



City of Port Phillip Living Heritage Project

Edited transcript – Roger Backway

Interviewee: Roger Backway [RB]

Interviewer: Sarah Rood, Way Back When Consulting Historians [SR]

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12 September 2018

Childhood activities - hunting and games

03:08

SR: This is your father's father?

RB: Yes. Pop.

SR: Did you see him much?

RB: Yes, we used to go to the Footscray Football Club ground with him on a regular occurrence. We used to always go to the Royal Melbourne Show and meet up with him there. We also used to go shooting together, shooting rabbits. Dad and I lived in Elwood and he had an old rifle and we would walk down on Saturday mornings and catch the tram in Elwood to St Kilda railway station into town, then to Spencer Street. The up train to Bendigo used to have two carriages on the back which were called the Sportsmen's Special, and they were for the rabbiters. Everybody would get on board with their rifles and shotguns; I cannot ever remember any problem at all. It would stop at places like Diggers Rest, I think Clarkefield, and Riddell, which is now called I think Riddells Creek, where we used to get off. We'd spend the whole day on Jacksons Creek, walking along Jacksons Creek, and we'd have our sandwiches, we'd make a little fire for lunch and toast our sandwiches, and shoot rabbits which I used to hang around my belt.

The train coming down from Bendigo used to get into Riddell about six o'clock and we'd catch that back and then go through the whole process of getting back to Elwood with me having bloody rabbits dripping off my belt. That was a prize, people would be standing in the street waiting for us to come home - they'd know when we'd gone - and people along the street would get a rabbit each.

SR: You'd give them to them?

RB: We'd give them away because we'd bring a dozen or so home. They were a prize thing in those days.

SR: Would you cook them?

RB: Yes. Out in the field we'd gut them. There's a special way of cutting one bit of the rabbit's leg so you could poke it through - you'd hook it under your belt and then poke the other leg through so you could carry them easily. You'd get them home, they'd be skinned and cooked, and they were a delicacy in those days. Keeping in mind this is 1940-something just after the war, and the people that we associated

in our street were basically low income people, so a rabbit was top of the list, it was a good feed. They were good days, I can still remember them very clearly.

06:30

SR: So you went with your pop and your dad?

RB: Yes.

SR: And other people in your street were going too?

RB: No, this was a rare thing to be doing, not many kids had that opportunity. And we grew up on the beach so we knew about seagulls and everything, and then we got up to the bush and all of a sudden there was parrots and cockatoos, all the birds that we didn't have in Elwood, and it was an educational thing as much as anything, and through that I learnt to shoot. My father would crouch down and I'd be given the rifle and lay it on his shoulder so that I could have a steady aim at something, actually shot rabbits like that.

Second interview 12 September 2018

0.22

SR: We were talking before about some things that we thought we'd mention that we didn't quite cover in the last interview. The format today is we're going to touch on a few extra things from the last interview and then we're going to go into Roger's working life and observations of what we now know as the City of Port Phillip. So Roger, tell me the things that you wanted to add about living in Tiuna Grove.

RB: At the last interview I'd completely forgotten about some of the childhood activities that we had to go through because we didn't have the money to go down to the shops and buy things off the shelves, and there was no Ikea and no Big W and all of these sorts of places.

Come October I think it is, is the windy month at the beach and that was kite flying season. To make our kites we'd go around to the back lanes of Elwood - and Elwood had a lot of back lanes because of the night-cart era - and there were always lots of wobbly old fences with old palings falling off so we'd nick a paling. Then with our knives - all us kids carried pocket-knives in those days, fold up knives for either peeling fruit that we'd stolen off the trees and/or making kites. We would split the palings down to fine sticks, cut them into the appropriate lengths and notch them, and then join two together to make a cross, and bind the centre up with a bit of string, then notch the outsides of each stick and run a string around there, tighten it up, take it home.

We'd have some brown paper that we got from the local grocer shop, we'd lay the sticks on the brown paper, and then cut the outline about an inch or an inch and a half oversize, then fold that oversize back on itself over the strings. So we had the brown paper, the cross, and then we'd fold the paper over. We'd glue that down, and the glue we made ourselves through flour and water mixed up to a nice consistency. Then press it all down with a couple of books and then in two or three days it'd be dry. We would then put a string from top to bottom to join our main line to. That was

the one thing that our parents had to help us with, they had to go to the grocer shop and buy a ball of string. And for the tails we'd make up out of - if you stole nylon stockings they were the best but they were a pretty rare commodity in Elwood at that time - we used to rip up lengths of sheets to make our tails. Then we'd go down to the beach after school on the windy days and fly our kites. The object of flying the kite was to get your kite to bash the other bloke's kite and send it to the ground, a little bit of competition. *[Laughs.]*

03:27

Another game that we played, of course everybody knows about marbles; not many people actually play with marbles, they've all got a marble collection. At the school there was a marble season and I think it was around May. It used to be in conjunction with either - Wattle Day or something like that - and you played the games, and one was Big Ring and the other one was Little Ring.

Somebody had to put their marble in and you had to fire your marble to knock them out of the ring. If you knocked them out of the ring you got their marble. Marbles were great Christmas stocking fillers so everybody had marbles.

Just occasionally somebody would turn up with their bag of their father's marbles, which were older, in some cases they were all the nice Victorian swirly marbles which today are worth a fortune. Sometimes if the family didn't have much money they'd turn up with their marbles which were clear marbles, which were the alleys out of alley bottles that had been broken just to claim the marble. Some of the marbles were also what we'd call 'eyes' or 'agates' which were either brown or blue, sometimes just clear, and they were a ceramic marble that had been glazed and they had spots on them that looked like eyes. They'd been the objects that grandmother used to put in the cast-iron kettles that used to sit on the stove and when the water boiled the marbles would go around and stop the inside of the kettle getting all the calcium. They were the poor kids' marbles, but they used to turn up also. I was to later learn in life that what we called agates are called Benningtons and they're highly prized today and bring a fair bit of money.

SR: Was there a social kind of value attributed to those who were good at marbles?

RB: Yes. The good marble players would not ever have a Bennington, no, that was socially down the grade.

SR: I wonder if marble season was in between cricket and football season.

RB: I seem to sort of remember that it was in autumn, that's all. But you know, it was a defined season, and then you put your marbles away and wouldn't play with them until next year. It didn't seem to be played in our street or down the beach. Although in later years I did used to find marbles at the beach but that's another story.

SR: That might be from them being in people's pockets.