

My Childhood By Violet Weeks (nee McKay) 1921 - 2019

My parents, father George, was a 1st World War soldier, my mother Eva, an English War Bride. I was born in Melbourne, and at 10 months of age, was taken to Eildon Weir with my older sister, Sylvia, where I spent my childhood until, at 15 I left home, to work in Alexandra.

Our home was built with second hand iron and kerosene tin boxes. It was lined with hessian chaff bags and wall papered with newspaper. It had wooden floors and consisted of a kitchen, dining room and two bedrooms. As the family increased, another room was built on. The dunny (toilet) was up the back yard, and consisted of a pan, which when full, had to be emptied into a big hole. Our toilet paper was news paper cut into squares and strung on a piece of string.

The washing was done on an open fire in the back yard. It was boiled in kerosene tins.

Our bath was a large tin bath, placed in front of the fire, water heated on the stove. The first one in the bath got the cleanest wash, after each one, the hot water was topped up, so all got a warm bath.

The lighting was candles or hurricane lamps. Our water was carted from a tap in the garden, Mum always had a lovely garden.

We always had pets, dogs, cats, a possum, magpie etc.

Although life was hard in those days, I had a happy childhood as I had lots of freedom.

Dad had a couple of cows which roamed the hills, so we had plenty of milk and cream.

We lived in a lovely spot surrounded by hills (it was at the base of Mt Sugarloaf, as the first wall for the Eildon Weir was getting built. When the second wall was built, half of Sugarloaf was blasted away, therefore, eradicating the spot of this house)

A few kids would get together and we would get pieces of tin and buckets of water and climb the hill, pour the water down the hill to make it slippery, and slide down on the tin. It was great fun.

My twin brothers, George and Gordon were born 2 years, 5 months after me, and then my sister Alma, 15 months later. All were born at home in the old bag house with a midwife. 4 years and 5 months later, my brother John was born at Alexandra.

I had a happy and carefree childhood, as we made our own fun, climbing trees, swimming in the river (Goulburn), going fishing with a piece of string on a stick and a hook. We always caught a fish. Catching crays would be fun and mum would have the water boiling when we got home to cook them.

The single men's huts (for the workers on the first dam) were just below us, and on Saturdays, they would play two up. The policeman would make a raid, the men would take to the bush, and we would swoop and collect the money in the ring.

For Guy Faux Night, we would spend weeks dragging branches off the hill to build a huge bonfire. We would collect any old tyres, etc about the place, to put on it. Somebody would always come along and light it the night before Guy Faux, then after school, we would have to build another one in a hurry. We always had crackers.

We walked 2 miles to school every day, some days Mr Savage (Jack Savage) would give us a ride in the bus, if he was in a good mood. He had the mail run.



Apple dunk, young boy on right is Lindsay John McKay, watching the fun, no doubt his brothers George and Gordon had their heads in the barrel.

Dad was badly injured by falling rock (working on the first wall) when I was young, and that changed our lives completely. He could no longer work and finally lost part of his leg. The cows were sold. I remember the year they found the crack in the rock wall (first wall). We were all trained to evacuate to the hill if it burst, emergency packs on the ready, but it didn't burst.

One year when the river flooded, part of the bridge washed away, and they built a swing bridge across the river.

The drunks would be going home, we would let them get into the middle of the swing bridge and then swing it. Poor blokes wouldn't know what to do.

Once a month, movies would be held in Collers' hall. They would be westerns, to be continued from one month to the next, so we had to behave ourselves, to get to see the next episode.

The weekends were very busy, Friday night we were all lined up and given a dose of licorice powder, to clean us out. We rarely got sick. Saturday was the lousing day, we were all de-loused then our heads wet with a kerosene mixture (kerosene and water) then covered with a cloth, this suffocated the lice. Sunday was bath night, ready for school next day. On Sundays we attended church. As we had relieving ministers, we attended different churches. Mum never cooked on Sundays, and we were not allowed to play as it was a very sacred day. We were allowed to go for a walk. I would go to a friend's place. We had a great time, climbing trees, swimming nude in the river etc. Mum never knew.

There used to be a lady, Mrs Jones, come around with a big basket on her back selling all sorts of things, there was an Indian, also, who used to come. We were always amazed at all the things they carried in these baskets, they would have anything from haberdashery to clothing.

When dad was injured, he could not work and also had a mental disability. Mum had a light wheelbarrow, made for her by a friend, and mum and I would go up the hill, sometimes, Mt Sugarloaf, and get a load of wood. Whilst there, we would set traps to catch rabbits, which we mainly lived on, for food.

When I was ten, Sylvia died suddenly and my mum was taken very ill, John was 6 months old. I was left to take care of the family, my sick dad as well as do everything for John. It was not easy, but we managed. At school, in the summer, we were walked 2 miles to the lake for swimming lessons. We would jump off a platoon, into the lake. Then, we would have to walk the 2 miles back to school, hotter than we were, before the swim. We would have to walk the 2 miles home after school. What a day.

Bunty Savage, had a ram called Johnny. As we had to walk through their paddock to get home, she would let it out and it would chase us. Many a time, it bailed me up, behind a tree.

Once a year, a sports day (picnic day) was held in the football ground. There were foot races, egg and spoon races, sack races and many more. There was also a greasy pig race. The pig was covered in grease and the men had to catch it and hold it. One year it ran into the river and the men had to follow, it was very exciting.

The 1st of May was called 'May Day', and we had a Maypole dance at school. Each pupil would hold a ribbon attached to the pole and then we would have to dance around it and weave the ribbons under & over until the ribbons were intertwined. If one made a mistake, it was all messed up.

Christmas was very exciting for us, as Mr Savage would drive his carrier truck on Christmas Eve, to Alexandra, and we would always be taken to see Santa and get a little present. When I woke on Christmas Day, Santa would have left a little stocking with little toys, a little bag of lollies and an orange.



GIRLS OF EILDON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Back Row - 5th from left Vi McKay (married Syd Weeks, Alexandra

Middle Row - 1st, 2nd, 3rd, The Peterson sisters, Maisie (Married Owen Morton, Alexandra) Gwen and Dorothy (married Gordon McKay, Eildon)

10th Alma McKay



MOTHERS OF EILDON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Front Row - 1st left Eva McKay



MAY DAY FESTIVAL - The Queen was Crowned

Her Princess on the left is Miss Jean Willouhby, Savage Senior sister.

On the right is Sylvia McKay (sadly she passed away at 14 years old)



BOYS OF EILDON PRIMARY SCHOOL

- Back Row - 3rd from left - Harry Hoskin
 6th from left - Gordon McKay
- Middle Row - 9th from left - George McKay (George and Gordon were twins)
- Front Row - 4th from left - Lindsay John McKay
 6th from left - Robert (Bob) Peterson

A footnote from Christine Pearson, Violet's Daughter

My mother, Violet Weeks (McKay) and her siblings, attended the school.

Vi was quietly proud to have assisted in the planting of the tree to commemorate the Centenary of the School. Especially symbolic to have her younger brother George McKay, looking on.

I have held these memories related by my mother for some years, and produced them to celebrate her 95 year as wall hangings. They were accepted on that day with many requests for copies, but mum did not want them circulated.

I said I believed the school should archive them, and that when she passed, I would forward them to you.

A little extra that I would like to add to the story, was the fact that life was hard, money was short. On the occasions when there was nothing in the house to provide lunch at school, the children did not attend. This was a standard practice, to save embarrassment for the family, I guess.

Along came the headmaster (unfortunately, I did not write down his name), whose wife made up sandwiches for those children who were missing school.

Mum was forever grateful to that headmaster, who assisted the families of that time.

Mum returned to Eildon as a resident of the Darlingford Upper Goulburn Nursing Home for the last 15 months of her life, and she was so thrilled to be back in Eildon, after spending the intervening years residing in Alexandra.

Eildon Primary School would like to thank Christine for allowing us share her Mother's recollections of growing up in Eildon in the early 1920's.