

Memories of Life

A rambling and incomplete account of my life
from 1945 to 1970



by

Stuart Longmuir

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Contents

	Foreword	1
Chapter 1	Setting the Scene - Me and my Family	3
Chapter 2	My Early Years at Eaglemont	15
Chapter 3	Early Schooling	27
Chapter 4	Mornington	43
Chapter 5	The Balwyn Years	49
Chapter 6	The Scotch College Years	55
Chapter 7	The University Years	69
Chapter 8	And so to 1970	79
	Postscript	87
	Annexure - Short Family Tree	88

Foreword

I recently purchased a book at the National Gallery of Victoria bookshop entitled *Marvellous Melbourne and Me*, authored by Bruce McBrien. McBrien was the son of a wealthy and very influential Melbourne identity, Likely McBrien, who played a large part in the development of the Victorian Football League (now the Australian Football league).

For me this book made for fascinating reading. Not only did I identify with many of the places he spoke of but found I knew some of the characters as well. Of course I had heard the names of the many other personalities that played a part in the development of Melbourne over the decades.

I very much enjoyed the trivia that the book contained; a walk down a street describing the houses and businesses that existed at that time or the more personal details of what the family did on Sundays.

I have similar memories of my life, although not so grand, and it occurred to me that my own reminiscences might be of interest to my son David, his wife Amelia and our grandchildren Lila and Roy as well as my sister Libby and her children Adrienne and Veronica. And so, in 2011 at the age of 66, I decided to put them on paper. If they are of interest to a wider audience, so be it; but the intent is for my family and to record the family trivia held therein.



My father, John 'Jack' Longmuir, in the back garden of our Eaglemont house

Chapter 1

Setting the Scene - Me and my Family

My name is Stuart Longmuir or, more fully, William Arthur Stuart Longmuir. I have never known why I was called Stuart instead of William, perhaps it just sounded better to my parents. As one can imagine, to be known by one's third Christian name has created lifelong problems; particularly as most official identification documents such as driver's license and credit cards only allow two initials prior to the surname. At times I have had to carry my passport in Australia to verify who I really was. Nonetheless it had some advantages. When I had a call asking for William I could be sure it was an insurance salesman or someone similar flogging goods or services I'd never heard of or did not need.

My parents were John Kately Longmuir (known in the family as Jack) and Elizabeth (Betty) Mary Kurrle, who married on the 30th of August 1944. My father, the son of a builder, went

to University High School, at that time located on that triangle of land between Lygon Street and Cemetery Road East. Oddly enough, this site later became the offices of the Forests Commission, where my father was to work in 1952. From high school he went on to study civil engineering at the University of Melbourne, graduating in 1924. My mother was a dental nurse prior to joining the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VADs) at the onset of World War II. My father had been married previously to Laura Hinton who died on the 30th of October 1930 giving birth to my half-brother John Hinton Longmuir.

My father, who hated the Kately part of his name and always signed himself, in the American style, as John K Longmuir, had two brothers, Gordon and Dudley. Gordon, the oldest, took over the building firm, W.O. Longmuir & Sons ¹ while Dudley and my father studied at the University of Melbourne; Dudley doing medicine.

I was born on the 8th of August 1945; neatly slotting in between the awful, but war-ending, atomic explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki – a between-bombs-baby.

In January 1948, my sister was born, Elizabeth (Libby) Margaret; providing our parents with a family widespread in age. With fifteen years between me and John, it was not until later years that we would really get to know each other.

My father's family lived at 9 Hope Street, Brunswick. The same street also held the yards and office of the building firm. After graduation my father started work at the Coburg City Council as an assistant engineer later rising to become Deputy City Engineer sometime in the early 1930s.

Sometime in the late 1930s he applied for, and was appointed as the Engineer for the City of Heidelberg. At that time, this municipality was one of the largest in Melbourne, stretching

¹ The firm W.O Longmuir & Sons passed from Gordon to Bob, his son, and still operated as a Master Builder. It then passed to Peter, Bob's son, who was involved in the design and building of golf courses. Today there are three companies with "W.O Longmuir" within their name registered with ASIC. I do not know if any of these still have any connection to the Longmuir family.

from Darebin in the south to Greensborough in the north. My father had purchased a block of land at 28 Glen Drive, Eaglemont, and built a house which, I believe, was completed in 1938 or 1939, just prior to the outbreak of war. Naturally the builders were W.O. Longmuir & Sons.

John had been cared for by my father's mother, Jessie Matilda McDonald and, when the house was finished, my grandmother, father and half brother moved in.

The war soon intervened on this family arrangement. At university my father had been a member of the Melbourne University Rifles and, upon the declaration of war, joined the Army as a sapper. His unit was the 10th Field Company R.A.E. (A.I.F) whose story is told in the book *A Purple Patch* by Jack Bourne and Jack Lavery and published by the 10th Field Company R.A.E. (A.I.F.) Association Melbourne 1991. My father's photograph is used in the frontispiece of the memoir.

While I am unsure of exact dates, it seems he left home sometime in early 1940 for camps in Victoria, Queensland and New Guinea. There was a family story regarding him planting seed for the new lawn the evening prior to his departure.

John went to Sylvester College, a small private school in



*My father
in the garden
of his father-in-
law's house at
9 Chatfield St.
Balwyn.*

Circa 1939



*My father
in uniform
during the
war years*

Mount Street, Eaglemont. This school for students up to about twelve years of age was run by a Miss Parsons and was co-ed and catered for about fifty pupils. After Sylvester College he went to Ivanhoe Grammar School.

For some unknown reason my brother John had the nickname Tim when he was a toddler. In 1935 family friends of the Hintons, the Attios, started a toy shop business but were at a loss for a name. At a family and friends get-together they spied John toddling around and decided on the name “Tim the Toyman”. This company still exists, selling toys for Australian children.



Sylvester College class photo. John is in the back row, second from the right

When the war finally ended in 1945, my father, now Major Longmuir, returned to the Eaglemont house with his new wife, my mother. I do not know where my grandmother went, or if she stayed with us for a while. I suspect she may have gone to live with my Uncle Gordon. My sister, Libby, thinks she might have stayed at Eaglemont for a while and that the brothers then bought her a house. I do not think my father's new wife, my mother, got on very well with her. Two women in the same kitchen! I have virtually no memory of her; just a frail, rather scary, old woman in a bed. Of my paternal grandfather I have no memory since he died before I was born.

I think my father enjoyed his time as Heidelberg City Engineer although I remember him complaining about some of the Councillors and their sometimes unreasonable requests. As City Engineer he was required to attend council meetings and I suspect local politics has not changed much in the intervening years – it can get petty and at times acrimonious. I recall a story about one particularly crusty councillor arguing strongly against the Council's purchase of ride-on lawnmowers; complaining that it meant the worker need not work – he would just sit there. My father won the day by explaining that the machine would keep running and therefore much more grass would be mown.

One innovation that my father brought to Heidelberg was the split street. A lot of the Eaglemont and Heidelberg residential developments were occurring on quite steeply sloping land, and often this gradient was at right angles to the direction of the road. This made access to properties difficult because of the steep grade. My father's solution was to split the road; making one side higher than the other. This way, access to properties on both sides was made easier. There are quite a number of examples of this type of road around Eaglemont and Heidelberg. They are regarded as a significant part of the landscape and referred to in Banyule City Council's "Heritage Guidelines for the Mount Eagle Estate" by Andrew Ward and Ian Wight.



A split road; Mount Street, Eaglemont

There is a Longmuir Road in Watsonia – I'm not sure that city engineers weren't responsible for naming the streets in new developments!

It was during this time my father became friends with Councillor Nellie Ibbott who became Victoria's first female Mayor, holding that position in 1943-44. Later, when my father was building a family holiday house at Mornington, we would find ourselves close neighbours of Nellie and her husband Alf, who had moved there when Nellie retired in 1954. There is more about my memories of our time at Mornington in a later chapter.

It was 1952, I think, that my father changed jobs to become the Chief Engineer of the Forests Commission of Victoria, a position he held until he retired in 1969. At that time exploitation of forestry resources was not as controversial or political as it is today. The primary responsibility of the engineering department was to build new roads into the Victorian high country to enable the extraction of timber and my father became probably the best designer of mountain roads in Australia. At that time all of the construction work was undertaken by Forest Commission personnel and not by outside contractors. This meant that my father was often away inspecting and supervising this construction activity. When building a new road in this quite difficult country the men would stay in work camps, near the construction site. I remember my father taking me with him on one such trip. It was to a road construction site somewhere to the north of Licola and we stayed overnight in one of the camp's huts. One of his major projects was the design and construction of the Tamboritha Road and Bennison Plains Road (now called Moroko Road) north of the Victorian township of Licola which were opened in 1963.

Elizabeth Mary Kurrle, my mother, was born on the 15th May 1908 in Korumburra, a dairy town in West Gippsland. Her parents, Arthur Earnest and Ruby (nee Mirams), had four children, my mother being the youngest. My uncles were Gerald, Norman, and Alan. I have a memory of Norman who died when I was quite young. Alan lived until I was in my early 20s but we did not see much of him. Gerald became my beloved Uncle Wat – a family nickname that came about when a young Norman could not say “fatty” and pronounced it “wattie” – he was Wat to the whole family for the next eighty years.

My mother's parents owned a hotel in Korumburra that is still there today. *The History of Korumburra Shire* by Joseph White records that Arthur Kurrle bought the lease of the Korumburra Hotel in Commercial Street in 1899 and ran the hotel until 1917 when the family moved to Melbourne. As you drive through Korumburra today you will see, on the left-hand side of the main street, a large mural depicting the hotel in times past. Arthur Kurrle was



*The Kurrles circa 1908. My mother is the baby
and my grandmother is on the left*

a Shire Councillor from 1905 to 1912 and President of the Shire in 1911-12. Their move to Melbourne saw them living in a large house at 73 The Grove in Coburg. When my grandfather died, my grandmother moved from Coburg to a house at 7 Maitland Avenue, Kew, just off Burke Road. My mother moved with her mother and was certainly living there when she enlisted in the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) at the start of the war. Her war service saw

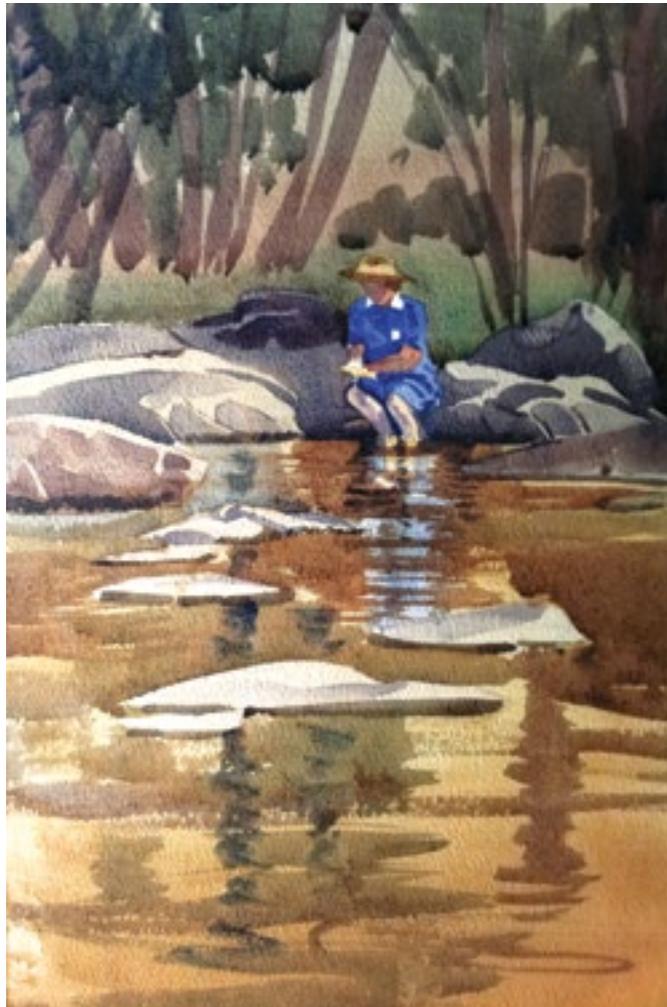
her in a training camp at Rocky Creek on the Atherton Tablelands in far north Queensland before serving in military hospitals in Palestine.

During her time in Far North Queensland's Rocky Creek she was friends with Doug Green, an artist. He was a sergeant in the army and after 1945 went on to become a successful graphic designer and artist. He and my mother must have been quite fond of each other as I recall my mother often mentioning his name. I first met him at my mother's funeral four decades later, so the affection must have been mutual. I have a very nice water colour of his depicting my mother in her VAD uniform sitting on the banks of Rocky Creek. Willa and I visited Rocky Creek during a trip to Far North Queensland in 1976 and saw the remnants of the wartime presence; a few old and forgotten Nissan huts.



My mother, aged about eighteen

The Kurrle name is still seen around Korumburra and surrounding districts. In the 1970s, when working as a junior engineer for Camp Scott Furphy, I worked on the design and construction of the Korumburra Water Treatment Plant. During this period I attended the monthly meetings of the Korumburra Water Board. One of the board members was John Kurrle who was a second cousin and had the local GMH (Holden) car dealership. I have visited John and his wife Lynette a few times in recent years and he has been kind enough to provide me with a copy of his extensive research into the Kurrle family tree which has been traced back to the 1500s in Germany.



*My mother at Rocky Creek about 1942;
a painting by Doug Green*

Gerald studied pharmacy and opened a chemist shop in Swan Hill. Alan became a surveyor but I do not know what Norman's occupation was. Uncles Wat, Norman and Alan went to Wesley College. My mother went to Coburg High School for two years and then to Presbyterian Ladies College (PLC) which at that time was located in Victoria Street, East Melbourne on the site of what is now the Dallas Brookes Centre. I discovered many years later that she had been in the same class as Willa's Auntie Vi, and only four years ahead of Mina Green; Willa's mother.

My mother became a dental nurse, working for Dr Bowen at 5 Collins Street. The Bowen's owned the building and at that time lived upstairs. Their son, Peter, also became a dentist and practiced out of the same building, although I do not think they owned the freehold at that stage. Peter Bowen was my dentist until about the mid 1970s, at which time my appearances before a dentist of any kind became much more infrequent.

Old Dr Bowen had quite an eclectic practice. I remember my mother talking of the Misses Simmons who lived in their family home, Nareeb, in Toorak. This was a vast Toorak estate that was still lit by gaslight long after Melbourne was electrified; and remained gas-lit until 1964 when the estate was subdivided and the mansion demolished.



*My mother
in her
VAD
uniform*



*My grandfather,
Arthur Edward
Kurrle.
Circa 1927*

They arrived at the dentist in a wonderful 1920 Silver Ghost Rolls Royce. This car was part of the catalogue of the mansion's contents when auctioned in 1964. The main gates of the Nareeb Estate were bequeathed to the National Trust of Australia by the owners and erected at the D Gate entrance to the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne in 1966, where they stand today.

In the early part of the 20th century, Dr Bowen also had many artist patients. My mother often told stories of them paying for the treatment with pictures; yes, the Heidelberg School mob. Even when I was going to the dentist in the 1960s, the waiting room was adorned with Streetons and the like.

Chapter 2

My Early Years at Eaglemont

My earliest memories are naturally of the Eaglemont house. In the early 1950s, Eaglemont and neighbouring East Ivanhoe were far from fully developed. While Eaglemont had been first settled around the turn of the century, it was not until the end of the war that many of the vacant blocks began to be built on. We had a vacant block beside us where a lovely horse called Jimminy used to graze and vacant blocks behind until they too were finally developed by about 1960. Our area, comprising Glen Drive, Outlook Drive and Summit Drive, and known as the Mount Eagle Estate, had been laid out by Walter Burley Griffin, Canberra's architect. The area is characterised by curved roads following the contours of the hill. Griffin created a small park at the centre of the curve formed by Outlook Drive that all of the houses backed on to. In this little park stood a large gum tree with a scar

indicating that the Wurundjeri aboriginal people had taken the bark to make a canoe. I do not know when the tree died but its trunk has been retained as a horizontal log.



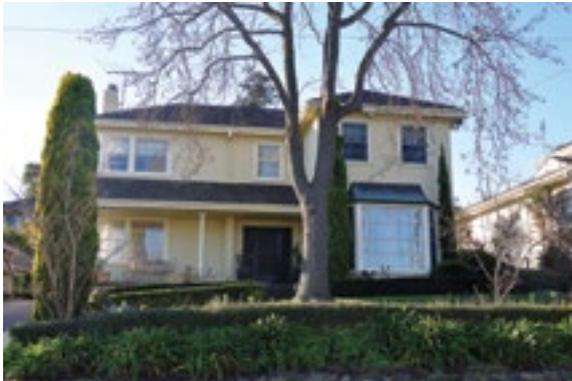
The remains of the Wurundjeri canoe tree, 2011

Our house at 28 Glen Drive was a cream brick, two-story house that is still standing today; although Google Maps tells me it has been extended a bit.

It was a great house and we all enjoyed it. Upstairs were three bedrooms and a bathroom plus an alcove at the top of the stairs that held some storage cupboards and a sewing nook for my

mother. Downstairs there was a lounge room to the left of the front door and a dining room to the right with the kitchen beyond. At the back was an external laundry and toilet and beyond that the garage and workshop. The garage had a flat corrugated iron roof hidden by the brick parapet. I can recall getting into endless trouble by climbing onto the garage roof; my father believing I would damage the iron work and cause leaks into his garage. One of my favourite pastimes was to hit a tennis ball against the garage doors, however it did not help me becoming a tennis ace. In the early years the house developed a crack in the north wall of the stairwell. It was quite large and seemed to be getting worse each year. My father eventually called in a team from his brother's firm to fix the crack which they did by digging a very deep hole to underpin one corner of the house.

At the rear of the garden there was an area screened off with shrubbery that held the messier bits that needed hiding from view; refuse incinerator, the vegetable garden, my sandpit, and the like.



28 Glen Drive Eaglemont in 2011



Libby and me with our parents in front of the Eaglemont house, about 1961