

## **I SERVED MY TIME AT FRANKSTON HIGH SCHOOL FROM 1950 TO 1953**

By Ron Wood – October 2015

(Plees suscuse th' bad ritin an' th' crook spellin')

Do you remember the first day of the first term at Frankston High School in 1950?

Everything is so different from what I had been used to at the 'one teacher' and sixteen students, Bittern State School, where all the students were all in the, same classroom. There were three kids in grade 1, three in grade 2, 1 in grade 3, 1 in grade 4, 2 in grade 5 and six in grade 6, being taught what we had too learn by Mr. M. Jackman or 'Sir' as we called him in class, but he was Mr Jackman outside the school and school hours. Mrs Jackman called in now and again when we had singing and dancing (out on the asphalt quadrangle by the flagpole) Good fun wasn't it Denise? He taught us to waltz, fox-trot, parma waltz and many others as well including the 'Alberts' with all that great swinging.

But I've now arrived at Frankston High School and I can't find Lois J., Denise S., and Peter M., my friends and classmates from Bittern State School No 3933?? Where are they??

All dressed up in my new white shirt, school tie and school socks, grey coat and short grey pants and my highly polished black shoes, complete with my school cap, a clean and ironed hankie and my new school bag hanging from my shoulder. All it contained was a couple of meat and pickle sandwiches, (the meat was left-over from yesterday's dinner), wrapped up in greaseproof paper with a couple of biscuits and an orange, all held together in a brown paper bag. This would soon be replaced by the new text books, exercise books, pens, compasses, strange shaped things with a bit of string hanging from the end of it, and other educational aids that one would acquire from Mr Brooks at that little window facing the quadrangle, between the science room and 'Snoop's' office.

Frankston High School was a huge school with many more classrooms than I could imagine. Hundreds of pupils from all over the Peninsula and dozens of instructors teaching dozens of subjects and most of them were strange to me like, French, Algebra and Science, but we had fun exploring this new environment and finding our way around. After a few days we soon got the hang of it and began to know just where everything was.

Remember consulting the list of names on the notice board, finding yours and learning for the first time which form you were to go into, which room you were to assemble in and this room would be your 'form room' for the year. In this room, you and your 'fellow form 1b's', were under the command of Miss Fitzpatrick, our form mistress, who was to become our French teacher. We were supposed to keep this room clean and tidy, to collect points towards being the tidiest room for the week. This could be a bit of a challenge especially if you had won room 2 with all those sliding doors at the front and the rear of the room, that rattled and shook even if a mild breeze was blowing and the grotty blackboards that were so hard to keep clean in a straight line. We elected our form captains, one for the girls and one for the boys, and the vice captains for the boys and girls, but only knowing them for the last five minutes we didn't have a clue who they really were or where they came from.

We would gather with our form teacher in this room once a week to hear who had won the cleanest and tidiest room, who's being doing the right things and who's been doing the wrong things and having the latest school laws laid down to us,.....and who was it who had carved their initials into the freshly painted wall near the door?? 'I dunno....wasn't me'

All of a sudden, you would be grabbed by half a dozen senior students and forcibly removed downstairs to the water fonts where your head would be shoved under the running tap. These gorilla's would have a laugh at you as water cascaded down the back of your neck and the front of your shirt as you searched for your cap and school bag with lunch in it. Your hankie was no good

to soak up the water as it was still wet from the last dunking about 10 minutes ago. Then the mob left to search for another 'first form victim' leaving you as wet as a 'shag on a rock'. There were many other 'first formers' that felt the same way and you could be grabbed and 'ducked' many more times during the first day.

ANNOUNCEMENT....."*Would form 1b please proceed to the bookstall window to receive their exercise books, text books, pens, compasses and other educational aids from Mr Brooks at the little window facing the quadrangle (underneath the stairs??) between room 9 and the Principals office.*" (Was this room 10??) Small students would need a wooden box to stand on to be able to see over the window and discuss with Mr Brooks their needs and wants in regard to school books for the year. Don't forget to pay school fees that are mentioned in small print at the foot of the page. Thank you.

After the pencils, books and mathematical aids had been dished out and paid for, we went out and looked at what we have acquired, "What is this strange thing and what are logarithm's for? Are we going to 'froggieland' at school break-up this year, I don't want to learn French!

Then we were assembled down on the Quad, (some teacher passes by and says "*You don't belong in this line.....you should be over in that line.....get over there quickly and pull your cap on straight!*" Now.....you are addressed by Mr Smith, the headmaster, Mr Smith (or 'Snoop' as he was affectionately known) welcomed us to the school and introduced us to all the teaching staff who were gathered along the balcony rails surveying the little angels and riff-raff below. At the end, to my right is Mr Aldus, a popular and likable gentleman who has been teaching science and physics here for many years now. Then there's Mr Davenport who also has been with the school for three years and is a very competent geography and history teacher among other subjects. He is also the Lt. Col in the F.H.S. Cadet Corp. Looking back at the cadets, it was kind of funny to see a small first or second form boy dressed in a bulky khaki uniform struggling along with a bag full of school books, and dragging a great big .303 'Lee-Enfield' rifle that was bigger than him and climbing aboard a passenger bus in the main street in Frankston. If it happened today, half of Frankston would be closed down, police, fire, ambulances, radio and television would be there to record the scene as the school was dragged away for questioning. We lived in a civilized time and nobody took any notice of him or what he was doing.

But next to Mr Davenport is Miss O'Donogue who arrived here in 19 something from somewhere and has been one of our most likeable teachers, as is Mrs Woolard who came here in the year of 19 o-dot and blah, blah, blah...and we cannot go on without mentioning Miss Styles that's her in the centre who has been here since the school was built way back in the year.....she is a pillar of kindness and strength, and the girls comment on her temperament and the understanding way she has with them a 'Just like her mother.'

She was actually carved out of a block of bluestone that was procured from the foot of Arthurs Seat and on and on he went until he had gone thru the entire teaching staff. We could have nodded off to sleep in our wet clothes 'standing up'.

*Just a thought.....Why weren't girls 'ducked' like we were???*

The assembled students would have come from various parts of the Mornington Peninsula and all points north, south and west of Frankston. There was also a smattering of students from interstate, England, Scotland and others who had arrived from the Baltic States, Europe and European countries. They had lost their homes and left their homelands after the war, to find a better life in Australia and in some cases, many did, but many others found themselves at the migrant hostel at Somers.

Time now to explore the school. Upstairs in the main building are rooms 1 to 8. Rooms 1,2 & 3 opening out to form one large indoor assembly room, and room 4 was the 'staff room' where the teachers retired to for their lunch, staff meetings and where they retired to, to get over a particularly bad period of being tormented by their young charges for one reason or another.

Mainly 'girl's only' would be accommodated in room 5, one of the commercial rooms for the young ladies there to learn the secrets of shorthand and typing. Room 5 was always locked when it was not occupied because it contained dozens of expensive typewriters for those aspiring secretaries of the future to learn on. They were not for the 'riff-raff' of the school and from down the Peninsula to go and play on and jam up the keys and paper amongst other things.

Room 6 was "The Art Room" where budding student artists would practice their artistic skills with watercolour impressions of vases of flowers, pastel drawings of Mr Sherlock's house (just over the road) or sitting on the soggy bank of Kananook Creek doing pastel drawing of boats on moored in to the bank. It would be better for us if we could nick off from here and hire a boat and go rowing for the arvo.

Rooms 7 & 8 were general classrooms located at the front-side upstairs where the kids that arrived to school early could look over the balcony and watch the students who arrived by train straggling into the school before the 9:00am bell was rang.

The school asked for monitors to set up and ensure that the P.A system operated for assemblies that were conducted from outside room 3. Billy K, Ian M, Kevin W and myself put our hands up and were duly appointed the position. Two of us set up the amplifiers in Mr Smith's office and adjusted the volume and later turned on the switches to all rooms that were to be broadcast into, the other two boys set up the microphones on the balcony and in room 3. The boys in the office could converse with the boys upstairs and we would tell jokes to each other, swear, and talk about the good looking sheila that had appeared in in form 3. All of a sudden, a girl came running into the office and yells at us *'Miss Anderson the cookery teacher has heard all that you have been saying for the last five minutes.'* We look down at the P.A. and sure enough, room 13 switch was 'on'. *'Quick! Turn all the switches off until it's time for 'Snoop' to start talking.'* *'How long has that been on?'* *'I dunno, didn't you turn it off?'* *'I didn't turn it on!'* *'We're in for it now, let's get outta here and go up into room 3.'* It all ended well, we weren't reported and the event passed without any further trouble. One good thing about P.A. duty was we were never seen by any of the teachers and so we never had to wear a cap at these assemblies.

Room 10 was the rather large room where science and chemistry was taught, experiments with zinc filings, acids, marble chips, mercury, alkalis and other concoctions. We made gases that we ignited with Bunsen burners, we made big bangs, little bangs, pops, fizzles and farts. Other brews that smoked, changed colour and stunk (or stank is it??). Frogs and grasshoppers and other harmless creatures were dissected and cut up in front of us, all to be studied, in the name of science. If you took a lock or strand of someone's hair and burnt it over the Bunsen burners, a quite interesting smell would permeate throughout the room that would draw the attention of the bespectacled and quietly spoken Mr Palsler, who would raise his voice to demand to know who had partaken in this despicable act.

On Monday morning we would assemble here to 'BREAK OUT THE FLAG', SALUTE and sing 'GOD SAVE OUR GRACIOUS KING' then we would recite; I love God and my Country, I'll honour the flag, and cheerfully obey my parents, teachers and the law and then it was 'Optima Semper' High School Forever! Hell I hope not!!

Cap and hat inspections would be conducted by a couple of goons or ferrets. It was stiff cheddar for you, if you didn't have your cap on or your hat wasn't on or straight or worse still, if you didn't have your cap at all! Then after a couple of announcements we were dismissed to go to our classes.

Extending back towards Oats Street was the girls sewing room and further on the boys woodwork room under the control of Mr Westbrook. Forming the back boundary of the school were two old ex-army 'Nissan' huts that had been placed there and converted into classrooms. They were hot in summer and cold in winter and unpleasant at the best of times, but they served their purpose and lasted a couple more years. We were instructed to gather here whenever the school doctors or vampires) came to attend. We were lined up and marched into the room where our form teachers waited with a nurse, who rubbed your arm with methylated spirits, then the elderly

doctor sterilised the huge needle by passing it through the flame of methylated spirits until the 'pointy' part glowed red-hot before plunging it into your quivering arm. Gees! That hurt! Then to make matters worse, we had to come back again the next day for another serving.

There were tennis courts and cricket practice pitch and the Cranbourne Road Oval that was surrounded by concealing bush and ti-tree that hid the rope swing.

Then there was the Junior Scout Hall where Mrs Wharington tried in vain to teach us to sing after she removed all the rubbish out of the inside of the piano. Things like paper, rulers, grass, someone's untouched lunch and an old lost white runner. Then she settled herself before the keyboard and as she thumped the ivories and sang with a Scottish Accent as we sang lustily. 'Pebroek O'Donoghue' (I think). *'We Run them In, We Run Them In, We Run Them In, We show that we're the bold Gendarmes, 2...3...We Run Them In', etc., etc.*

When it was recess time, it was onto the Cranbourne Road oval for a few kicks of the football, a few overs of cricket, or perhaps into the bush over the back of the oval where someone had tied a rope to a branch of a large gum-tree and everybody would use it as a swing. There would be bodies jumping for the rope from the small trees, Ti-trees and bushes around the swing and grabbing onto the rope that possibly had about a dozen bodies hanging and swinging from it. There were some mighty 'death defying leaps' with bodies flying through the air in every direction chasing after the rope. Now and again the rope broke and a pile of bodies would fall in a giggling, laughing heap onto the ground amidst a cloud of dust. Next day a new rope would mysteriously be tied to the tree again and it would start all over.

Wednesday mornings, Bass, Collins, Flinders and Murray houses would gather in their respective 'house rooms' to arrange teams for the sporting events held later that day. For the boys, cricket and football, hockey and athletics were popular, for the girls there was basketball, softball, rounders, athletics and lots more. Then there was the un-sporting group who would meet under a concealing tree by that small tin gate leading onto Oats Street, enjoy a smoke and plan what they would do during sports.

The combined high school swimming sports meeting at the old Olympic pool in Batman Ave in Melbourne about 1950 was a huge success for some of us. After carefully evading the patrolling 'goons and ferrets' we made our way into the city centre where we were able to partake in the different shops that we wanted to visit, before making our way to the Bourke Street theatres and studying what was screening that afternoon. We would wind up watching some blood-curdling western, or equally morbid war show with 'as real' blood flowing freely from the poor unfortunate loser of this particular conflict, and the losers lover, who arrives near the end of the show, covers him with her body to protect him from further harm. That was a terrific show! Then back to swimming in time to join all the frogs for the rowdy train trip home, a wonderful day at the swimming sports.

When the combined inter school athletic sports were held at Essendon High about 1950 – 1951, an educational opportunity not to be missed by Vic J. and myself (after getting past the patrolling goons) an excursion by tram a bit further along the road to the old Essendon airport to inspect the array of aircraft belonging to Australian National Airways arriving and leaving for distant places in Australia. Not a lot of people at the airport today and nobody around to say we couldn't go out onto the tarmac and nobody stopped us. We looked and walked around the assembled DC 2's and DC 3's, the smaller De Havelin Doves and Herons, and the big four engine Douglas DC 4's planes waiting for their departure time from there. We wandered up the steps and into the cabin, sat in the passenger seats, looked in the galley (nothing to eat there) and toilets. Then up to the sharp end and looked and sat in the pilot's seats with the controls and dozens of meters and gauges in front of us. 'Don't touch anything or the under carriage might retract'. Outside on the ground again, we crawled into the luggage hold and looked around inside there then out to look over, under and around the planes that were standing there. Nobody asked us what we were doing or made any attempt to remove us. Another wonderful day well spent in the name of sport. Then an exciting tram ride back to the Essendon High School where we joined all the competitors and onlookers and boarded the bus back to Frankston. Nobody missed us or knew we weren't there!

But speaking of participating in sport, a group of us, Billy K, Ian M, Kevin W, Don J and myself organised a game we would play during recess or lunchtime. On the left, just outside the gateway to the Cranbourne Road oval on a nice sandy patch of ground, circled by ti-tree and that was our sports arena. It was a game that was played by as many people who wanted to play and watched by many interested persons who did not want to play themselves and thought us quite mad.

Frankston was a wonderful big town to explore, there was G.J. Coles, Arthur Bros Dairy, Woolworths, Paterson's, Cafes, Central Timber and Plaster, Sherlock and Hayes, Fletcher Jones, and a thousand other shops and cafes to visit and inspect. Cameron's Men's Wear shop was popular with the boys who could afford to shop there but I had to visit more affordable locations like Hattam's and Coles.

The teacher's that I enjoyed learning from were Mr Davenport who had the Geography portfolio. He was an excellent teacher of the subjects that he taught but could not control the riff-raff in the class and the mischief that they got up to, thus putting off the students who wanted to learn. I liked singing and Mrs Warrington who was also a very good music teacher, but like Mr Davenport could not gain full control over the class who ran riot on many occasions and did and sang whatever they wanted.

Fred Moon usually drove Peninsula Bus Lines No. 11, a mixed passenger/school bus, we called them 'Pushers' because they had their motors in the back of the bus driving the rear wheels. Our bus started at Flinders and ran to Frankston each morning at about 7:00am with Patsy H and picked up Billy W at Shoreham, Brenda H and Audrey J at Merricks, Denise S, Kath W and Ron W at Bittern at 7:45 am. The bus rolled through Hastings and then turned West at Tyabb, picking up Alan B just past the top Tyabb School. Tim H and Jill G, boarded at Moorooduc from where we turned north and heading towards Frankston along Three Chain Road, arriving at Cranbourne Road, Frankston (F.H.S) at 8:45 am.

During the afternoon, the Flinders bus departed from the railway station at 4:25pm, after loading paying passenger and a herd of chattering kids. (*'School children to the rear of the bus, paying passengers to the front of the bus please'*). The bundle of 'Heralds' (the evening newspapers) were stacked up at the front of the bus, so many that they nearly blocked the front entrance. The driver threw the bundles of papers out at each town beyond Hastings. At Hastings, the local chemist loaded aboard pills, tablets and medicines for distribution along the way to shops at the towns the bus traversed. There were no chemist shops at these South-Eastern Peninsula towns and Hastings was the closest one at that time. We got back to Bittern about 5:15pm that night but the kids from Shoreham and Flinders couldn't have been home much before six o'clock.

Then one day just after mid-year in 1950 there was great excitement as trucks and utes rolled into school and started unloading building equipment, planks, tools and goodness knows what onto the ground, just the other side of the basketball court and flag pole. "*What's happening?*" Well, they were constructing a concrete slab to accommodate two, then four new pre-fabricated aluminium classrooms for the almost overflowing Frankston High School. We took great interest in their construction and right up until the day they were opened. We were not allowed in them or even near them, they were sort of 'sacred sites' to the Education Department and they didn't want them getting grotty little students running amok through their new acquisitions.

The house swimming sports at Hastings pool could also be an opportunistic day for the local children. We would get our swimming gear on at home, get dressed and go to the bus stop by the Bittern Post Office, get on the bus, travel three miles and get off at Hastings. After a short walk, to the pool, you would strip off and be in the water by 8:00am. Gees, it was cold too but you couldn't say anything to anybody or you would get chewed out. After about two hours the buses from Frankston would arrive and discharge hundreds of students and a few interested teachers who were competing and officiating in the events, and those who were just watching this spectacular sporting event. (Make sure that one or more of the teachers knows or has seen you at the poolside and they can verify you were seen there). There were back-strokers, breast-strokers, freestylers and others who had just been pushed into the pool and were only trying to

save themselves. There were those who dived in off the low board and the smart ar..es who climbed up and dived off the high board. I'd had enough by 10:30 so I'd wander up the street to the railway station and caught the Stony Point train home, and so passed another pleasant and enjoyable day of The House Swimming action. C'MON COLLINS!

In Fourth form Bill K and myself sat towards the back of the class, right in front of Janet E and Elizabeth D. Now and again Bill or myself would sense a foot, or two feet at our backside preparing to give our bottoms a mighty shove forward in the seat, causing us to fall out of the desk and onto the floor. The class would pause while we picked ourselves up and were reprimanded for playing around in class and not paying attention. The two girls would sit there with their innocent angelic eyes looking straight ahead as if nothing had happened, and said with a soft whisper to us, "*How was the trip Boys*". We would get even by poking our hands down the back of our desks and grabbing their leg or foot or whatever we could get hold of. One of us held the offending foot while the other sailed into it with a ruler until the teacher got wind that something was up and we would stop. Sometimes we would even pinch one of their shoes. These two girls would be given hell, we would pinch their books, their pens, and pencils and anything that they left lying around. We were poked in the back by rulers and pens, had our hair pulled, were kicked in the backside and had drawing pins placed on our seats but we usually saw them. We were given hell by these two girls but they were given hell by us, I think we all enjoyed the fun.

A small cheap water pistol from Coles could create a lot of laughs and anger in the girls. You could conceal the pistol in the palm of your hand and if you could squirt them on the back of the leg (not in their faces because then they could see which direction and from where the water came from) they would jump up and down, squeal, and wonder where the water had come from.

Then one evening in October or November 1953 at tea time Mum said to "*How are you enjoying your time at Frankston High School*"? "*Do you think you are learning anything and what you are learning, is it an advantage to you*"? I replied that I thought it was a bit of waste of time and I would be happier if I could be somewhere else, perhaps an engine driver in the Victorian Railways. After careful thought and a few minutes discussion, she agreed and said if I could get work at the Victorian Railways Workshops at Newport then I could leave Frankston High School. Next day I travelled to the railway head office at Spencer Street and applied for a position with the Victorian Railways as a trainee locomotive driver. A few days went by and I was told to return to V.R head office for a medical exam and an interview. The railways accepted me and put me in the electroplating shop to learn the types of nickel, chrome, copper and gold plating and the way it was preformed, but I wanted to be an engine driver, not an electroplater. Mum said an engine driver was not a real trade like a carpenter, a car builder or an electrician, that would be a better choice. So I put in for a position as a 'car painter' and won one of the five positions that were available in that field. So in February 1954, I began a five year apprenticeship as a Carpenter & Sign Writer. Early in 1959, I completed my apprenticeship. I got my Indentures signed and a certificate to show that I had successfully completed the prescribed course as a Car Painter.

Am I sorry I didn't stay at one place doing the same old repetitive job every day and years on end? No Way! I've enjoyed every minute doing a variety of jobs that I've had and the experience that I've gathered performing these tasks, has helped me in future life. Then I thought I better get a serious job with good prospects for advancement, a pension and good working conditions, I've got a wife and two sons to look after now. Looking through the paper I found an advert for a P.M.G linesman that sounded good. After six months training at the lines school at Doncaster, I qualified as a linesman in the P.M.G/Telecom/Telstra Hastings. I started off digging holes for pits and posts, learnt about various cables and how to install them, and when they were faulty, how to repair or replace them. They gave me a Ford Falcon utility to carry my tools into the field and later I became a Faultman for the Westernport area on the Mornington Peninsula. I stepped up to become a Cable Recorder and later an Estimator at Frankston Divisional Office and as a free agent roamed.

Perhaps the grounding that I received at Bittern State School and Frankston High School went a long way to helping me through these happy times, some difficult times and many other stressful times that I have encountered in the various positions in which I have been employed in.

On reaching 62 years of age I applied for a Telecom Redundancy Package and it was granted, so with a sad heart on a Friday evening I said farewell to the many friends that I had made in Frankston and down the Peninsula, walked out the door and didn't look back.

Ron Wood