

CHAPTER ONE

EARLY MEMORIES

Wonthaggi, East St Kilda, Kallista and Essendon

Wonthaggi

It all started on the 6th of October 1921. Dr Sleeman called at the vicarage in Wonthaggi at 9.00 am on that day to tell my father, Walter, that another young footballer had arrived. My mother, Ethel, 31 years old, had been driven to Nurse Jones' Hospital in the early morning from our home next to the Anglican Church. My brother Arthur was born in the same hospital on the afternoon of the 26th of April 1920, eighteen months before. Mrs Mc Bain, wife of Jim McBain, looked after Arthur while mother and I recuperated in hospital. I was baptised on October 30th 1921 in St Georges Wonthaggi by the Rev Hedley White, a missionary priest and given the Christian names of Hedley Thomas John. Miss Edith Kitson was my godmother (and later in 1927 she stood in as proxy godmother to Nancye Margaret King born 22nd of August 1927) who was later to become my wife. The McBain family were very good friends. Jim worked in the mines and was often called on to take father, the Anglican priest in Wonthaggi, down to the pits to visit men.

Hedley Thomas John Backholer

Wonthaggi is 130 km south- east of Melbourne on the Bass Highway and is supposed to mean “more wind”. It was true to name. The population in 1921 was 9,000. The coal mines were owned by the Victorian Government, under direct control of Mr Harold Clapp, Chief Railways Commissioner and supplied coal mainly to run the steam trains. The mines were officially closed in 1968. Father said (in later life) that the men of the town were good hearted, ‘rough diamonds’ he called them, not generally devoted to the church. The women folk held families together as the men were often on shift duty or in the hotel. Our transport consisted of a horse named ‘Brownie’ and a buggy and harness bought for £23.

I do not pretend to remember anything of my stay in Wonthaggi but from those early times, friendships made by my parents carried through to later life, and when life seemed to be at its lowest ebb, it was then that old friends came to the family rescue in friendship, gifts and concern.

One thing about being the son of a clergyman - you never had long in the one place.

The vicar of All Saints Chapel Street, St Kilda, was looking for a senior curate. Father had spent thirteen years in the diocese of Gippsland, four at Wonthaggi, and was glad to enter the diocese of Melbourne on the 30th of September 1923.



St Kilda East

The church in St Kilda is the largest suburban church in the diocese of Melbourne seating 1,200 people, and in 1923 it was humming with activity. There were all kinds of societies in the church and out, hospitals and schools to visit as well as a closely settled suburb throbbing with life. The church is dedicated to All Saints, and a good strong choir of men and boys maintains to this day the English tradition of good

church music. During our time there an organ worth £4,000 was installed and the organist Doctor Inge, a true blue Englishman, got the most from the instrument. Both father and mother were heavily engaged in church duties. I can remember attending kindergarten run by my mother and listening one day on a crystal wireless set to father who was preaching at St Paul's Cathedral in Flinders Street.

The parish hall, called the Gregory Hall, was a huge place on the corner of Chapel Street and Dandenong Road. Arthur and I often played there. Arthur commenced at Hornsby State School whilst in St Kilda on June 9th 1925 but I was still learning to ride and push my tricycle around the immense driveway that encircled the church. Two tennis courts were at the back of the church and All Saints always had a strong team entered in the Church of England Tennis Competitions. A lovely green tree-lined park was situated right behind the church.

Accommodation was an early problem. The Rev John Jones, the vicar, came up with a solution by dividing the large old-fashioned brick vicarage for which we paid £1 per week for an upstairs flat. John Jones was one of nature's gentlemen. Father has said he was number one to work for, loyal to his men, courteous, never seen in a temper and he was a treat to work with.

With the advent of new friends our family was obviously happy at East St Kilda. John Jones had three children - Brian the oldest, Gilbert and Rosemary, all successful at university and beyond. Rosemary was my favourite and several times I declared my love for her to my father. One unfavourable recollection of the place was my visits to Mr Fegent, our dentist, who lived not far away in Dandenong Road and had his practice there. On one occasion a slap was administered when I protested about some of his procedures.

Chapel Street shops were only five minutes walk from the vicarage flat and it was a good place to buy food and to meet people and friends. A picture theatre operated opposite the church. St Michael's Grammar School for Girls, in Redan Street, was close to the church and the clergy were often called on by the sisters of the church to give spiritual guidance and religious instruction. (Later in the 1960s, our daughter Jenny attended this school for two years.)

Hedley Thomas John Backholer

At the end of 1926, the Bishop of Gippsland offered the Parish of Yarram in South Gippsland to father but he was very happy at East St Kilda and did not relish the idea of going back to the diocese of Gippsland. Later the Archbishop of Melbourne offered the combined parish of Kallista, Sassafras and Monbulk in the Dandenong Ranges.



Kallista

In February 1927, father decided to go to this combined parish to become its priest-in-charge. Kallista was its geographical centre and provided accommodation for the clergy family. All Saints' Sassafras and St George's, Monbulk were the other places.

When we first arrived from St Kilda there was no vicarage built but a house had been rented for our use two kilometres from All Souls' Church. This house was surrounded by tall grass that was not considered safe. Permission was given to live in a house called St Leonards' on the Kallista – Monbulk Road. Opposite was a tiny little house, occupied by Stan and Elsie Elder. They were real battlers, but possessed hearts of gold. We became friendly with them and they often performed many acts of kindness to us, looking after Arthur and me, or building toys for our use. At one stage I was made a beautiful go-cart but I must have been naughty and the go-cart was confiscated very quickly. Stan was in and out of work picking up jobs where he could. Later he drove big American de Soto cars from Kallista to Belgrave as a taxi service.

Within weeks of our arrival at Kallista, Dad purchased a new square-nosed Morris four-seater car for £250. It was then that we enjoyed a new friendship with the village baker and his wife and family. Mr R V Wiley put up a garage on his property just over the road (at his own expense) to house our Morris and he also lent £50 to complete the purchase of the car. Later he sold us his piano, a steel framed Bernthall (an upright model made in Berlin) for £50 on

which Arthur and I took piano lessons. It is still going strong in our dining room in 1993. Nancye and I occasionally enjoy playing it. The grandchildren of course, especially Christopher, liked to make noises on it. Arthur and I took lessons on the piano from a Miss Carleton who travelled up from Belgrave each week. We attempted theory and practice and although we tried hard, practice was always difficult - the other kids were playing outside. If we produced good work we were rewarded with stick-on flowers in our theory books. Miss Carleton must have had a lot of patience and perseverance and a never ending supply of stick-on flowers.

Not long after we arrived in Kallista, Father tackled the question of a new vicarage. Miss Maude Finlay, who lived with her sister at The Patch, designed a very up-to-date house - the plan of which was submitted to the diocese. Two adjustments were made and then Gawler and Drummond (architects) took over and received all the credit. The parish had just £600 to start the building. The ground plan consisted of a study near the entrance steps, three bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchen, separate dining and a sitting room 17 feet by 12 and to our delight, a sleepout 18 feet by 7 enclosed along the back of the house by fly-wire enabling the fresh Dandenongs air to permeate the entire room. Double doors off the sleepout went to two of the other bedrooms. The kitchen had a stove and the hot water operated from the wood fire that seemed to be always burning. There was a lift-up panel between the kitchen and the dining room to enable the food to be passed through. Clement Langford commenced to build in May 1928 and it was finished in September.

Father worked hard clearing old apple trees from the block. At the rear of the building the wood-house and toilet were built. The toilet was a septic tank system, and to enable it to flush it was necessary to pump, by hand, water from a ground level tank up to a smaller tank on the roof of the shed. Arthur and I took it in turns to work the hand pump, but the mechanism was stiff and my arms soon ached after a few minutes' work. A garage was later built down near the road away from the house and this housed the Morris and spare parts. I can remember lovely open fires in the sitting room and there was always plenty of room to play.

Hedley Thomas John Backholer

One Christmas 1929 I can remember very well was when Father Christmas brought me a cricket bat. The bat must have come from, or through, Bill Ponsford - the great opening bat for Australia, in Shield and Test matches. It had a spring handle, the first I had ever seen. My father records that I wrote to Mr Ponsford as follows:-

“Dear Mr Ponsford,

Thank-you very much for the lovely spring bat you sent me. Are you going to England this year? I hope Australia will win. I am glad to hear that your wrist is better. When I am a big man like you I hope I will be able to play for Australia. I often play cricket but not with a spring bat before.

Good-Bye and Thank-you once again,

Hedley Backholer”

Arthur and I prepared a pitch up in the orchard, behind the church and we enjoyed asking our friends over to play. The cricket bat and stumps were oiled regularly to keep them fresh. We were friendly with the Reid family, who owned the general store and post office. Mr and Mrs Reid were musical and active Christians at All Souls'. They had three children - Alex, Barbara and Helen. Alex later became a priest and retired from Saint Anselm's, Middle Park in 1989. They were always over at our place or we at theirs and Barbara was in my class at school.

The Morris was a great help in the parish and for use on holidays. We went to Ballarat (Mc Bain's place), Ocean Grove, Cowes clergy rest house and Queenscliff. Sometimes Miss Jones and her mother would take us on holidays in their car. Miss Jones was a very good friend who attended St George's Monbulk. Our car regularly went to services in Sassafras and Monbulk and meetings. The road to Sassafras was very steep and quite often we had to get out of the car to let the water in the radiator go off the boil. Coming home was different as it was all down hill. The car developed almost every weakness possible - battery trouble and pistons worked loose, punctures were numerous and were usually fixed by a lighted vulcaniser applied to the tube. Once a fire

started in the garage and father saved the car but severely burnt both hands and had to drive to the doctor in Belgrave with them covered in bandages.

In August 1928, the three hundredth issue of “The Magnet” was issued for the Parochial District of Kallista and enclosed a tribute to those who have come and gone, but who laid the foundations of our church, wisely and well. The first vicar the Reverend Fred W. R Newton 1903-1907 was remembered with affection. “The Magnet” contained photos of the three churches and a pencil sketch of the new vicarage. The vicarage cost £1300 to build, £600 of which was given by the diocese leaving £700 to be raised by the parish.



School Days

In February 1927, I had my first taste of school. The primary school (number 3993) Kallista was diagonally opposite the church grounds and I left home when the bell rang and still got there in time. The school was situated on the Belgrave/Kallista road opposite the Sherbrooke Forest and contained one big room and a shelter shed and plenty of playground. We had one teacher and one part-time teacher. The headmaster was Mr A. H Winton-Smith and approximately 35 children attended. The older children were called on to help the younger pupils. I started in grade one and, regularly, thrice a year reports were sent home from the head master giving details of subject marks and comments on behaviour and future prospects. Reports had to be signed by parents to show they had been seen. In my first year there were three exams - headmaster's half yearly, inspector's in October and the headmaster's yearly on the 15th of December 1927. The marks gained in the 15th of December exam were reading 8, recitation 9, spelling $8\frac{3}{4}$, writing 7, composition 7, written arithmetic 6, mental arithmetic 8 total $53\frac{3}{4}$ out of a possible 70. Place in class of eight - 4th. Mr Smith's comment, “*A very good examination promoted to*

grade 2". I liked school and happily went off with my school bag on my back each day. I loved the play time and several times got into heaps of trouble for leaving it to the last minute to come home for lunch. One day I was so engrossed in football that I failed to go home at all. My mother was not too pleased - she was very cross.

After school it was usually cricket or football. Most of the parents were poor. Some children did not even have shoes and most of the girls' dresses were home made. One boy named Jim Darby came to school in braces and short pants and an old shirt. Some came long distances from The Patch and rode bare back on horses to school.

Religious instruction was always a good session when the Methodist minister played the piano with gusto and we sang "Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam" and other rollicking choruses.

On the 6th of May 1928, a Sunday afternoon, Mother, Arthur and I were walking towards Monbulk on the Monbulk road to meet our father who was returning from a service. Suddenly our dog named "Mickey" strayed across the road and was hit by a car and killed. When father arrived we were all in tears, he picked up the still warm body put it in the car and we took him home to a reverent burial.

At the Head Teacher's yearly exam in December 1928, my marks for arithmetic written and mental picked up. Possible marks 70 actual marks 63 ½. Second in class of six and the headmaster's comment, "*Hedley has done very well in his work. He was beaten for first place by only two marks, promoted to grade three*". In grade three geography, history and drawing were added to our subjects and the December exam in 1929 actual marks were 78 ½ out of 100, second in a class of nine, promoted to grade four. All the time the school was getting bigger and bigger and Mr Smith must have found it hard to manage so many children. Arthur and I attended church and Sunday school regularly and we had jobs to do with wood and pumping water etc plus piano practice during the week. We also had to do some of the small messages to the general store, post office and the bakery. When shopping at Mr Reid's general store, the sugar, flour, biscuits etc all had to be weighed out and put in brown paper bags. He used to bang the counter with his hand to make sure the scales were working

correctly. When a big order was given a bag of boiled lollies always was slipped in with the order for free.

The mail was collected each day from the post office. Going for the bread was the best errand of all. When bought it was usually very fresh - warm or just out of the oven. We bought high tinned loaves wrapped in thin tissue paper. The end of the bread was always open and small pieces would come away quite easily and somehow made their way into our mouths. You had to know when to stop otherwise the hole became obvious, but I think mother knew every time the loaf was touched. We often went into the bake house to watch Mr Wiley knead the bread. It was hard work and Mrs Wiley worked just making the cakes and pastries. Emily, their daughter, was in the shop which was on the Belgrave- Kallista Road opposite the school. On one or two occasions I put the crosses on the hot cross buns at Easter time and felt very grown up.

Milk was delivered at the front gate, ladled into a billy-can that was tightly-lidded. Father at this time had trouble with his eyes and his one hearing ear began to play up. He was studying hard for his Scholar of Theology Degree but the parish kept him very, very busy. At the end of 1929 Father was asked to become a locum at Christ Church Essendon, while their Vicar, the Reverend C. W. Wood went away for 9 months. The Reverend Garnet Shaw took over at Kallista for the interim.



Essendon

It was arranged that we take over in Essendon in March 1930 and stay till December 1930. The vicarage and church were at 1 Marco Polo Street, the Parish was well organised with a large church and a double storeyed vicarage. Again we made many good friends. Rita Boundy and Gladys Quarry were good friends to my parents until their deaths.

For Arthur and me this meant a new school and a large suburban atmosphere to get used to. It was entirely different from country Kallista - more people, trams, hotels, large schools, classes, more noise, cars and shops. Rather frightening to an eight-year old boy. Arthur and I walked to school in north Essendon about a mile or so in Keilor Road.

The Depression was gradually spreading to the suburbs and many men were out of work. Coming home from school I had my first sight of a drunken man. I was scared and gave the many pubs a wide berth each time I walked up the street. We had desperate people calling at the vicarage for food and work or money. At first father gave them two shillings for a feed but when he thought the money was being spent at the pub he let them chop up wood in the back yard or do gardening for a good meal at the end, or arranged with a food outlet to provide a meal on presentation of a voucher. Father was able to give more time to his study for a degree. The parish was full of young people. The Sunday School was large and we enjoyed concerts and outings. Sunday School picnics were usually up around Sherbrooke and a furniture van was hired to support the many who wanted to go. Scouts and Young People's Fellowship were alive and well and everybody was very friendly. Arthur unfortunately broke his arm one day in the parish hall when jumping from a rafter.

On the 6th of October 1930 was my ninth birthday. Father gave me a cricket ball and mother gave me two shillings and a note. The postie brought a birthday card from Mrs Barber, our next door neighbour, saying there was another present in the barrel where the fowl food was kept. I was pretty fond of Mrs Barber and fed the chooks and collected the eggs everyday. The fowl house was under some big peppercorn trees. At one stage egg production appeared to be lower than normal. One day I happened to be climbing the peppercorn tree and to my surprise sighted a huge nest of eggs on the roof of the chook house. There must have been two dozen, but I can't recall if they were ever eaten.

In 1930, Phar Lap was the favourite for the Melbourne Cup and he won well. Father took me to see my first league football match at Essendon. The ground was located a half a kilometre away in

Brewster Street. Essendon wore black guernseys with a red sash and always black shorts at home. The team won only ten games in 1930 and lost eight. Names of the better players I can remember are Keith Forbes (a rover), Norman Beckton (captain and ruck), and Jack Vosti - a fireman - was full back. Vosti and Forbes were also interstate players. C.R. Sevier played that year and he later was to coach the Royal Artillery football team on the Atherton Tableland in 1944 for the divisional football championships.

(More on this memorable football match in Chapter 8)

At nine years of age I was really keen on League football and gladly stood in the outer for the entire game. Under the Coulter law, players were paid £3 a match and £12 for finals games. Many of the players lived on their match payments as there was no work available for men in 1930, the start of the depression years. Wally Buttsworth was a later player at centre half back who took my interest with long and telling drop kicks.

Arthur and I attended school at the North Essendon State school - number 4015. By this time I had reached grade 4. North Essendon State school was very different from Kallista State School. At North Essendon we were one of a large number - 54 in grade 4 - and we had to do more for ourselves in order to get through. Class teacher was a Miss C. Lamb and being a good disciplinarian she kept me at my work. One day I came home with a red strap mark on my hand and wrist for something I must have done wrong. Father took umbrage at this and came with me next morning to confront Miss Lamb. However Miss Lamb must have been good for me. At the half yearly exam held in June 1930, I came third in a class of 54 with 50 ½ actual marks out of a possible 60. Later in the half yearly exam held in December 1930 I did even better scoring 57 ¾ marks out of a possible 60 and finished first in class. For this I received a five pointed gold star stuck in my report book and told I was ready for promotion to grade five. I was not sorry to leave Essendon at the end of our nine-month stay. Father was offered the Parish of St Paul's East Kew, but failing hearing and eyesight meant it had to be refused.



Return To Kallista

We were welcomed back to Kallista with a show at Grendon's, which was a guesthouse at Sherbrooke. Flower shows were often staged there in aid of the church and Miss Maude Cameron, head mistress of Firbank Girls' Grammar school, had a holiday house close by. It seems Arthur and I went back to Kallista State School in time for the December 1930 Head Teacher's yearly exam and I again did well tying for first place with 92 marks out of 100.

Father's left ear was now giving him a lot of pain and eventually he was operated on for mastoids at Koorungal Private Hospital by Dr Clive Eadie. The inflammation was very wide spread and virulent. After nine weeks in hospital, he stayed with the Reverend Arthur and Mrs Edith Banks at St Jude's Vicarage Carlton for three weeks visiting the doctor every day for dressings. Arthur Banks was a very old friend who had known father in London and then in Gippsland where they had worked together with the Reverend Jack Horner who was another old and valued friend. After the operation father tried to take the service job again at Kallista but he had to seek help and his elder brother Charlie, a lay reader, and a Reverend McIvor came to his assistance. Mother must have been worried at this time as she still had to run the vicarage and look after us two boys. Friends rallied around as always. There was then nine months of uncertainty but in the end father had to resign from the parish on Easter Day, 27th March. The Reverend Sydney Buckley, headmaster at Ivanhoe Grammar School, took the services for father and on the first of April we were ready to move out - another coincidence for me - for later Sydney Buckley was to be my headmaster and on his initiative I was invited to Ivanhoe Grammar School as a boarder in 1933 where I stayed for five happy years free of charge.

Stan and Mrs Elder came into the Vicarage for some of the previous six months to look after Arthur and me and I'm sorry to say I didn't make it too easy for them. Just before we left Kallista I remember we had a very serious bush fire in the forest close to us. The weather was unbearably hot and cinders and smoke filled the air around us turning day into night. Maud Finley presented Father with as original oil painting 800 mm by 500mm of Beagley's Bridge, just as it used

to be in the thirties. He loved this painting and gave it pride of place everywhere we went. It can still be seen in our home at Sandringham and I hope future generations will continue to value it and derive pleasure from it.

With father's resignation we had to start looking for somewhere to live. I don't remember any panic about this. In an issue of the "Messenger" - the Melbourne diocesan monthly paper - appeared an offer of a house at Rosebud for four months without charge whilst the owners went to Brisbane for a holiday. This seemed to be just the thing and Mr. Wiley immediately offered to drive father down to Rosebud. It was soon fixed up that we should live there. Thus the family came to pack up and move for the fifth time in nine years - off to Rosebud. Hospital and other expenses were heavy at this time, but departing gifts from Kallista at this time totalling £90 helped a lot. We were sorry to leave this parish.



Marriage of Ethel and Walter



*Hedley,
1921*



Family group, 1923

*Hedley and Arthur,
1925*



*Hedley and Arthur,
1927*





Kallista Primary school, 1928



*Car,
1928*

Hedley Thomas John Backholer

CHAPTER TWO

EARLY MEMORIES

Rosebud, Sunbury and Blackrock

Rosebud

On the first of April 1932, the car was packed with immediate necessities. Ten fowls mounted on the running board and four of us in the front seat. Surplus furniture was stored at St Jude's Carlton. A bag of potatoes was bought at Frankston and had to be carried between the headlights and the bonnet of the car as there was no room inside.

The house to be looked after named "Waitamo" was right on the beach road about two and a half miles from the township of Rosebud. Today a supermarket stands on the sight. For a little while we were able to swim and play on the beach but it soon became cold and we had to go out and gather wood for the fire. Trees were being cut down to widen the road (that's the beach road) so wood was plentiful. Father now was on Clergy Provident Fund pension of 35 shillings per week from which he tried to save 5 shillings per week. There were no old age or disability pensions in those days paid by governments.

Arthur and I commenced school at Rosebud and I was glad to get back to football and cricket. I'm indebted to my father's diary for the following football highlights. My first game in football for the Rosebud school was on the 10th of June 1932. Father had written to the headmaster Mr Goyen suggesting that I be not chosen but I desperately wanted to play and although I was small compared to my opponents, I was quick on my feet and kicked left foot. Rosebud was only able to field twelve against the Sorrento side. I reportedly put up a pretty good show although we were well beaten. The greatest compliment was a warning from the Sorrento boys to "watch that little kid". The buns and oranges during and after the match helped compensate for the loss.

My second match with Rosebud State School was on the fourth of July 1932. Father said in his diary "*He has improved out of all recognition, no sign of nervousness, but a keenness to get the ball and do something with it*". When we played Dromana, Mother had knitted football socks in blue and white (Rosebud colours) and found a pair of white shorts and Arthur found boots and guernsey. I played half forward flank, kicked five goals and we won well. For the third match against Sorrento at their ground, little needs to be written.

The following Friday on the first of August 1932, we played Red Hill at home. I kicked the first six goals in the first quarter and finished with 13 out of 22 scored by Rosebud. On 17th of August 1932 the final of schools football was played between Sorrento and Rosebud on neutral ground at Rye. To the surprise of most, Rosebud won by 2 goals - 7-9 to 5-9 and I kicked 4 goals. Sorrento had not lost a match during the season so they had the right of challenge and the grand final was played on the 24th of August 1932. I developed a boil on the neck and alas the diary does not say whether I played or who won. We walked to and from school along the beach road quite a long way it seemed and no school buses.

Pleasant memories of our four month stay in Rosebud include receiving a new full size football for a present and being able to use the vacant paddock next door as our ground with small goal posts erected each end, using the beach and foreshore (when fine) as a place to play, and listening to the stories of the Crimean War from