large chair. There is other furniture like my brother's drawers and bedside table as well as my wardrobe. My bed is covered with mostly clothes at the back and pillows at the front.

Outside our gingerbread house is our outdoor decking area with a beautiful rocky system with plants scattered through it. On our decking we have a long wooden railing with vines hanging down from it like a jungle wall. In front of that an outdoor lounge what we like sitting on, on a nice warm day while the sun shines on us. Next to the lounge is our little BBQ with our lemon and lime trees next to it.

Down from our decking area is our lovely rock steps leading to our driveway. Next to our driveway is a small garden with pomegranate tree and our flame tree with lots of other beautiful flowers and bushes. On the other side of our driveway is a path that leads to the very front part of our house along the sides are plants, flowers and an occasional apple on the ground from a possum.

At our home, there are a main few things I like the most and one of those things is our wildlife! I love our wildlife they're all just part of the family especially our possums. They like living in our walls and shed. Normally on a hot night Mum and I will put out an apple on the balcony for them or a bowl of water. That's normally why we sometimes find apple on the ground, they normally fight over an apple when we put out two, how funny. Sometimes they enjoy it so much they try to get inside to thank us.

Most of the time in the morning I'll wake up to either a rooster, Teddy or our neighbours dog Sasha. Sometimes in the mornings I'll sit with my Mum on her balcony while enjoying a cup of milo as the birds are chirping their unique songs.

Another one of my favourite places is our beautiful backyard but I like to think of it as a jungle. Before you go to this jungle when you go out the back door you will see a small brick landing with a small garden with flowers. On the side of that is our old dog kennel a small, red, crooked, spider webbed kennel, it may be old but it has many memories of our darling little Cleo.

You then walk up a pair of rocky/dirty steps with plants on the side that leads up to our jungle. Once you reach the top of the set of stairs there is a lot of grass that has grown for a long time so it's very tall. Once you've walked through the 'grass path' I like to call it, you see a tall wattle tree and as lot of gum trees with bushes and plants around it. Whenever I go up there Teddy will most likely follow with his tail flying around in circles as he trots behind me. Normally I'll find a place to sit and listen to all the different birds singing while Teddy barks at the neighbours.

At our home I like looking at the dusk sky with so many beautiful colours before I go to sleep, it's beautiful.

So what do you think of my place? I really love my home and even with two "people" missing I'll always keep them with me.

Thank you.

WHO WE ARE AND HOW TO CONTACT US

Museum Board Members	
Patrons:	Mick Woiwod woiwodgongfler@bigpond.com.au Diana Bassett-Smith
Chairperson:	Warwick Leeson OAM 0439-347-797 wcleeson@iprimus.com.au
Vice Chairperson:	David Sharpe sharpiesw5@aapt.net.au
Secretary/Public Officer:	Carol Leeson 0422-307-630 wcleeson@iprimus.com.au
Treasurer:	Rob Shackleton
	Geoff Ritter
Supporter Officer:	Robert Thornton

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