

YALLOURN: THE BROWN HOLE

By Barbara Elliott (Park) YHS 1950

It started off a small country industrial town with people from countries all over the world, making a new home and life in its promises for them. My parents (Harold & Kitty Park) had come from England and Scotland to settle in Australia during the time of the great depression. Times had been tough for them, the sort of toughness that today we would think of as "Just a story". Food was a luxury, and work almost a dream. My parents met and married in Adelaide, where the only big industry was the car industry. Dad could see that it wasn't to be constant employment, and they needed regular work if they were to have their own family. An advert in the paper told them of work in a distant town, in the state of Victoria, an area called The Brown Coal Mine. Houses were to be built to house the new workers, and a town would be shaped out of the bush. It was the dream that they needed desperately. Dad went ahead and secured employment in the Coal Mine. My mother followed him some months later, and they boarded with a couple Mr & Mrs Hare, until a house became available for them to rent, in Broadway West. This little house was bare, and with little or nothing in furniture, they went to the Yallourn General Store and ordered what they needed through Mr. Woods, being able to pay it off as my father earned his wages. My sister and I were both born while our parents lived in Broadway West. The lifestyle in Yallourn was a very happy one, with Band Concerts held in the Rotunda in the Broadway Gardens, picture shows in various Church buildings, Tennis played at the various Church courts; Displays by the Firemen in the town, and a Shopping Centre forming, and even a Bus Service to Morwell for the women to buy clothing and Manchester. Sunday school was the event of the week for the children, and once a year a picnic was organised by the churches with buses taking the families out to Moe to a farmer's paddock by the river. The Swimming Pool was another family gathering place, with our little kiosk that sold delicious ice blocks that were homemade. Dad played badminton at the Yallourn Fire Brigade Hall, where I spent a lot of time while my parents enjoyed this social game. Mum had a large pram, and I would entertain everyone with my antics and then go off to - sleep. My sister joined us later, at the badminton, although I think Mum found it a lot to cope with a toddler and a babe. Then came World War 2!!! Life changed at this point. Many men from the area were enlisting. My Dad was reluctant to leave his little family. Life had just seemed to be taking shape, but Hitler was advancing, and Australia was threatened. Dad eventually enlisted, and was away for 4 ½ years, serving in New Guinea. It was a tough time for all the women. The men who were left endeavoured to help the women on their own, cutting wood, cleaning up gardens, etc. Then came the terrible Bush Fires. I was about 6 when this happened. I can remember it so clearly. We kids all thought it was such fun, as we were allowed to stand in the swimming pool with our clothes on. One lady came down to the pool with a pram filled with as many worldly possessions as possible in the pram. In her haste she forgot the hill down to the pool, and the pram took off and landed in the drink. Of course we were all allowed one of those super ice blocks from the kiosk, no such things as ice-cream cones in those days. The women had their billies filled with hot water from the kiosk and sat drinking tea, and watching the children having a great time, while the sky was red and smoked from the fire. The fire raced along the tree tops down the back of the pool, and we children thought it was good fun until we saw our mother's faces. A dump of shells for the Ack ack guns were held here and could have blown up, fortunately we were spared. It was a really bad day, as some people lost their lives, and many lost homes, particularly in Hernes Oak. I remember Victory Day in Yallourn. We had a street parade, and all the children were dressed up. I went as Curly and Sonja Ostlund went as Bluey, two cartoon characters from The Sun. My sister had her dolls pram decorated with crepe paper, our only form of decoration in those days. Dad returned home so/ne months later, one cold wet night (as Yallourn was famous for). Mum heard the bus stop at the corner, as it made its nightly run from Moe Railway Station. There was a heavy thump on the front door. Mum apprehensively opened the door to see this very dark man with an air force issue of a waterproof poncho type garment, standing dripping on the doorstep. "Well are you going to let me in?" Dad asked. Mum almost fainted as she realised it was her long gone husband. As he shed his waterproof, she noted all he had on was a pair of shorts, boots and socks. He had dressed like this in New Guinea for so long. They hadn't been issued with any other clothes, they had left New Guinea with a minute's notice. He had flown home to Sydney in a Lancaster Bomber, being in the Tropics one minute, and back to the cold and wet of South Eastern Australia the next. His one concern was to see his little girls. My sister and I slept with Mum in her double bed, so Dad walked straight through and switched on the light. My sister just screamed and screamed at this wet brown man smiling at her. Being older, I remembered my Dad and sprang into his arms. Dad said he knew how to coax my sister

around, and reached into his haversack and pulled out two dolls (now dolls just were not available), but Dad had searched Sydney on the way home, for 'dolls for his girls' and it won my sister over. This is just the start of all my wonderful memories of Yallourn, and the dreams all those young couples had when they arrived there.....and now the dreams are gone, the town has gone, and I, like all of my counterparts, come from a Brown Hole in the ground.