



CHAPTER 7 Personal journeys





IT TAKES A CERTAIN PIONEERING SPIRIT to move, and then settle, into the Bushlands. It's never been a place for featherweights. When the subdivision first came on the market in November 1974, people were slow to take up the challenge. Some—though not all—of the first sales were to people who bought blocks as an investment or as weekenders, which they remain to this day. We don't see those people often.

During the 1980s about half of the blocks were sold to more hardy spirits, people brave enough to take on the adventure of actually living here. Some came, some went, but by the late 1980s there were many more who came, saw, and stayed. Over the last forty years, all up, dozens of residents have lived in the Bushlands on Parson's subdivision or its surrounds.

For whatever reason they chose to spend time here—its natural environment, its proximity to friends and community, the privacy, because it's off grid, or some other reason—they all have different stories to tell.

The fifteen personal stories in this chapter, ordered by year of purchase, paint a picture of this diversity.

LEFT AND PREVIOUS PAGE Bushlands textures.
PHOTOS: KIM WINDSOR



Susan Hellowell's story

'75 '76 '77 '78 '79 '80 '81 '82 '83 '84 '85 '86 '87 '88 '89 '90 '91 '92 '93 '94 '95 '96 '97 '98 '99 '00 '01 '02 '03 '04 '05 '06 '07 '08 '09 '10 '11 '12 '13 '14 '15

I HAVE SPENT NEARLY four decades living in the Bushlands. I helped my husband Peter Hellowell build our stone house, our three children were born and grew up here, I buried my husband down the road in a coffin built by his children and made from wood that had been on our walls. I have watched the vegetation and the animals flourish and diminish, the changing pattern of the weather and its effects. I have shared my time with the people who, over that period, felt that this area could be their home.

The 1970s was a fantastic time in Australia, possibly especially so because we were young. There was so much potential, so many ideas about ways to live, and we had the ability to try them out.

When Hellowell and I saw an advertisement placed by Brian Parsons in the *Saturday Age* in 1975, we were living and working in outer Melbourne and for nearly a year had been thinking about buying our own place. We had been listening to close friends who were enthusiastic about building something big, such as a house or a concrete boat. We also

Lot 30

had friends in the USA who were exploring alternative lifestyles; their ecstatic letters about how good that was supported the eccentric experiences we were amused by when watching the television program *The Good Life*.

Coincidentally, in 1974, after much discussion with many of the hippies living nearby, Brian Parsons had subdivided 121 hectares into what became known as the Chewton Bushlands. A year later his advert fell on fertile ground. That weekend we drove four hours up the Calder Highway to see the Bushlands and met Brian and Tony Daniels, a local who worked for Brian. Tony showed us around and within an hour—and without a qualm—we chose the plot and bought our place.

In the 1970s Australia was one of the leading lights (excuse the pun) in solar energy. Part of our reason for choosing our plot was so we could live independently.

We wanted to explore alternative energies, so we spent the next year avidly reading about solar and wind power, house design, self-sufficiency and animal husbandry. We also worked full time. The numerous magazines and books we read made it all sound so simple. In 1975 Hellowell accepted a job at the local high school, and then, in December 1976, we moved into the Bushlands.

Over the next five months we lived first in a tent, and then in the two-storey stone house next door, before moving into a shack that, with the help of friends, we had built on our land. Because it was supposed to be temporary, the shack we built was tiny but as neither of us had any experience building with stone (or building with anything) you could say we were more than a little optimistic. Footloose and fancy free, with no children, we moved into the shack. By the time we moved into part of our stone house in September 1979, we were





At the time our friends and work colleagues thought we were mad to eschew the comforts of the twentieth century.

not so footloose and we had an 18 month old toddler.

So, first with candles (getting up to a baby in the middle of the night was sometimes a challenge), and then with solar, we adapted quickly, though not always without some tension. At the time, our friends and work colleagues thought we were mad to eschew the comforts of the twentieth century. The passing of time and the awareness of the fragility of our world have made increasingly mainstream what seemed back then to be a weird choice made by a small number of rather odd people.

Water is something townspeople used to take for granted, so how to collect and use water was another important lesson for us to learn. During the time we lived in the two-storey stone house, I had drawn up the house plans and the Metcalfe shire engineer accepted them. He also suggested the installation of a particular septic system that was many decades ahead of its time. Predating the use of grey water systems, the design enables effective and safe use of every drop of water that leaves the house. We installed it in 1978 and it continues to work well.

As we soon found out, two other couples also moved into the Bushlands at the end of 1976 and although there were rumours of weekends, we rarely saw them. We met the first of those neighbours in early January 1977, soon after we had moved into the two-storey stone

house next door. A couple, about our age and wearing very little, drove up on a motorbike to warn us that they had seen a snake cross our drive: they were Ray and Leslie Lindstrom from Essendon. Over the next few years we shared dinners and barbecues and put the world to rights; Leslie and I shared information about ways to grow plants in the challenging conditions. Today, thirty-eight years later, when I walk around my garden, I enjoy seeing how the few bulbs planted then have survived and multiplied, and how the deciduous trees, planted as fire retardants, have survived rabbits, drought conditions and our goats, and have grown to give wonderful summer shade.

The other couple, Beryl and Laurie Leslie, was a little older than us. Beryl and I shared a love of reading and had many chats discussing our latest finds. One other couple, Scott and Karen Hall, was here for a time at the beginning of 1976, but they were very busy organising their home in Castlemaine and we rarely saw them.

For quite a time we six were the only full time residents I knew of, but soon, others moved in. Enid and John Hall moved into their cottage, the one their son Scott (see 'Personal journeys', page 54) and daughter-in-law Karen had briefly inhabited. Towards the end of 1978, Helen and Michael Melican moved onto their

block and built an amazing shed around a large tree that

was used as the staircase. Helen was pregnant with their first child, Joshua, who was born in March the following year. Enid organised a new year party to welcome them and introduce them to other Bushlanders.

More people were moving into the Bushlands. In late 1984 we met Linda and Tony Cook, who were expecting their second child. The residents of that period used to socialise, though having young children and building houses didn't leave much energy to cavort into the night, as we had done a few years earlier. As the children grew and more people moved in, we decided to have a party to help everyone meet everyone else. Our first formal Bushland Bash happened in December 1985 at our place. We called the bash 'Better Homes and Ruins', and left invitations at the doors of every house that appeared to be occupied. Many people turned up, bringing their contributions to the feast. The December bash, which is now thirty years old, has become an annual event, though not everyone is able to make it every time.

In our first ten years, many people tried living here full or part time, taking on the adventure of building their own home and living without reticulated water, bathrooms or power. Many found it too difficult and several relationships crumbled under the strain.

Some people moved on, and then moved back. The circular award must



go to Douglas Banks and his wife Eve, who, starting in 1978 with first one, then two, then three children, built or renovated three separate houses in the Bushlands, moving to Castlemaine in between, then back to the Bushlands, before deciding that Castlemaine was the place for them. Douglas is the man responsible for having the fire access road opened up into Bubbs Lane, which has provided another escape route should that be necessary.

My husband discovered a liking for building, as a result of which, all three of our children grew up on a building site. Although I say 'building', the cosmetic finishes that are quite useful in keeping a house clean were not his forte. Being city born and bred, I used to feel that the children might succumb to awful diseases, ones that had become extinct everywhere there was a vacuum cleaner, strong lights, toilets and bathrooms, that I may somehow have irrevocably deprived my children by lack of access to endless water, non-stop electricity and closeness to town. I was really heartened to read that children who grew up in sterile surroundings were more likely to suffer conditions such as asthma. Apart from accidents, such as teeth being broken in a

friendly game of cricket, all of my children have survived and are fit, healthy, well adjusted and extremely adaptable.

For the first twenty years we lived here, our winters were wet, the dam always overflowed, the bottom paddock always flooded and the trees, birds and roos flourished,



The view across the Hellawell dam around 1977 showing a thinner tree cover than there is today. PHOTO: SUSAN HELLAWELL

as did the rabbits; my garden grew and grew in size and flora. The trees we planted to cut for firewood grew tall and there was a steady supply to keep us warm. In 1996 we noticed that, after so many years, our bottom paddock was not flooded: our drainage system must be working. The following year we realised it was not the drainage system at all, it was the beginning of the drought. It was the last time for fourteen years that our dam filled.

During the past twelve years many new energetic and exciting people

have moved in, as weekenders and full-time residents, all of whom have experienced only drought, yet still they loved the Bushlands. It has been wonderful hearing and reading about their delight in the return of the wet in 2010—the revitalised Bushlands, the Bushlands that I had moved into and that might have disappeared

forever. But it has bounced back, bigger and bushier. It has been a pleasure to see my dam overflow again, a delight to have the bottom paddock flood.

Of the initial six people who moved into the Bushlands in 1976, three have died and two have moved on. I remain. I have many memories of past animals, most of which, if

they weren't eaten or sold, have been buried in that bottom paddock, our pet cemetery. I have years of memories, recollections that are good and bad, and that are accumulated in a life: of building and going without a loo or bathroom for several years, of creating the garden without water tanks or hoses, of children growing and of being their taxi service, of people shuffling off their mortal coil and being buried down the road in Chewton cemetery. I have spent most of my adult life here in the Bushlands and I feel very lucky for having done so.



Ray & Leslie Lindstrom's story

'75 '76 '77 '78 '79 '80 '81 '82 '83 '84 '85 '86 '87 '88 '89 '90 '91 '92 '93 '94 '95 '96 '97 '98 '99 '00 '01 '02 '03 '04 '05 '06 '07 '08 '09 '10 '11 '12 '13 '14 '15

RAY AND LESLIE BOUGHT LOT 37 on Dishpan Gully Road for \$24,650 in March 1976.

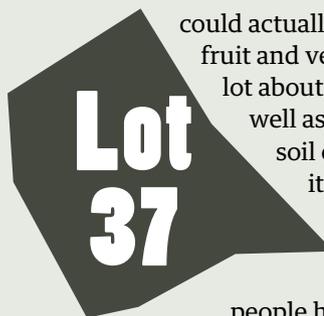
They also purchased the adjoining

Lot 36, on which Ray built a shearing shed. The building of a shearing shed explains a lot about what Ray's plans were for this particular block.

Ray spent his early years in Essendon, where he had trained as a hairdresser. After holidaying in the United Kingdom in the early 1970s, he decided that city life was no longer for him. During his travels in Yorkshire and Scotland with Leslie, his air hostess wife, he met many local people who had also made that decision, following a trend at that time to choose an alternative lifestyle and to live independently off the land.

The house in the Bushlands Ray and Leslie chose was one of the nine stone houses that Cap Delmenico had built for Brian Parsons. The Lindstroms were the first to move into one of the stone houses.

Ray immediately set to work clearing the land to create a permaculture garden and brought in livestock. He began with a few sheep and chickens, and eventually introduced a couple of horses. By the early 1980s, with a new wife Nicole and a growing family, the produce from the garden was very welcome. The fact that he



could actually have a successful fruit and vegetable garden says a lot about Ray's dedication, as well as something about the soil on that particular lot;

it also says a bit about the climate at that time. These days, most Bushlands people have given up on the idea of successfully pursuing such an endeavour. Concurrently, Ray continued to work in his own Castlemaine salon, cutting the hair of his many clients.

In the Bushlands, he made

friends first with the Hellowells, and then with the Halls. Ray tells of the many hours he spent in philosophical discussions with John Hall, who he considers to have been one of the finest people he ever knew.

Meanwhile, as an accomplished musician, Ray was also kept busy playing at many events in the district. It was during that time, in the late 1970s, that he developed an interest in the Theatre Royal in Castlemaine, which, at the time, was very run down. Ray saw this as an opportunity to make a big change in the

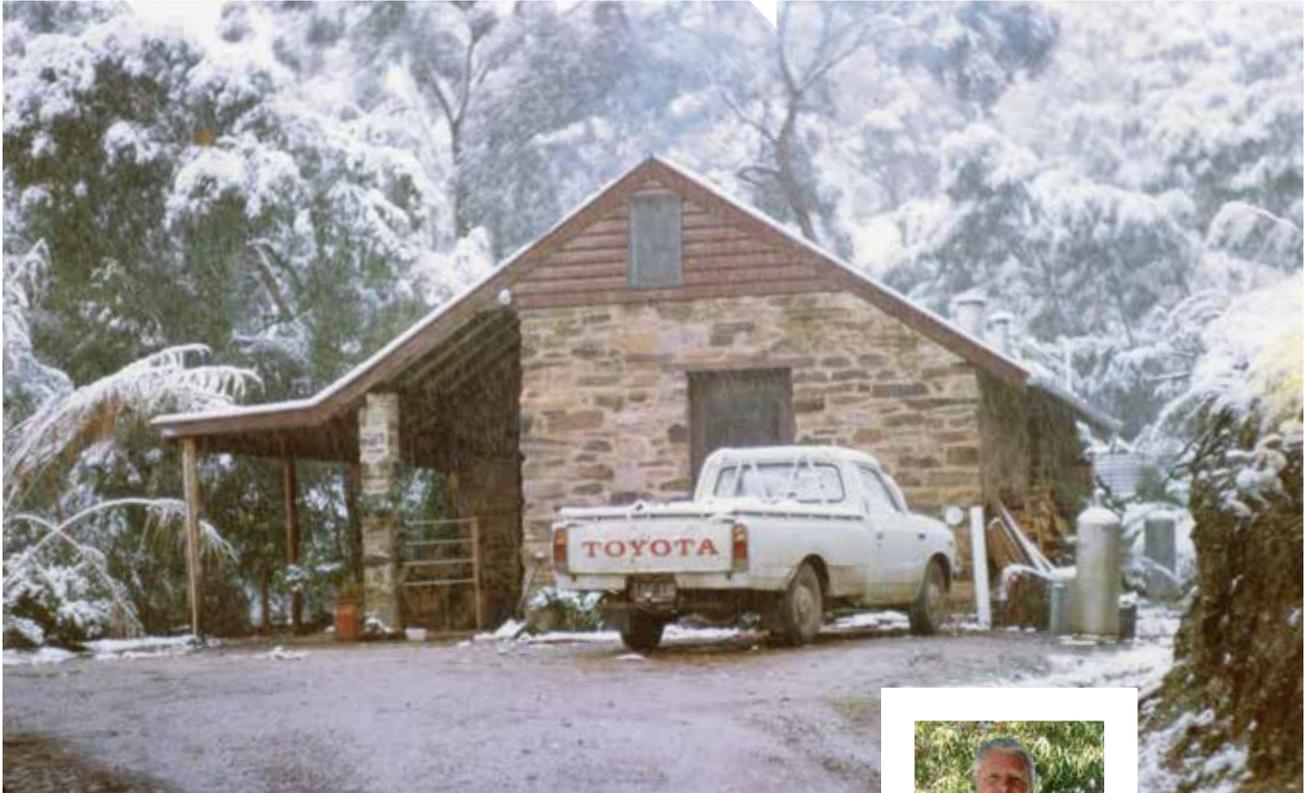


Early Bushlands resident Ray Lindstrom tried the farming life.

PHOTO: RAY LINDSTROM



Ray immediately set to work clearing the land to create a permaculture garden and brought in livestock. He began with a few sheep and chickens, and eventually introduced a couple of horses.



Proof positive that it snowed in the Bushlands in 1981. PHOTO: RAY LINDSTROM

town. By this time, he had developed a friendship with Brian Parsons and the two of them decided to take on the theatre and turn it into a venue that would attract a new crowd. Ray wanted to return it back into the dance hall and hotel it had once been, and for it to show films and have other entertainment, much as it does today.

Brian looked to Ray to make the decisions and, eventually, to finance the deal. But this partnership did not last; in 1980, nine months after it started, Brian pulled out. Still believing in the venture—even selling his house in the Bushlands in 1996 to help finance it—Ray stayed with the project until 1999. He was the person responsible for obtaining the liquor

Ray Lindstrom.

licence and for installing the couches that are still a feature of the Theatre Royal today.

As always, change comes. Ray's marriage to Nicole faltered and his interest in the farming life declined. Today, Ray lives happily in his house in Maldon where there's no livestock, but there is a lot of wildlife.



Rita & Peter van Benthem's story

'75 '76 '77 '78 '79 '80 '81 '82 '83 '84 '85 '86 '87 '88 '89 '90 '91 '92 '93 '94 '95 '96 '97 '98 '99 '00 '01 '02 '03 '04 '05 '06 '07 '08 '09 '10 '11 '12 '13 '14 '15

IN 1977, NOT LONG AFTER THE BUSHLANDS ESTATE subdivision into its forty-two lots, there were not many occupants in the area, not legal ones anyway. Still on offer were four of six lots, each with stone cottages on them, available for purchase in the Mount View Estate in the Bushlands, including one still awaiting a roof.

Twenty years earlier, Rita Heskes and Peter van Benthem had emigrated from The Hague to Australia on the same vessel. They had known each other prior to heading for the land Down Under, so it was no surprise that, three years later, they became Rita and Peter van Benthem. Not to rest on their tulips, they set about establishing their own food outlet in Melbourne. Peter being a trained pastry chef, they created a quality cakes and pastries business, *Rita's Homemade Cakes*, in Niddrie, and later opened a second shop in Kensington.

Down the track, with a successful business and four children—Dianne, Melinda, and twins Leanne and Peter—Rita and Peter felt that it was time to look for a source of relaxation and an outlet from the demands of two very busy cake shops and four very lively children. Investigations of possible locations were not very fruitful; most were either too far from their home in Essendon or were just not inviting.

Then, one Saturday in 1977, the Melbourne press carried an

advertisement for properties with cottages in the Mount View Estate, not too far from their suburban home, that offered the environment and tranquillity they sought. The following Sunday, Peter and Rita loaded the family and the picnic basket into their Ford panel van and headed north up the Calder.

At an agreed time, the family rendezvoused with Brian Parsons and a Cassidy Real Estate agent at the 69 mile post and proceeded to explore the remaining cottages that Brian had available. They chose Lot 29 for a negotiated price of \$32,000. Their acquisition was not only a plus for them, but also a bit of an opportune boost to the vendor's pocket.

It was the van Benthem's choice to enjoy their spot with as few encumbrances as possible. Already there was a corrugated water tank with a hand pump (later exchanged for a motorised pump), gas lights, an open fire and a gas cooker. No generator, no telephone. Given that there were children, a tree house

was a natural, essential addition. All that has not basically changed in the many years since Lot 29 of 2.5 hectares became a jewel for Rita, Peter and their children.

Life in the Bushlands for the van Benthems has been about family and about the company of their many friends. They could sleep up to eighteen in the cottage—quite a bunk room. The opportunities to enjoy all that the environment and their particular lot offered made them very frequent weekenders.

They loved walking through the bush and holding parties.

Card evenings with their numerous visitors were dominant in the calendar, and if there were too many players for one table, they just set up two; when demand was extreme, three.

There have been many years of great enjoyment for Rita, Peter, their family and friends in this, their ideal country spot. Recently, with a few health issues emerging, their visits have become less frequent but they still love to visit when they can, with favourable weather being a significant consideration. Lot 29, 2 Mount View Road, one of the original stone cottages, is still very much in its original condition and remains the warm, welcoming home away from home that it has always been for its only owners, the van Benthems.





ABOVE Rita with the van Benthem children Peter, Dianne, Melinda, Leanne and their dog Goldie, Christmas 1979.



ABOVE Peter helping with pest control and food supplies, December 1980. PHOTOS: VAN BENTHEMS





The Hall family's story

'75 '76 '77 '78 '79 '80 '81 '82 '83 '84 '85 '86 '87 '88 '89 '90 '91 '92 '93 '94 '95 '96 '97 '98 '99 '00 '01 '02 '03 '04 '05 '06 '07 '08 '09 '10 '11 '12 '13 '14 '15

THE FIRST PHASE: JOHN AND ENID

IN 1977 MY FIRST WIFE KAREN AND I honeymooned in Castlemaine. We liked the town and it was close to Melbourne. We became caught up with the idea of a tree change, even though that expression hadn't come into use yet, and so we contacted real estate agents. Max Cassidy drove us around and I think we also met up with Brian Parsons because I remember walking up hill and down dale looking at all the Bushlands blocks, and this house [Lot 23] in particular, one of the first nine that Brian built. I have a memory that Brian used this place as a sales office and that one of the stonemasons lived here while he was building.

I brought my parents, John and Enid, up here to look at this house—well, a cottage really—with just two small rooms. John was in his late fifties, had a heart condition and had taken early retirement. He had been assistant director for overseas services of Radio Australia. He was very much an A-type personality, worked hard and chased promotions. The family had lived in many places, including Brisbane, Sydney, and then Melbourne, where, initially, they

came to Carnegie, and then to North Balwyn, and lastly to Bulleen, at that time on the edge of Melbourne where the house they lived in was on a dirt road and the sewerage was just being put through. John was originally from Cunamulla, a small town that lies on the Warrego River in southwest Queensland, approximately 750 kilometres west of Brisbane. So he had a rural background.

John and Enid bought Lot 23, Dishpan Gully Road in the Bushlands in December 1977. They built the large shed—which is still standing—and started bringing up their furniture. They planned to extend the cottage, but were still living in Bulleen. Karen and I, who were both teaching at Castlemaine Secondary College, moved from Castlemaine into this cottage for about six months before moving to Vaughan Springs. One memory I have of that time is of driving our car up to the front



Lot 23

window to plug in a little black and white television so that we could watch *Sherlock Holmes*.

Coming from the orchard country of Bulleen at a time when there was more water around, John and Enid's expectations were that the Bushlands was a fertile place, so John planted an orchard down at the bottom of the property, started a vegetable garden and, with help from my brother-in-law and me, put in an irrigation system. John was of the generation who believed they could do anything if they put their mind to it. For example, we had never done any fencing but we just hove to and taught ourselves how to, as one did in those days.

The cottage renovation was started in 1978 with the laying of the slab for the extension. John, who was a wine collector, and Enid, who were intending to supervise the construction, went away on a wine-buying trip to give the slab time to dry. Sadly, in January 1979, while on that wine trip, John died. He never did see the second half of the house come to fruition, nor did he have the pleasure of living in his Bushlands house, although working on the garden and planning the renovation had given him a great deal of pleasure.

The idea of giving up this place was not on the agenda for Enid, then in her early sixties. This place





LEFT John the treehugger. CENTRE Camp cook Enid. RIGHT Laura and Scott, March 2014. PHOTOS: SCOTT HALL

was theirs and, although it was very challenging and daunting for her, there was never any suggestion that she would be anywhere else. She had half a house, on a rugged slope, open to the elements because the end wall was out. She put on the extension, including the second storey, and set about establishing herself in the community.

Enid was a joiner. She studied geology at U3A because she wanted to be up a bit more with things for Landcare, was active in the Castlemaine Field Naturalists for a long time and was secretary for years of the Save the Children Fund. It seems she was always the secretary; she was also a good bookkeeper. She lived for about three years after I met Laura and, as Laura put it, 'She was pleased that I was a treasurer type of person. She also tried to introduce me to U3A, but I thought I was a bit young.' She was also a member of the Newstead Spinning Group, a group of women who had a great time together and were very close. All of them were

of an era: if it was cold they would put on a jumper rather than light a fire. Nothing was ever thrown away, a legacy of the days of the war when goods were in short supply.

So it is nice to keep this place as a sort of a family home. Enid put down a lot of the garden and I think she would be very pleased with how it looks now. Her gardening style was typical of those times: plant whatever cuttings you got from a friend or picked over a fence—lavender and roses and geraniums. Those plants are as hardy as anything and many have survived. That's not the way that we do it now. It was not native gardening.

THE SECOND PHASE: SCOTT AND LAURA

IN 2001, AFTER TWENTY-FIVE years in the Bushlands, Enid moved away. Towards the end of that time, my brother Roy and a friend of his had installed the basics of a solar system, but until then

she had lived with bottled gas and kerosene. There came a time during which her health was fading and being here was becoming too much for her, despite our help. After she eventually left to live with my sister in Melbourne, the house remained empty for two years. My siblings and I then put it on the market, but offers were too low and we didn't sell. I was living in Castlemaine at the time, and then temporarily moved here.

Laura had been living in Melbourne for two years when we met. Initially, she was very reluctant to take on this place. For me, this house gave a sense of connection to the past but she did not have that attachment to it and was looking at it from a different point of view. The interior of the building was very run down. Enid had found it hard to maintain and had sectioned off part of the house in order to remain here and stay independent. Laura could see that it would need a lot of work and what that would cost. She was interested in alternative



technology but more interested in being connected to the grid so that we could sell electricity back into the grid and not have the problem of cost and the limitations of batteries. She could also see that the climate was difficult and that there was no soil.

Nevertheless, Laura and I bought it and came to live here permanently in 2003. We named the property 'Gondwanaland' as an acknowledgement of the ancient super continent when Australia and Africa, among land masses, were part of that continent. Laura is from South Africa so it signified a joining up of the old continent again.

Enid still maintained a connection to this place, coming to stay with us in the school holidays (I was still teaching) for a week or two at a time. The property was still rough but Laura and I were working on it. Enid did see some of our renovations happening before she died in 2006 aged eighty-seven.

The changes I have noticed over the more than thirty years since I first came here are the changes in the bush. From the front of the house we used to be able to see the road quite easily; now no longer as the bush has recovered magnificently and is still recovering.

Larry, the Jacky dragon.



The two storey extension to the original stone house (see page 30).

PHOTO: SCOTT HALL

Originally, we had mainly gum trees and coffee bush with no understorey. Now the trees have replaced the coffee bush and there is an understorey of wattles, cherry ballarts, herbs and grasses—a good news story. Around the house, we have learnt to make soil. Around the back of the house, where it is sheltered and shaded, there is a flourishing fernery. Here in the Bushlands. Who would have thought it possible?

As youngsters, my three children came up here a lot and played at Gran's place, built cubbies, and so on. Now they have their own lives and careers. Even though one lives in England and the others in Melbourne, they love the idea of this place and have a strong attachment to it. My son Tony and his wife Julie had their first child, baby Eleanor, in September 2014, so I can imagine Enid's great-grandchild will come and do the same things and that is a nice feeling.

My main hobby is gardening and landscaping. My interest is the built environment; I love the idea of having

a context. My context was to look from the front room across water and to have a view of the top half of the trees. Laura is more about the natural environment. She is the naturalist and the botanist; we are planting natives now.

Birdlife is increasing: the honeyeaters are all over, and right now, in the late summer, the eastern spinebills are coming in. Of course, there were birds when we first came here, and the honeyeaters have always lived here, but now there are more. On our property, native plants and the water in two dams attract birds; we have a list of thirty different species. Among the wildlife, a notable visitor is Larry, our Jacky dragon. When he hides under the grapevine, he looks like a crocodile.

So here we are and, despite the challenges, Laura is not sorry at all. As she said, 'We have done it, redeveloped it, and extended it'. Our property has survived in this area and has a connection to the past.

— SCOTT HALL



Sandra Watson's story

'75 '76 '77 '78 '79 '80 '81 '82 '83 '84 '85 '86 '87 '88 '89 '90 '91 '92 '93 '94 '95 '96 '97 '98 '99 '00 '01 '02 '03 '04 '05 '06 '07 '08 '09 '10 '11 '12 '13 '14 '15

IN 1980, INSPIRED BY THE EXPERIENCE of helping friends at Lockwood build a mudbrick home, Sandra Watson and Gerard Bonnice purchased their Bushlands block at Lot 2, Bubbs Lane. They had been looking for about eighteen months and this block came up as part of a subdivision of a long strip of land between the Parsons' area and the old Calder Highway, now called Harmony Way. There were no houses on any of the seven titles; it was just what they wanted.

Sandra grew up in South Australia, where her dad managed a 40,000 acre farming property in the Koorong: it was off grid, remote and self-sufficient. Nevertheless, Sandra's dad described this Bushlands block as 'hellish', wondering why anyone would ever buy it because, in his opinion, nothing could be done with land like this. But Sandra and Gerard had two young kids, Kieren, born in 1978, and Kythra, born in 1979, and they thought it would be a better life for kids to grow up in the country.

They bought the land jointly with an inheritance from Gerard's family, but continued to live and work in Melbourne. Then, in 1983, Gerard and Sandra separated. Sandra was given the land but Gerard always remained involved in the property, even after she later remarried. Sandra now found herself with two small children, the land and her job as a nurse. Although

she was, by and large, a self-sufficient single mother, finances were much tighter.

Sandra and her new partner, Hans Henderson, son of American musician Skitch Henderson, decided to build their mudbrick house on her block in the Chewton Bushlands. During 1984, Sandra continued

to work in Melbourne, where the children were at school. They all came up to the block for weekends doing a lot of the groundwork. Hans, being younger than Sandra and not working at that time, was able to spend more time on the site.

Once the build actually started in 1985 the family moved up full time

**Lot 1
Bubbs
Lane**





and lived off Sandra's savings in a tin shed. Family and friends, including Peter Hellowell, who had already built and was living nearby, gave assistance and support. Kieran and Kythra, who became close friends with the Hellowell children, were home schooled for a year before going to school in Castlemaine.

To some, the life they had may sound like a romantic story. The kids were mostly free ranging, counting and laying bricks, learning to use a level, painting timbers, building cubbies, digging for gold and so on. Not so, says Sandra. It was a hard life and hard work for everyone who was doing much the same thing at the time: living in the bush, self-building, raising young children, maintaining relationships and finding their place in a new community.

Sandra and Hans were mudding

daily. The bricks were formed after sieving the clay through an old bed frame, making the mud mix in a concrete mixer borrowed from John Anders, forming the bricks in a mould, leaving them out to dry and, finally, stacking them. Their tin shed had no bathroom or toilet; they washed in the dam every day. There was no power, no solar panels like now. Over time, the concrete slab was put down, the post and beam frame went up, the roof went on, the pine ceiling lining in the main living area finished, and all the mudbricks were eventually laid in the walls. Gerard, who had considerable building expertise, did the framing for all the windows and doorways and made all the windows and doors. The house was taking shape but there was no money left for glazing, plumbing, wiring and doing the inside.

By now it was the late 1980s and Sandra and Hans decided to leave the unfinished house to go back to the USA for a year so they could earn some money, then come back and finish the house. They married in 1988 and, as a result of the business they set up there being so successful, it turned out to be almost twenty years before Sandra was to permanently return to her muddie.

During those years the house just sat, neglected. Consequently, there was some deterioration but, testament to the enduring qualities of mudbricks, it survived well. When they left, the upstairs bedroom did not have a timber ceiling, only sisalation, which had become torn and blown around everywhere; as well, the possums had gotten in. Upon returning from the USA for a brief period in 2000, a lot of cleaning





up was done; it was in this year that the couple divorced.

The second stage of building to make the house habitable began in 2005. For the enormous amount of work involved Sandra thanks Dave McCaffrey, her partner since 2003, and Xavier, Gerard's brother, who is a builder. Gerard, also, was working on the house when he died in 2005. The last part of the project was in 2014, when Xavier and Sandra put on the upstairs balconies, the carport was added and the large open room downstairs was divided to create an extra bedroom. All the major works are done now. A vegetable garden is thriving. Sandra's son Kieran, his wife Jamie and their two young children are presently living in the house, where the back area sports kids' toys and play equipment.

Sandra and Dave travel and

I have always loved the notion of the house being a symbol of self, particularly when that dwelling is owner built ... Thirty years later and the house is still unfinished—solid, rough and rugged. Its beauty is not in the way it looks, but in its stories.

return to this two-storey muddle. It is a remarkable house that stands tall halfway up the hill on its cleared space, glowing red-brown in the afternoon sun. A north facing downstairs wall of glass and clerestory windows upstairs bring in the sun and the natural light.

Sandra has this to say about her house in the Bushlands, 'I have always loved the notion of the house being a symbol of self, particularly when that dwelling is owner built. There have been times in the past when I have camped on the block and looked at the house with its gaping holes for doors and windows, bricks unrendered, and have cried for seeing myself. Thirty years later and the house is still unfinished—solid, rough and rugged. Its beauty is not in the way it looks, but in its stories. I see myself as a reflection of the house.'





Ken Savage's story

'75 '76 '77 '78 '79 '80 '81 '82 '83 '84 '85 '86 '87 '88 '89 '90 '91 '92 '93 '94 '95 '96 '97 '98 '99 '00 '01 '02 '03 '04 '05 '06 '07 '08 '09 '10 '11 '12 '13 '14 '15

LOT 7 IN THE CHEWTON bushlands is a great place to be. In December 1983, the Savage family—Meg and I, and our three children,—purchased Lot 7, Bush Sanctuary Road, for the sum of \$7000 from John and Robyn Cox, who had originally purchased it in 1978.

Max Cassidy Snr (now deceased) was the estate agent who, with his redoubtable experience in assessing his clientele, made the sale. What's more, one has to admire an estate agent who, back in 1983, could

produce Earl Grey tea bags from his filing cabinet.

We were on side from there on. It was a sure sale right from the start. After visiting several vacant sites, and others with stone cottages on them, Max delivered a clear statement: 'We are now going to see your block.' We did not take too much convincing: Lot 7 was beautifully situated and certainly met our visions of a place where we would like to set up camp.

At this time we were both teachers: Meg was teaching in special schools, I was in my second year as deputy principal at Balwyn Primary School. We had finished rebuilding our house in Surrey Hills and, with no great pressure

on finances, decided it was time to look for a weekender. We already had connections with owners of beachside properties, but after choosing to explore possibilities in central Victoria, we happily settled on Lot 7,

Bush Sanctuary Road, Chewton Bushlands, which was really Lot 7, Wattle Crescent.

Later, when rural numbering was implemented, it became 20 Wattle Crescent, and then, still later, after Mount Alexander council's changes to road names, it became 20 Wattle Road.

Before settlement on the sale, Meg's father Cliffy and I took on the task of repairing the dam wall, which had been close to being breached in

Lot 7



A squeeze down the driveway as the first section arrives.



Home delivery: would you please sign ...



For much of 1985 and 1986, my Friday evenings consisted of dashing home after school, loading the Urvan and travelling up the Calder, to attack the work site. With gas lantern lit, it was out with mattock, shovel and hammer to embrace any task that was possible to do in the semi-darkness ... Full moonlight was always very much welcomed.

some prior heavy rain period, when a very significant section at the back of the centre of the wall was washed away. Due to consolidation of the wall over time, the centre of the wall had been left lower than the usual overflow channel, rendering it prone to erosion when the dam overflowed.

At first we camped on the block while we considered our accommodation options, the solution needing to be one we could afford.

Early thinking favoured some form of kit home. Then, coincidence and good fortune came our way when our friends Bob and Rosie Harris needed to clear their federation era weatherboard house from their block in Surrey Hills to make way for a new residence. We readily accepted their offer of a house. Hence followed frenzied activity in March 1984 to produce plans and documents that would be acceptable to Metcalfe Shire and to

find a reliable contractor to move the structure.

The plaster on the laths had to be stripped off so that it did not litter the highway in transit; chimneys and lean-to sections at the back of the house had to be dismantled. The contractors removed the roof, leaving the dismantled framework on the ceiling joists, bisected the house via the hallway, jacked it up and loaded it onto the two very long metal rails with wheels at the rear that provided the carriage trailer. Subsequently, the house was moved in two major sections that had to be transported up Commissioners Gully and Goldspeck Gully Roads (known then as Parsons Road) because the then Cemetery Road bridge and adjacent trees did not enable passage for such a large cargo. One person sat atop the house, chainsaw in hand, to trim the odd branch or two along the route. The contractors positioned the two



for this?



Getting there, but still a long way to go. PHOTOS: KEN SAVAGE



sections, dug the stump holes with much difficulty due to the nature of the terrain, and then lowered the structure onto the stumps. The roof frame was reassembled and new battens and corrugated iron installed. We paid their bill of \$10,300 and they departed. It was April 1984, only two months after we had been given the house.

My tasks were to fit external doors and some windows, construct new back sections, including the kitchen, rebuild the chimneys, reconstruct the verandahs, install guttering, remodel some interior spaces, replaster walls and ceilings, arrange for the plumber and spend many hours with paint brush and paint pot in hand. A 5000 gallon concrete water tank had been delivered and the septic system dug and installed before the arrival onsite of the house. Only in Metcalfe did one have to leave the septic tank 6 inches above ground level and paint it black (to aid the bacterial action was the theory).

For much of 1985 and 1986, my Friday evenings consisted of dashing home after school, loading the Urvan and travelling up the Calder against the much too frequent northeasterlies, to attack the work site. Meg and the children, who often accompanied me, were a great source of unpaid labour when they were around; however, their weekend activities in the city frequently saw me as the sole traveller. With gas lantern

lit, it was out with mattock, shovel and hammer to embrace any task that was possible to do in the semi-darkness, and then in the darkness, before midnight, and sometimes beyond. Full moonlight was always very much welcomed.

The 2kVA Honda generator was a constant and loyal companion on the worksite. Work continued apace until Sunday evenings, when it was back to the city for the school week ahead. Getting the house to the finished stage took over two years, but work on it has never really ceased as improvement possibilities have always been present, not the least the regular exterior painting cycles that keep coming around and, most recently, the new bathroom that has been installed. When the major work on the house was completed, a mudbrick carport and shed and a timber workshop were added.



In the early days, in the mid 1980s, lighting was provided by eight gas lamps; the existing electrical wiring for the house was connected to the Honda generator, which was the source of electrical power for many years. A petrol-fuelled pump was used to pump water from the dam to a header tank, a good way up the hill, and rain water for household use to an adjacent header tank. It was not a lot of fun moving the pump and connecting up the two separate water sources. Thirty years later, we still use that pump for dam water but since an upgrade in the electrical provisions, the rain water now makes its journey via an electric water pump.

Then, in the mid 1990s, the electrical system was first upgraded with the installation of a 5.5 kVA low rev, relatively quiet, diesel generator with battery storage and inverter.

In 2000, solar panels were installed and the original batteries, which were not up to the job, were replaced by some with greater capacity. Finally, a recent upgrade of the inverter from 1.5 kW to a 3.00 kW unit has the system working very efficiently.

Our Bushlands house was the weekender for my immediate family for many years, sometimes frequently occupied, sometimes not. A vast array of friends

Enjoying a rather potent brew of eucalyptus tea served at the Outback Cafe.



Dusk can provide the spectacle of the resident sugar gliders creeping out from the house ceiling onto the roof and making their amazing leaps from tree to tree, although their noisy return early in the morning is not always appreciated.

managed to join us from time to time; all indications were that they thoroughly enjoyed their visits. Encounters with a kangaroo or two, a wander through the bush, a roast from the slow combustion stove with suitable accompanying beverage seemed to please most. And, when the weather was suitable and the leeches not too prevalent, a plunge from the pontoon for a frolic in the dam was the icing on the cake.

I took up permanent residence in the Bushlands in 2001 after selling my city abode. Some time before this, Meg and I had gone our separate ways so I did not spend a great deal of time at Chewton. Our friends Rosie and Bob, who had given us their house for removal back in 1983, had also separated. Through coincidence and good fortune, Rosie joined me in sharing the delights of the Chewton Bushlands. In

more recent years, our grandchildren, have become part of the regular contingent to visit the block. The cubby, christened the Outback Cafe, is a major drawcard for them, as is the dam. We now spend our time between the city and the bush and consider ourselves to be very fortunate in having such options. Since 2001, I have become much more involved in community activities and helped in the establishment of the Chewton Bushlands Association, which I believe helps develop and maintain the social cohesion of this special community.

Always, the appeal of the

Bushlands for us has been the relatively unspoiled nature of this spasmodically occupied area and the joy of being in a bush retreat, escaping the hustle and bustle of city life. We look forward to our visits to a diverse and accepting community, comfortable in the knowledge that neighbours are keeping an eye on the property when we are not around.

It is always a thrill to see the kangaroos bounding past on their way to graze in the valley below, as is listening to the many birds and watching their antics. We enjoy the glorious sunsets and the shafts of golden light that tinge the foliage of the eucalypts as the sun descends beyond the hills. Dusk can also provide the spectacle of the resident sugar gliders creeping out from the house ceiling onto the roof and making their amazing leaps from tree to tree, although their noisy

return early in the morning is not always appreciated. There is much to enjoy here, in sitting on the verandah at almost any time of day, taking in the beauty of the bush, noting its changes season to season and over the years.



Ken, Rosie and the house, with its 2014 coat of paint—the fourth in thirty years.



The Cook family's story

'75 '76 '77 '78 '79 '80 '81 '82 '83 '84 '85 '86 '87 '88 '89 '90 '91 '92 '93 '94 '95 '96 '97 '98 '99 '00 '01 '02 '03 '04 '05 '06 '07 '08 '09 '10 '11 '12 '13 '14 '15

B USHLANDS PIONEERS. It all had to do with the desire for a bush block, something a bit rugged, natural and unspoilt.

Tony had always loved the bush and knew he'd know that right block when he saw it. Sure enough, there it was—Lot 16, 81 Miners Hut Road. It had the view, that special remote quality and it was affordable. Tony paid \$11,000 for it in 1984, and considered it a bargain.

Tony, Linda and baby daughter Sarah, who were living in Hurstbridge at the time, had come up from Melbourne to visit friends in Castlemaine. While there, they travelled all about the countryside looking for that perfect spot. From Castlemaine the family visited Dunolly and other possible locales in the area, until finally they called on Max Cassidy Real Estate on Templeton Street, whose agent showed them what he had for sale up here.

Tony and Laurie Cook.

Prior to coming to this part of Victoria, Tony had led an interesting life. He had restored a house for the artist Albert Tucker, which contact perhaps helped develop Tony's creative streak. The first mudbrick house that he worked on was built with Peter Wallace at Smiths Gully and he subsequently worked on many other mudbrick houses in the Nillumbik area; the first load bearing mudbrick house he built on his own was in Woodend in 1973. It is not surprising that Tony became familiar with, and somewhat inspired by, the design principles of the architects Alistair Knox and Robert Marshall, both of whom he knew. Immediately before

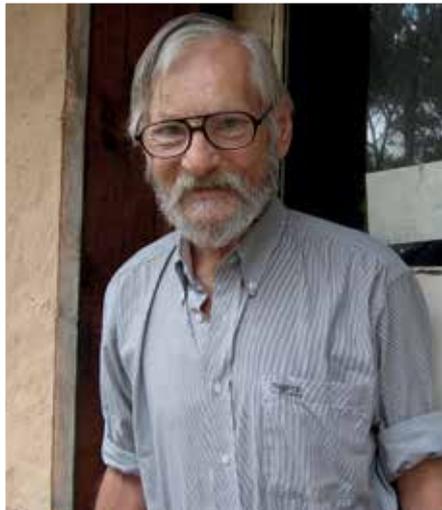
moving to Chewton he was working on the beautiful function room at the Lovegrove Vineyard & Winery in Cottles Bridge.

He'd also worked as a wool classer, and then as a barman at the St Andrews pub. Even with his back problems he had the sort of confidence that led him to believe he could turn his hand to most things. For instance, when he first came to Chewton, he

worked at the Wattle Gully and the Prince of Wales mines; he also took up whatever other work he could find.

The early 1980s was an exciting time in Victoria. Tony, being a multitalented man, jumped at the

Lot 16





The view to Mt Tarrengower from Lot 16.

chance to build his own mudbrick house with a low interest loan offered by the then Labor government of John Cain. He had seen a small advertisement in the *Sun* newspaper for a Mudbrick Scheme that would fund such building and applied. A Ministry of Housing representative met Tony onsite, asked him for an outline of the building requirements and an estimate of cost. Before he knew it, he had been approved for a loan of \$23,000 to build his house. The conditions of these loans changed over time, but in Tony's case, he received no actual cash; all of his accounts were sent directly from the supplier to the ministry, who paid the accounts. Tony laughs now: he found that the building did not cost as much as he had anticipated, so he was able to make the loan cover the purchase of a fridge. As life eventuated, we now have Tony to thank for four unique

mudbrick houses in the Bushlands.

The family set up a caravan on their chosen lot of 2-plus hectares and, with the help of some mates, built their first house. Friendly neighbours were delighted to offer advice and encouragement: the

Hellawells (see page 47), Laurie Leslie, Enid Hall (see page 54) and Ray Lindstrom (see page 50); each had experience and local knowledge that they were happy to share.

Building with mudbricks is hard work. The soil, arranged by Tony to



Tony's muddie on Lot 16.



be brought in by a local contractor, was so good a mix of sand and clay that his bricks did not have to contain straw. Each load of soil, which was about 10 cubic metres, was shovelled off the truck and worked in stages: first a pile of dirt, then water was added, then it was mixed to a wet, muddy consistency. Then, more dirt, more water and more mixing, and so on, until all the dirt was in a single muddy pile. The pile was covered to enable it to cook overnight, during which process, the water gets absorbed. But the mud has to be repeatedly worked, turned over and puddled to reach the right consistency before it can be put into moulds. For this, Tony used a pelican pick, a tool used by prospectors and miners. With just a single mould he could make 250 to 300 bricks a day. No wonder his back gave out.

The house took a while to build, and life in the caravan cannot have been easy.

Linda was already pregnant with their second child, Beau. But the Cooks were very happy, and when it was eventually finished, the house was very comfortable. The view southwest over towards Castlemaine and beyond is superb, and sunsets from the patio are spectacular. This was enough to raise everyone's spirits. But as the years passed, money became short, so when the opportunity came to sell the house on Lot 16 at a profit, the Cooks took it.

Lot 21

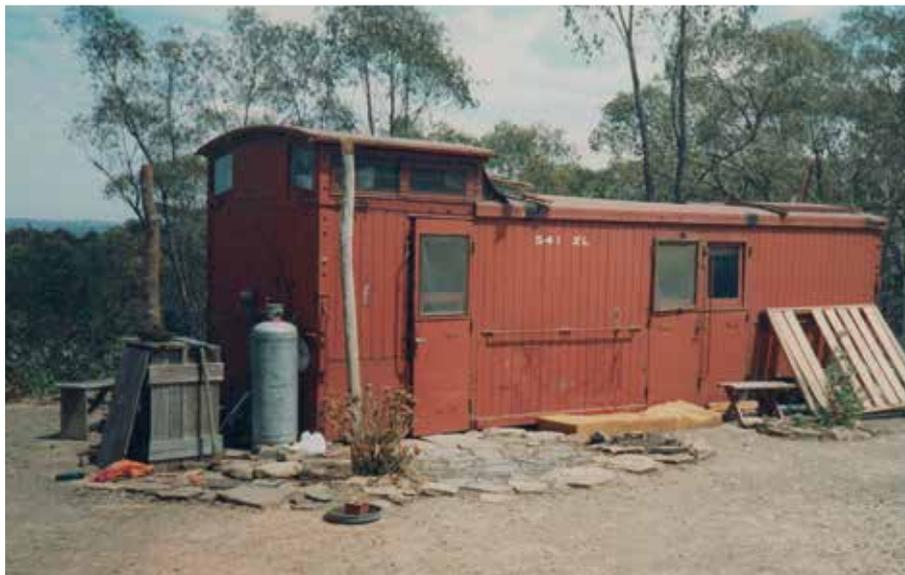
Just waiting to be built on was another site, right across the way at Lot 21 on Goldspeck Gully Road.

This block does not have the beauty of the first, but it's a good one nevertheless.

Once again, the earlier experiences gained in house building were put to good use. The mudbrick house that now stands there has a charm all of its own and is a credit to Tony's considerable skill.

At this stage, things began to change for the Cooks. Linda had grown tired of Bushlands life and decided to move on to other things, taking the children with her.

During all this time, Laurie, Tony's mother, had been making regular visits here. She grew to love the area just as much as Tony did. As it happens, while Tony was living at Lot 21, Lot 20, right next door, came up for sale.

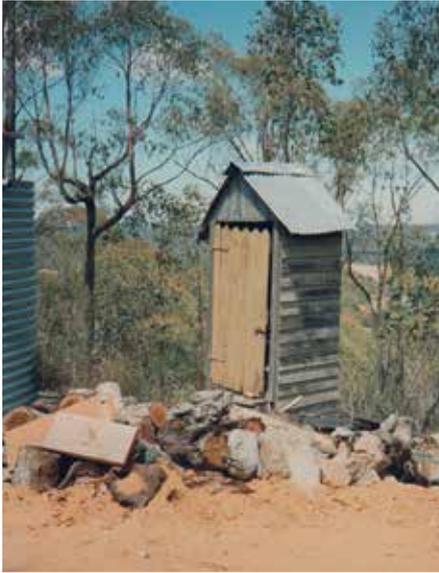


The rail carriage on Lot 20: an early prefabricated residence ...

Laurie had been living in Croydon and working as a bookkeeper in East Ringwood. All of her four children had left home and were now busy with their own families. It was the right moment for her to make a change, and change she did.

In 1992 Laurie retired from her job, sold the house in Croydon and moved into the railway carriage that was parked on Lot 20, 184 Goldspeck Gully Road, which property she bought from Peter Reed, who had been using it as a holiday retreat.

This was no ordinary railway carriage. It had water tanks, a generator, a fully functioning dunny and bottled gas for hot water and cooking. After living in Croydon, Laurie felt as though she was on a never-ending holiday. Laurie lived in the carriage while Tony set about building for her—mudbrick house number three for him—which took him about six months, so Laurie



with essential infrastructure.

didn't have to wait too long before she could move into what has now become her comfortable home.

Meanwhile, Tony sold his second house and subsequently moved into the railway carriage. From there he went on to build his own house a short distance from Laurie's—mudbrick house number four, Tony's last home.

What an accomplishment.

Each of the houses has its own specific character and design. Small touches, such as recycled stained glass windows, personalised entrances and interesting floor finishes, give each of the houses a distinct and subtle personality,

Lot 20

Laurie and Tony belong to that very small group of people in the Bushlands who built their house, made it their home and have resided in it ever since.



The muddie on Lot 20: at last Laurie's permanent home. PHOTO: TIM PURDIE

and each one fits very comfortably into its Bushlands environment.

Tony has since retired from building houses but he did keep his hand in over a number of years helping others to build theirs. He worked on the house on Lot 22, helped Gary and Michael on Lot 11 and worked on Cate's house on Lot 15. His love of the Bushlands led him to explore it from end to end;

he was often seen walking barefoot through the land with his dog Penny at his side.

Laurie and Tony belong to that very small group of people in the Bushlands who built their house, made it their home and have resided in it ever since.

Laurie, now in her nineties, continues to take pleasure in the wonderful sunset views and plans to keep doing that for the rest of her days. She is a true inspiration to all of us. Possessor of a witty, wise and humorous pioneer spirit, long may she keep on enjoying her holiday lifestyle. The Chewton Bushlands would be a lesser place if Laurie and Tony had not decided to settle here.

Laurie died on 17 June 2015 at the age of 95. She will be greatly missed.



Gary Van Den Driesen's story

'75 '76 '77 '78 '79 '80 '81 '82 '83 '84 '85 '86 '87 '88 '89 '90 '91 '92 '93 '94 '95 '96 '97 '98 '99 '00 '01 '02 '03 '04 '05 '06 '07 '08 '09 '10 '11 '12 '13 '14 '15

IN 1984, MY THEN PARTNER David Williams and I bought this unimproved block (then known as Lot 11, Wallaby Crescent) from its original owner, Tim Crichton. Tim had recently become engaged, and his bride to be was not enthused about living so far from Melbourne at a time when the Calder Freeway did not exist and the Bushlands was a two and a half hour drive from Melbourne.

David and I had been working in the CBD, at Dun & Bradstreet and Telecom Australia respectively, for a few years and had long wanted to move to the country but had found nothing suitable until this block came on the market.

Our immediate neighbours were Steve and Helen Key, who later sold their property to Tim Ford and Annie O'Shannessy. Uphill from us was Laurie Leslie, one of the original residents. Also resident close by at that time were Ken and Meg Savage, Sandra Watson and her partner Hans, Peter and Susan Hellawell, Tony and Linda Cook, Jenny Higgs, Enid Hall, Ann Quinton (see 'Personal journeys', page 70) and her grandson Paul, Ray and Nicole Lindstrom, and Mick and Helen Melican.

Purchase price for this property in 1984 was \$9500—very reasonable, even in those days. An additional \$12,000 was then spent buying and transporting an unloved 1940s two bedroom weatherboard house

from the Melbourne suburb of Mentone. When David and I moved into the house in March 1985, there was no running water, no phone, no septic, no water tanks, no guttering, no verandahs, no dining room, no carports and no electric power. We survived via LPG, firewood, kero lights and an icebox. We loved it and never regretted making what in later decades would become known as a tree change.

Our septic was installed by local identity and colourful character, earthmover Kevin 'Casha' Wilson and his son Joe. In 1986, Tony Cook (Beau and Sarah's father) built our chimney, and built it well; Mick Melican, ably assisted by local men John McBride and Graeme 'Bushy' Holden, added the dining

room, carports and verandahs.

In 1990, after some years of a deteriorating relationship, David and I went our separate ways. I stayed and he moved back to Melbourne, where, sadly, he died in 1991 of alcohol poisoning.

Fourth generation Castlemaine resident Michael Kuhle bought into the property and moved in with me. We continue to live here

quietly and harmoniously. In

2002, we installed solar

panels and thereby

dragged ourselves into the twenty-first century, Bushlands style—electric lights, a

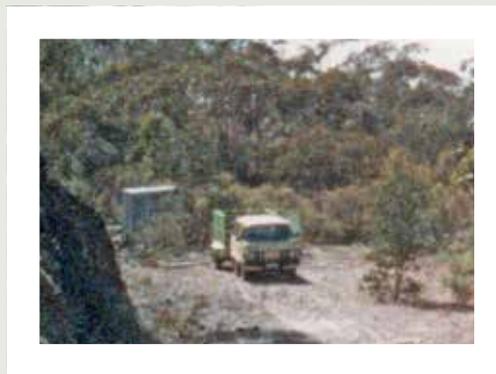
decent sound system and home theatre. No more 12 volt

television run off the car battery.

Also in 2002, I realised a secret and long-held ambition—I finally got to paint the house watermelon pink.

Life is

good here, and neither Michael nor I have any wish to live elsewhere. We drive past the Chewton Cemetery almost every day, and we know that one day we will remain there indefinitely.



This is the spot for a house.



Another home delivery: (top) looking east and (below) the watermelon dream.





Ann Quinton's story

'75 '76 '77 '78 '79 '80 '81 '82 '83 '84 '85 '86 '87 '88 '89 '90 '91 '92 '93 '94 '95 '96 '97 '98 '99 '00 '01 '02 '03 '04 '05 '06 '07 '08 '09 '10 '11 '12 '13 '14 '15

MY BUSHLANDS SITE has had various identifications since I bought it in 1985. I thought that no one had ever lived on it before. Now I have come to realise that the original people, the Dja Dja Wurrung people, lived here for many generations, when it was a gentle forested area with small creeks meandering down the hills to feed what the newcomers would name the Loddon River system.

After the Bushlands was subdivided in the 1970s, the blocks were prepared for sale by building driveways, dams and house sites. To Metcalfe Shire Council, my block started life as Lot 4, then became 126, and now is 46 Miners Hut Road, Chewton, although the CFA still call it '118, off Cemetery Road'.

In 1985, I was living in Campbells Creek in a little cottage that was in need of repairs that I could not afford. So I decided to sell it and buy back into Chewton, the area that I grew up in, although I couldn't afford to buy an already built house. Many people were building their own homes and I asked my children if they would help me build in the bush. They agreed—bless them—as long as they didn't have to make mudbricks.

Bush lots on the Bushlands Estate were being advertised at reasonable prices, so I went to look at several sites. I was surprised by the beauty of

the area. When I grew up, this was regarded as 'just bush'. To me, it was a wilderness where I never went in my many childhood wanderings. On my bike, I often rode around it along Golden Point Road to the Koala Park, then to Elphinstone, back past Tunnel Hill and home to Pitman Street. When I went bush, I used to walk across the railway tracks into the bush there, where, if I stayed still and quiet, I would sometimes see the bush creatures that I loved so much.

The first block I liked was being advertised as having 'a levelled building site and a dam'. There was no dam, and the

Ann Quinton.



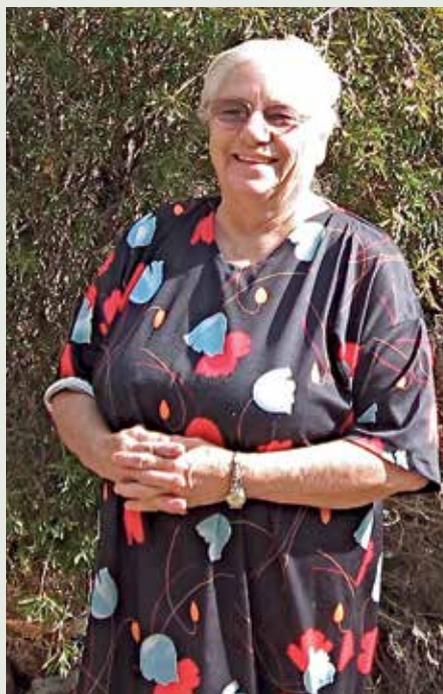
lot was very steep all over. Eventually, I went back to the block that is now my home, Lot 4. Previously, I had dismissed this one because the level area had been chopped out of the side of the hill. This created a cliff at the back above the house site, and a very steep slope on the other side. I worried that my grandchildren might fall over the edge.

But on my return, when I fought to see the view through the coffee bush that had completely overgrown the site, I fell in love with the wonderful vista. In the distance were the Pyrenees ranges, Mount Franklin and Mount Tarrengower.

I realised that the level area for

the house was a good quarter of an acre and decided that the grandkids would have to learn not to go near the cliff.

So, I sold the Campbells Creek house for about \$26,000, paid \$8500 for the land in the Chewton Bushlands and bought a more reliable car to cart myself to Castlemaine and back.





One concrete block at a time.



For eighteen months, I lived in a caravan at the back of the level area but I was terrified for the first few nights when the August wind threatened to blow me off the cliff and down to the road below.

The boys' solution was to dig the caravan's wheels into the ground so the wind couldn't get under it and

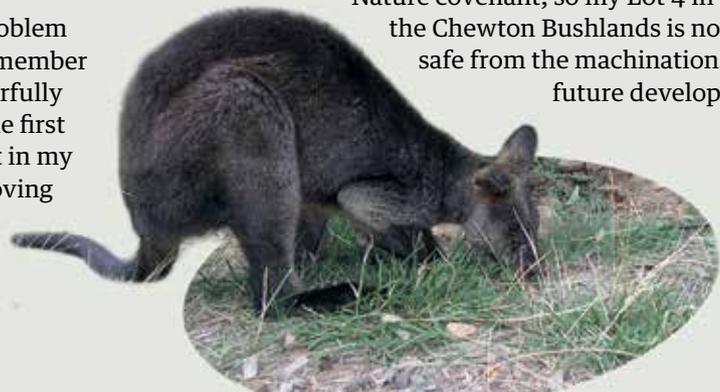
lift it off. Problem solved. I remember how wonderfully safe I felt the first night I slept in my solid, unmoving Besser block home.

For several years I used 12 volt batteries to listen to the radio, and to watch my little black and white television. My lighting was kerosene lamps and I had a gas stove and refrigerator. Now, I have two solar panels and an inverter and can run a colour digital television and a computer from them, which puts me in touch with the world via the internet.

Through the years, I have been thrilled by the wonderful wildlife that shares its habitat with me. From the timid wallabies, which I fed during the drought, to the various snakes who visit my front verandah during the summer months, and, of course, myriad birds of all kinds that bring music and colour to my garden.

My only sadness is that many, many creatures have disappeared as more and more humans moved here and brought their precious pets, their fear of snakes and their lack of natural knowledge to this place which has taken more than a hundred years to renew itself from the devastation of the goldrush era.

To complete my wellbeing, I have, with the help and support of the beautiful neighbours around here, finally been able to get a Trust for Nature covenant, so my Lot 4 in the Chewton Bushlands is now safe from the machinations of future developers.





Ray Pentony's story

'75 '76 '77 '78 '79 '80 '81 '82 '83 '84 '85 '86 '87 '88 '89 '90 '91 '92 '93 '94 '95 '96 '97 '98 '99 '00 '01 '02 '03 '04 '05 '06 '07 '08 '09 '10 '11 '12 '13 '14 '15

THESE DAYS, MOST OF US would have a hard time living without the benefit of electricity, but it doesn't seem to bother Ray. Although he has solar panels on the roof of his house, he hasn't had them connected for years. He does have a landline phone, and gas for cooking, hot water and a fridge, but he manages to live quite comfortably without the luxury of electricity—or a car.

He had a bike for a while, which he rode in and out of Castlemaine, but as traffic increased and his chances of ending up as a 'smear on the Pyrenees Highway that someone would have to hose off' became more likely, Ray gave it up and took to walking instead. There's usually someone driving a car, going back and forth to town, who'll give him a lift, and the exercise of walking on most days is enjoyable, beneficial to his health and environmentally sustainable.

Ray was born in Northern Ireland but left there at the age of two when the family moved to London, where they spent the next fourteen years before coming to Australia. When they settled in Melbourne, Ray attended Northcote High School, and then, after matriculating, went to Monash University. At that time Monash was a university in its heyday, so student years at Monash were lively.

Ray was very happy there. He graduated with a degree in English

History and Politics, then went into the field of education and gained his Diploma of Education at Melbourne Teachers' College, another experience he greatly values.

It was while working in Footscray in a Program of Education for Unemployed Youth that he met a young woman named Jennifer Higgs. This meeting was to prove auspicious, for it provided Ray with the opportunity to flee the city and to reject, in his words, the bourgeois tendencies that may have resulted if he'd continued living there.

Jennifer, meanwhile, had moved out of Melbourne to fulfil her aspiration of building her own

Lot 13

place in the bush. In 1983, she purchased Lot 13 in the Chewton Bushlands and set about realising that dream. She took up a state government low interest loan and began designing and building her own mudbrick home.

Between 1984 and 1987,

while she was building, she rented a small shack on Sir Les Thornton's country estate known as 'Bonkers'. Once her muddie was completed, she moved into her house on Lot 13, and then offered Ray the space she'd been living in at 'Bonkers'. Without hesitation he jumped at the chance to move out of the city and live in a shack that was so greatly esteemed in the shire.



Ray Pentony.

Within twelve months of living at Lot 13, Jennifer wanted to move back to the city. She offered Ray the opportunity of renting her house. In November 1989, he moved in. In the



years prior to that date, he had been spending four days in the city and three days in the Bushlands, which he gave up and from then on became a full time Bushlander.

When, in 2002, Jennifer put the house up for sale, she gave Ray the first option to buy it. After thinking about it for a full five minutes, Ray said yes. Then followed a six month negotiation with the bank that finally led to his ownership of the house at 119 Miners Hut Road. From that moment on, he made a full commitment to a Bushlands lifestyle.

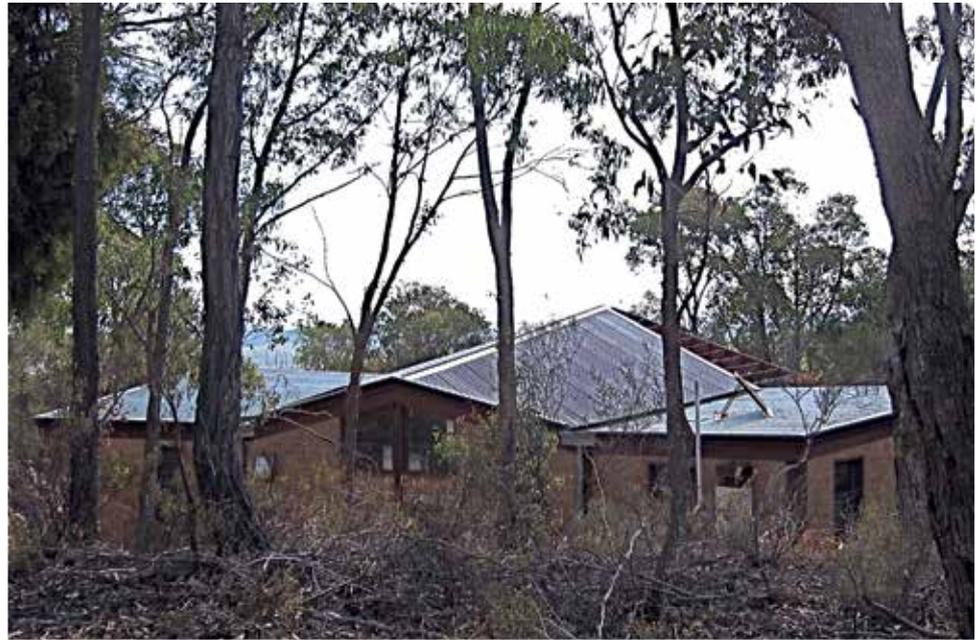
These are the basic facts, but they do little to explain what the move meant to Ray on an emotional level. The city had been his métier, but increasingly in his late thirties, he had become alienated from that way of life. He had begun to view it as 'fast, furious and mostly futile'. When the opportunity came up to move away he saw it as one not to be missed. Ray likes to sum up his present feelings with these quotes.

Only after the Last Tree has been cut down, only after the Last River has been poisoned, only after the Last Fish has been caught, only then will you find that money cannot be eaten.

— CREE PROPHECY

Not that I want to be a god or a hero, just to change into a tree, grow for ages, not hurt anyone.

— CZESLAW MILOSZ



Ray's muddie: 'A bird has just landed'.

A tree is a poem that the earth writes across the sky. We cut them down and turn them into paper that we may record our emptiness.

— KAHLIL GIBRAN

The affluent society is a society at war ... If its citizens have not noticed it, its victims certainly have.

— HERBERT MARCUSE

Technology is not the basis of our society, compassion is. — DALAI LAMA

There is much to be reflected on in these quotes, much that most of us who live here can relate to.

Ray is the proud owner of a very beautiful and unique house. It

sweeps back in an angle to the rise of stone behind it. In front there's a wonderful westerly view out over the valley that falls away towards Goldspeck Gully Road, and then on far beyond to

Mount Tarrengower.

From the highest point on the lot looking in an easterly direction, far off in the distance, there is view of Mount Macedon.

The house itself is all angles. As Ray puts it, 'It looks like a bird that's just landed or is about to take off'. It was built by a man named Dick Anderson, who was also responsible for building other houses in and around Golden Point Road.





A contemplative environment.



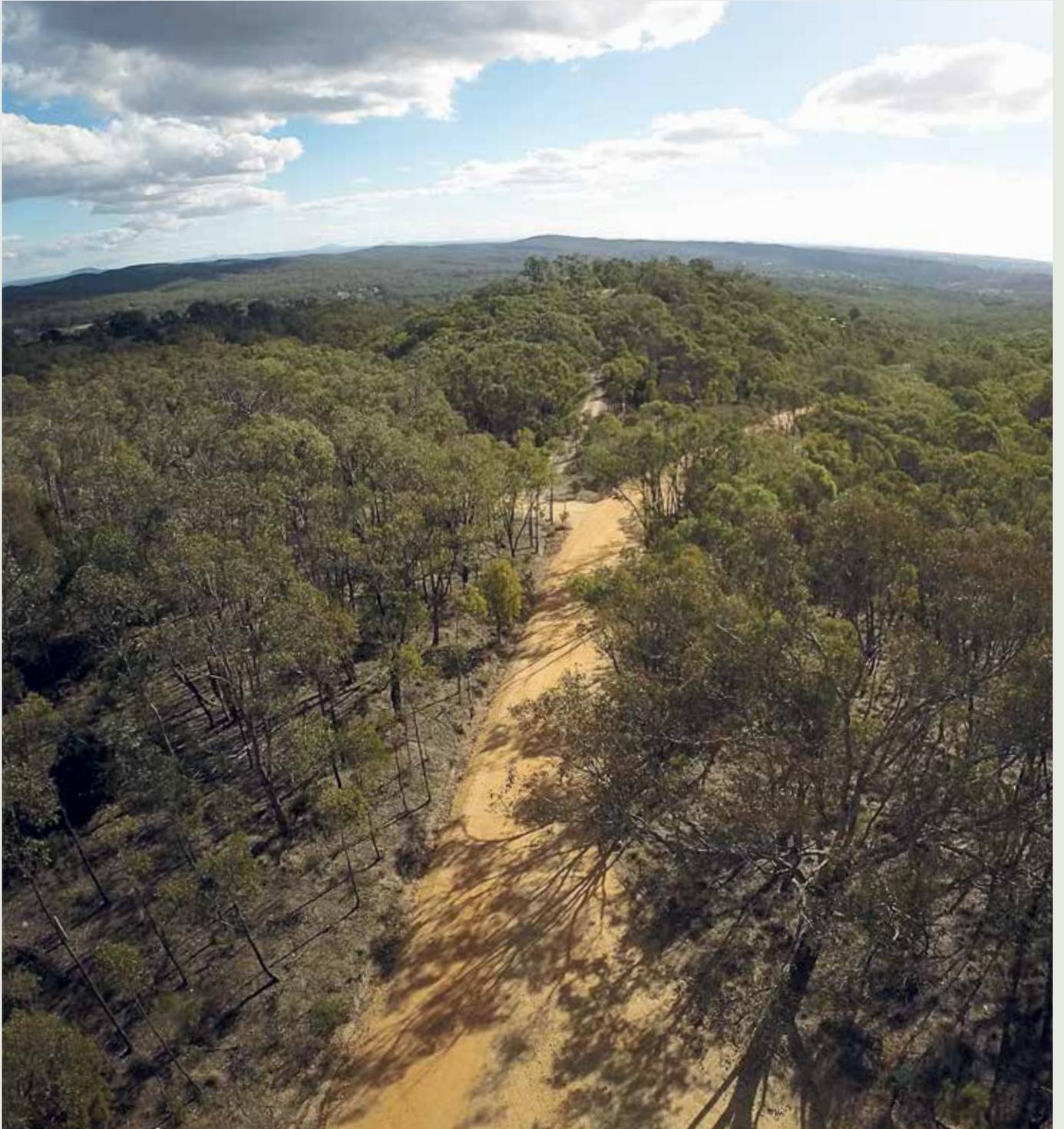
Sadly, Dick died in his early fifties but not before leaving a wonderful legacy of his craftsmanship and skill, as can be seen in Ray's house.

When Ray first came to this area he did some occasional work teaching literacy at the junior high school, and later, to adults.

He was not unhappy about giving that up. At present, he does volunteer work at Buda Historic Home and Garden and at the Castlemaine Information Centre, work he greatly enjoys. Ray also takes pleasure in participating in Castlemaine's cafe culture. There was a time when, he says, he was a very gregarious person who craved the company of others. This is no longer the case. At around about the age of forty Ray found that having time alone to contemplate was essential to his sense of wellbeing. He now likes to spend at least two days a week in isolation, with just the natural environment for company. This is something that can be easily achieved in the Buddhist like atmosphere of his retreat in the Bushlands.

There are places, such as the Wesley Hill Market and the op shops in town, where Ray often spends time rummaging around looking for those special treasures, particularly books, as reading is a favourite pastime. By living frugally, his needs are few.

Ray rarely leaves the Bushlands nowadays, except to go into town or to make an annual visit to family in Perth. The Chewton Bushlands, which has become his physical and spiritual home, is where he expects to spend the rest of his life.



Looking west down Miners Hut Road. PHOTO: TIM PURDIE



Charles Affleck's story

'75 '76 '77 '78 '79 '80 '81 '82 '83 '84 '85 '86 '87 '88 '89 '90 '91 '92 '93 '94 '95 '96 '97 '98 '99 '00 '01 '02 '03 '04 '05 '06 '07 '08 '09 '10 '11 '12 '13 '14 '15

CHARLES AFFLECK DESCRIBES HIMSELF as a musician, arranger and pianist. He has worked as a music teacher in the Castlemaine area for just on thirty years. As his story reveals, he is also a muddie builder.

Born in Chicago, Charles moved to Sydney with his family in 1961 when he was 11. As a typical boy in Sydney at that time he developed a keen interest in rugby. Fortunately for Charles, his family moved to Melbourne in 1965 and he discovered that there was more to life—music.

Charles matriculated to study music at the University of Melbourne, but after a year, quit formal study. He also quit piano and took up guitar. He didn't seriously play piano again until 1984, when he got a job as a ballet pianist at the Marilyn Byrne Dance School in Brighton, and hasn't played guitar much since then.

In the intervening years Charles did further study and worked at many different jobs. He completed most of an Asian Studies degree at Murdoch University in Perth, which he completed in 1988 at LaTrobe University, along with a Dip Ed, after which he moved up to the Chewton Bushlands.

His first experience of this area was in 1975 when he was taken to visit David and Buffy Wallace who lived in the settlement at the end of Madigans Road, just over the hill from Pye Rankine's place on the northwest corner of the Bushlands subdivision.

A post and beam framed mudbrick house, Charles fell in love with it. He also fell in love with the scrubby regrowth bush and the quality of light and sound here.

In 1989, he received a loan from the state government's self-build scheme and bought the block at Lot 26 in Dishpan



Gully Road. While the loan seemed generous (\$55,000 to purchase land and build a house, with an interest rate of 3 per cent, indexed at CPI and repayments pegged at 25 per cent of the borrower's income),

it would not go far if new, conventional materials were used. However, as Charles said: 'Levelling a space to make room for a house leaves a big pile of dirt.

Perfect. A no brainer. Use it to build my house. All the dirt came out of here ... It is good clay.'



Footings for Charles' muddie nearly complete at the start of August 1989.



The best test for a brick, Charles said, 'is to drop it. If it shatters, don't use it. If it breaks in half use it as two bricks.' The idea is that 'if it stays there it is finished ... It is not going anywhere. Mudbrick is very forgiving. You can make it pretty or just leave it pretty rough. You can render it and hide your mistakes or point the bricks to outline the courses.' This was how Charles approached his mudbrick making and laying. So the build began.

Charles has many stories of concrete strip footings being poured in the winter of 1989, the frame being raised in December, and in January 1990, of a working bee, complete with barbecue, beer and family. Most

of the 2500 bricks used for the whole house were made that weekend, with two moulds, each of which made four bricks, while a constant stream of wheelbarrows ran from the mud pit. Only 300-400 more bricks were needed.

The design went through several changes. The drafts person, 'quite a stylish young woman', Charles remembers, came out to the muddie site wearing stiletto heels, it was observed, for discussions. The timber for the frame was delivered one afternoon and Charles rode a bicycle uphill all the way to help unload ('I hadn't ridden a bicycle for years and haven't ridden one since'). It was not until a few weeks later that, with help

from his dad, the timber was moved and stacked. All the timber except, that is, the large quarter tonne beam that was cut to make the two spans in the middle of the building: one of four metres, the other five metres. Those beams could not be moved. Then, with all the posts up and everything braced, help came in the form of two friends who were both partially sighted. The beams were carried into the house and raised using pulleys, the main difficulty being to get them high enough. Next came the roof, with Charles' mum Naomi handing up sheets of roofing iron. After that came the walls.

Antoinette Birkenbeil first visited the Bushlands in January 1990 when



Framing likewise four months later.



And roofing after that ... approved by canine inspector Sam.



Lois Affleck exiting the sleeping loft.



Grandson Jhet waiting for dinner.



Charles and Jim Coad creating soundscape for *Trace* for the 2013 Castlemaine State Festival.

she came to help her friend Charles make his mudbricks. She had no idea of the immensity of the task of building a whole house, even though she hoped to one day do it herself, which was a good reason to come along to the building day. Little did she—or Charles—know that, in the future, she would move into this house as Charles' wife.

Charles began camping in his house on 27 April 1990, just one year after starting the build. One wall was missing. The doors were not hung but just propped in place. The windows were in and the slate floor was laid. The piano was brought in through the missing wall and placed at the end of the living space. Slowly, over the next couple of years, the house took shape and, in time, a certificate of occupancy was granted.

The rich cultural atmosphere of Castlemaine has provided many musical associations. Over the years Charles has worked as an arranger or performed as a musician for bands, orchestras and many other shows, including Allan Watson's Jazz Band, Steve Murphy's Castlemania and the stunning cabaret-style orchestra, The Flaming Flamingos, at the opening of the 2009 biennial Castlemaine State Festival.

Charles has accompanied performers such as Jan Wozitsky (aka Bill Smith, formerly of The Bushwackers) in his critically acclaimed show about the Australian experience of the Gallipoli campaign, *Lest We Forget*, talented jazz singer Suzie Dickinson, and puppeteer and storyteller Peter Fernon. He has composed music for actor and

playwright David Watson, and has been musical director for the successful Three is a Crowd production company at Castlemaine's Phee Broadway Theatre for *The Little Shop of Horrors*, *25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* and *Lucky Stiff*.

A rich life, embedded in the sound and light of the bushlands, in a



Spring thyme.

house that sits well on its hill: mud walls that are not rendered inside, clerestory windows, huge timbers, a slate floor, a pergola on the north and the whole surrounded by wildflowers in spring. This place has adapted to life's changes. Handcrafted, homemade does not please everyone, but skills are learnt and an appreciation of the idea that not everything must be bought, much can be recycled and many things can be given new purpose is passed on. Such is the way of life for Charles Affleck and Antoinette Birkenbeil.



Roland Moswick's story

'75 '76 '77 '78 '79 '80 '81 '82 '83 '84 '85 '86 '87 '88 '89 '90 '91 '92 '93 '94 '95 '96 '97 '98 '99 '00 '01 '02 '03 '04 '05 '06 '07 '08 '09 '10 '11 '12 '13 '14 '15

THE LEGENDARY ROLAND, knight errant of Charlemagne's court, rode a horse, carried an indestructible sword and battled giants. As well, he made himself heard by using an unbreakable horn.

A horn is something our Roland does not need to draw attention to what he does. He has made himself heard in Castlemaine through the work he does at the Mount Alexander Community Information Centre. As well, his bike serves him better than a horse, and the hills he rides each day are just as daunting as any mediaeval giant.

Roland bought his place on Lookout Ridge Road on 11 March 1995 and has lived there permanently for the last thirteen years. He considers it one of the best things he ever did in his life. When he first saw it he said, *'That's it'*, and it is.

Roland Moswick, protester and pacifist, came from a German Polish background. He lived first in Sydney, but left there in 1972 to avoid conscription to Vietnam, and the possibility of being penalised for his activist role during the 1971 South African Springbok Rugby Team tour.

He moved to Melbourne, where he lived for a time in Albert Park within sight of Station Pier, the very spot where his family had disembarked from Europe to begin their life in Australia. This sometimes led him to

feel a bit like a displaced person who viewed Melbourne as a kind of labour camp. While he worked at a variety of jobs in the city, Roland continued to yearn for a simpler life, such as he had encountered on his travels. Although he bought his house in 1995, he was, for a while yet, just a weekender.

Two events brought about a change. One was the catastrophe of 11 September 2001 in the USA, the other the news that he was about to become a parent.

The prospect of Australia becoming involved in yet another war and the thought of raising a child in the city were enough to motivate him to make a move. How far could one go under the circumstances? The Chewton Bushlands seemed far enough.

After relocating to this area, Roland was employed by IGA in Castlemaine, where he worked for several years doing various jobs, including product manager. But he was always filled with a desire for change and, eventually, he voluntarily disengaged from the mainstream economy and swore that he'd 'never work for



Roland's house, one of the nine original stone cottages.



The original stone cottage verandah.

a capitalist again'. Since making that decision, he has been a volunteer for the Mount Alexander Shire, working in community services.

When he lived in Melbourne he had become familiar with the Bushlands area through friends who had settled just south of the Bushlands. In 1995, while looking for what is now Ray Lindstrom's property, which was up for sale, he saw another 'For Sale' sign at Lot 39, Lookout Ridge Road. And so began, at that moment, a new chapter in Roland's life.

In his earlier travels Roland had spent time in India and Nepal. On these adventures he realised that one doesn't necessarily need very much in order to live a fulfilled life. Some of his happiest moments were spent trekking through the mountains of Nepal where one could travel for days in the peace and quiet, rarely encountering any sign of modernity. When he saw the house on Lot 39 he

was reminded of those moments, and as he looked about at the surrounding scenery, with Mount Alexander in the distance, he could almost imagine it covered with snow, and the house and its accompanying carved tree, a red box eucalypt, as a Nepalese abode. The tree even had a plinth at its base, much like those seen in Nepal, placed that way in order for the porters to take rest with their burden balanced behind them.

Once he went inside the house, what was there not to like about its spiral staircase, stone walls and efficient utility area? It took only a matter of days of negotiation and the house became his. The house itself is one of those built by Brian Parsons. We don't know if Brian ever went to Nepal, but it seems likely that when building a house that is constructed primarily of the materials that are

immediately at hand, there is a naturalness about the final product that lends itself to its environment in a way not found when using other means.

As you can see from the plan on page 25, the house is made of stone. It is set on a 15 centimetre thick solid concrete base that is approximately 7 x 10 metres in size. The 35 centimetre thick walls are built of local stone and slate, and the hardwood beams support a sloping galvanised iron roof. Inside, it is fitted, as were each of the Parsons houses, with a gas stove, gas hot water service, stainless steel sink, approved septic system, shower recess and a potbelly stove.

Access to the second floor is via a custom-built spiral staircase. Since moving in, Roland has made a

number of improvements and upgrades, including the creation of walls and paving on the exterior.

Like many of us who live in the Bushlands, Roland is fond of the solitude to be found there, its wildlife and its rugged natural beauty. He pumps his water up by hand

because he enjoys doing so, just as he enjoys collecting and chopping his own wood and riding the roads on his bike.

Originally, he wanted to buy all three of the surrounding lots and close off all but the entrance to his own place, but the cost of doing so was too much. When John Richardson came and built on Lot 40, Roland quickly became used to



Roland Moswick.



'You may watch for eagles': from the top of the Bushlands, looking east past the red box Nepalese abode.

having a neighbour. John arrived with an idea: the possibility of connecting to the electricity grid. This would have been financially impossible for Roland to do on his own, but with John paying his third and a connection to Lot 38 also being part of the deal, it became manageable. These are the only properties in the Bushlands on mains power.

For a brief time, this part of the Chewton Bushlands was advertised as Mountview Estate. A picture of Roland's house was used in the advertisement at Cassidy's Real Estate office in Castlemaine and in an article in the *Age* real estate section of 18 November 1978.

Reference is made in that article to twelve building sites from which 'You may watch for eagles ... [and the] views are tremendous ... You may look from Mt Lofty in the east past Mt Alexander [a]round to Harcourt and Maldon, to Daylesford on the southwest and Mt Macedon due south. The north westerly vista extends even to the Pyrenees more than a 100 kilometres away.'

At that time you could have all this for \$12,000 to \$15,000 for an empty block or, for one with a stone house on it, the cost was between \$38,000 to \$42,000. As well as Lot 39 there were Parsons-built houses on Lots 27 and 29.

Today, every spring, summer and early autumn, there are regular sightings of eagles, hawks and falcons soaring overhead during the breeding and nesting season, and perching on the tall timbers nearby.

As to whether the red box in front of the house was actually carved by a native hand, no one is certain. It is not hard to imagine that this particular spot may well have been used by the Aborigines to view the happenings in the surrounding countryside. What is beyond doubt is that the small stone tools found here indicate that this place has been used as a platform for viewing the surrounding countryside since long before our time.



Kim Windsor & Mark Carter's story

'75 '76 '77 '78 '79 '80 '81 '82 '83 '84 '85 '86 '87 '88 '89 '90 '91 '92 '93 '94 '95 '96 '97 '98 '99 '00 '01 '02 '03 '04 '05 '06 '07 '08 '09 '10 '11 '12 '13 '14 '15

FROM THE OTWAYS TO THE STRZELECKI RANGES, Kim and I had been looking for a place in the country for a few years, without success. We even went to a workshop to learn about building a straw bale house. Luckily, we found our place in the Bushlands before those skills got road tested. An old friend from Castlemaine knew that a lot was up for sale and suggested we visit. We did a fortnight before its scheduled auction.

We were immediately attracted to it: 7 kilometres from Castlemaine, which was on the recently upgraded trainline to Melbourne, it was in the bush but close to a decent-sized regional town, off grid and it had plenty of room for friends to stay. Our lot sits on the edge of the Bushlands, abutting cleared land on its southern boundary. A rocky hill (smaller than its neighbours), which rises in the middle of the block, is surrounded by gold dust wattle, coffee bush, stringy bark and box, all managing to thrive in rock hard mudstone, clay and a bit of granite that falls away on all sides and allows us as much garden as we chose to create.

The north-facing house is protected from stronger winds at the level of the tree canopy and has views over the distant canopy to the northwest.

The block has changed hands a number of times since subdivision. Brian Parsons sold our lot in June 1980 to Ian and Lynette Protheroe. In July 1986, Ivan and Julie Muhar bought it from them, and they sold to Julianne Hallinan in December 1988. Michael Cartwright and Shona Nunan were the next to own the block before they sold it to us in August 2007.

Michael and Shona, really creative metal workers and sculptors, constructed four buildings in around 2000: a steel and glass house with a shipping container bursting from its south side, a warp-shaped corrugated iron studio, a six metre cube that served as a workshop and another shipping container transformed into a guest bungalow, all unique spaces filled with natural light.

We couldn't have anticipated how this place would change our lives. It's given us space to slow down, to share time with neighbours, to rub up against nature and to make things. We also couldn't have anticipated what a steep learning curve it was going to be, attempting to find some answers to those endless

questions: How does a water pump work? What's the least exhausting way to chop firewood? How easy is it to blunt a chainsaw? Is it really possible to cook things evenly in a wood combustion stove? How much sun does it take to heat the water for a shower? Did spilt battery acid burn those holes in your pants?

Some questions were easier to answer than others. After years of drought we put in an extra water tank just in time for those drought-breaking rains and, a couple of years later, another to secure supply to our vegie beds and fruit trees. Digging, grading and lining the pad for the new tank was our first opportunity to get some blisters and all-of-body muscle cramping. Next came earthworks for a dam, with swales to take water across the block—a lesson in taming water flows.

There was a fifty:fifty chance that the clay at the bottom of the hole would hold water—if it rained. When it did, we learnt that sinking a whole hay bale into the water is considerably more than what is required to encourage a mini ecosystem but just enough to become a maxi methane generator.

Having dealt with water, we then got onto temperature. When you're cold you can't just turn on the heater and expect to be warm five minutes later. When you're not cold—months, actually, years, before you get cold—





A shading solution to the enormous north facing windows materialised as a massive eave extension.

the switch you turn on is that of the chainsaw. This object, which can take off a limb in the blink of an eye, has shifted from being the stuff of horror movies to just another tool in the shed. To better retain the warmth, we had local metal worker Andy Bull install a 25 metre length of theatre curtain track so we could hang our four metre high curtains.

If the winters are cold, the summers can be heat strokingly hot, which we felt especially initially, as the buildings had little ventilation. Because it was a necessity, a summer shading solution to the enormous north facing windows took months—well, years, really—of investigation

before a massive eave extension materialised. We engaged Nick Cartwright (no relation to Michael), a builder who likes a challenge, to install flywire screen doors, including a sliding one 4 x 2 metres, and then weatherise all the buildings.

It must be said that, year by year, increased global warming will make living here way more challenging. Our collective failure, so far, to urgently cut our carbon emissions to zero, as the climate modelling shows us is necessary to avoid catastrophic warming, means the climate of central Victoria will, in a few short decades, be more like that of outback New South Wales.

While working out the logistics of living here, you get to look around at the amazingly diverse plants and wildlife with which we share this place.

What once looked to us like incredibly harsh, bare land comes alive with fungi and orchids, is traversed by echidnas and wallabies and is spun up in webs of gold by giant golden orb spiders. Who would want to be anywhere else? Twenty years ago, when visiting those friends living in Castlemaine, we drove through Chewton and I remember thinking: I could never live here. Can you believe that? I can hardly believe it myself.

— MARK CARTER



Glen Harrison & Olwyn Jones' story

'75 '76 '77 '78 '79 '80 '81 '82 '83 '84 '85 '86 '87 '88 '89 '90 '91 '92 '93 '94 '95 '96 '97 '98 '99 '00 '01 '02 '03 '04 '05 '06 '07 '08 '09 '10 '11 '12 '13 '14 '15

IT'S SAID THAT YOU don't choose a house, the house chooses you, and there's no better example of this than our house.

Towards the end of 2008, Glen and I were heading up the road on the way to see our long-time friend Steve Charman. Although tempted by the idea of buying a country property, we were not in the market for a house. If we were, why else would we drive straight past an open for inspection sign by a bushy driveway? But something, perhaps curiosity, made us stop, back up and drive in—and the rest is history.

For Glen, it was meant to be. He was ready to semi-retire, sell up his

home in Pascoe Vale and to make the ultimate tree change. I, being still tied to the city, would have to be content with a weekender in the goldfields. No complaints about that.

Our property had once been part of a Crown grant to a John Henry Thomas of Hunter Street, Chewton, the grant being made on 8 February 1945. The land was comprised of many Crown allotments that were his to a depth of 50 feet (according to the Title paperwork), so I am assuming it was purchased with mining in mind. The total grant covered a little over 44.5 hectares, which included the land west of us, apart from that portion that was once Fitzzy's place, towards Golden Point Road and north of the cemetery. The cost was equivalent to

\$110 today. The acreage was sold four more times before two lots, north of O'Hallorans Road down the Golden Point Road end, were removed from the original title in 1976.

In 1977 the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission served a notice relating to the compulsory acquisition of land, a 6 x 93 metre strip at the western end of the cemetery. The transfer occurred on 2 May 1978. Finally, on 23 September 1980, our lot in Sparks Road (then Cemetery Road) was separated from the larger holding. A further 4.85 hectares was split from the original grant on 4 October 1988. As far as I know, the rest is intact and is made up of twenty-two lots in total.

We like to think that the first owners of our property, Eric and



Beth Ibbitson, really enjoyed the eight years they spent here. We have been reliably informed that they built the mudbrick home. Having been potters, I guess they knew a thing or two about clay. The Ibbitsons were the pioneers, and all who have come here have benefited from their hard work.

The land changed hands five more times before Glen became the seventh owner of this beautiful property. Our aim from the start was to improve habitat by weeding, planting and encouraging indigenous plants, which would in turn entice native fauna. Introducing nesting boxes has accelerated this. We now have prime wildlife real estate, with comfy homes available for sugar gliders, phascogales, parrots, pardalotes and microbats, but the word is out and spaces are limited. Most creatures are good tenants, but when a colony of bees

60 Sparks Road

moved into a phascogale box it was quite a battle for Glen to evict them.

With good rains, the shrubs and trees have thickened and the understorey now offers excellent habitat, but when we first came here, it was dry and sparse (the drought was yet to break), so we decided to introduce more indigenous species, such as a couple of gold dust wattles. These we protected with wire and diligent weeding, and watered and monitored them for many months. Came spring, it slowly dawned on us that our block was already covered with healthy, mature specimens: hundreds of them were erupting into flower all around us. Live and learn.

One of the biggest challenges is gorse with which we conduct an ongoing battle. Slowly, painstakingly, Glen has removed every remnant of this weed from the property and

surrounding fencelines. It's no easy job, as the gorse defiantly springs back time and time again, often from long-dormant seeds. But every week through the growing season, without fail, he goes on gorse patrol, doing a lap around the block and treating any gorse that appears to be intent on resurrecting itself. It might as well lie down and die now, because it has no home here.

Whether it is discovering new orchids each spring or identifying another bird to add to the dozens we've listed, this place is our paradise. It's now officially 'Land for Wildlife' and, through Trust for Nature, the land has been covenanted, ensuring its protection into the future.

Whenever people ask if he has any regrets about moving to the country, Glen's answer is always the same: 'Only one regret—I wish I'd done it sooner.'

Thank you, Sparks Road, for choosing us to take care of you.

— OLWYN JONES



Hannah Nicholas & Tim Purdie's story

'75 '76 '77 '78 '79 '80 '81 '82 '83 '84 '85 '86 '87 '88 '89 '90 '91 '92 '93 '94 '95 '96 '97 '98 '99 '00 '01 '02 '03 '04 '05 '06 '07 '08 '09 '10 '11 '12 '13 '14 '15

THE IDEA OF BUYING a small house in the suburbs filled us with dread. We had dreams and a lifestyle we were chasing. All we wanted was to be nestled on several acres of bush surrounded by kangaroos, wallabies, endangered frogs, indigenous flora and a friendly community, to have an internet connection and be not too far from Melbourne, just in case we got a bit of cabin fever. Not too much to ask, we thought.

We were renting on the Mornington Peninsula at the time and knew we had zero chance of fulfilling this goal there, given our meagre savings and the cost of real estate in the area. So we began to look further afield. Having spent much time in Castlemaine visiting family and enjoying the area, that was the logical choice. The day we first drove into the Chewton Bushlands to look at a piece of land, we knew we had found where we wanted to live. Stunning orchids graced the undulating hills, crimson rosellas lit up the box ironbark forest and a lone swamp wallaby warily observed us from a distance.

When researching the Chewton Bushlands Association website we found stories detailing a colourful community of like-minded people and a rich history. It was settled. We wanted to become Chewton

Lot 1

We still don't know a great deal about the history of our house yet, but we couldn't be happier. The bottom corner of the block, just below the dams, has some fertile land that was once used as a flower farm, evident in the occasional non-native flower

Bushlanders, but we soon found that buying a plot of land and building a house was going to be near impossible due to the stringent planning controls. We needed an existing house.

It took a while, but eventually, we bought our first home on Sparks Road.

reaching up from the earth and the decaying signs we've found around the place from time to time. Some of our neighbours have relayed stories of talented artists and musicians residing here. It's a place that feels conducive to creativity.

Misty morning in the Bushlands.





We've been living here for two years now and still feel as if we're on holidays. How can one not be inspired by these surrounds?

In the morning, when the curtains are pulled back, the sun's soft yellows and oranges enchantingly filter through the gum leaves, kangaroos graze unfazed near the house, the endangered Bibron's toadlets call out to one another and the yellow-tailed black cockatoos raucously devour vegetation and dance a prehistoric dance. We've been living here for two years now and still feel as if we're on holidays. How can one not be inspired by these surrounds?

It hasn't been all beer and skittles though. Relocating a feisty tiger snake that came through the front door one

hot evening was a challenge. We have since installed a fly screen door. Living off grid requires a little extra work, such as firing up the generator on frosty mornings when the solar power is running low. We use gas sparingly, regularly check water tanks and periodically top up solar battery fluid levels. For all things plumbing, electrical, structural and mechanical, Google has become our best friend.

The people here are friendly. Everyone respects one another's space, but are always willing to lend a hand when needed. There's a

community fireguard during bushfire season, weeding days, social gatherings and a shared respect for the Bushlands and the fauna that inhabit it. For any community to flourish there must be renewal, and Bushlands newbies such as us are enthusiastically welcomed by people old and new to the area.

All of us are merely short-term caretakers of this beautiful piece of country we call home. Once we've gone there'll be more newbies, more renewal, more history, but we don't plan on going anywhere else any time soon.

Hannah and the non-native wildlife.

Don't fence me in.





Heavy rains break the drought in 2010. PHOTO: STEVE CHARMAN