

Coochie Alan's Beginning

By Alan Marshall 20th October 2019

I was seven years old when I first laid eyes on the beautiful beaches of Coochiemudlo Island, or Coochie Mudlo Island as it was spelt then, in 1968. Our old timber boat had run aground on the big bank which separates Coochie from Victoria Point. So my parents decided to go for walk while we waited for the tide to rise. We had been told by various people that there is no land for sale on the Island, given the circumstances my parents decided let's have a look. We found a road which was semi straight dirt road (Elizabeth Street) followed it to what we now know as Morwong Beach. On the way we found a For Sale sign which as a youngster reminded me of an old sign out of the Wild West movies. It was a piece of old wood which was crooked and decayed with details you could only just read. Little did I know or expect that this would be the begging of a 50 year connection.

Childhood: where I was brought up; childhood memories.

Born in Rockhampton this was due to the fact my parents were travelling fashion sales people travelling to the country areas. We spent a year at Fairfield with my grandmother while my parents were running a fish and chip shop at Stones Corner. My father Norman injured his back some years ago when working on the cane fields in the far north. The lifting of cane bails, and the loss of an army mate had a huge impact on his physical and psychological well being. Shifted to Lota in 1966 and then shifted to Macleay Island in 1967. The land was in Perulpa Bay which was beautiful at high tide but a mud bath at low tide. My mother went back to nursing during the week and I attended Russel Island State School where the whole school was in one room grades 1 to 7. As mentioned above my parents bought the block of land on the corner of Elizabeth and Erobin Street in mid 1968 and latter bought the block behind as well which was the corner of Erobin and Orange Grove Street. The land was over grown so my father spent several months removing trees and undergrowth so as to have access the land and have enough space to put the caravan on which was what we lived in when on Macleay Island for a year. Erobin Street was a winding track with washouts from rain water and large ruts and holes, barely enough room for one car to comfortably travel on.

Arrival on Coochie: year; where living; memories of arrival on Coochiemudlo.

As a complete family we moved to Coochie in the middle of November 1968. There were very few roads that were straight Elizabeth Street and 4 others were the only ones. It was humorous to us then, because in reality we would have been using private property to evade huge pot holes or tree's that was in the middle of the road. In the first few years the only children apart from myself, was my best friend, Gillian Mountwinter and her sister Jessica who did school by correspondence. I went to Victoria point State School. Sadly they left along with their grandmother a few years later including their horse "Diablo" which at the time was the only horse on Coochie. Fond memories of Gillian and myself both riding Diablo together along the beach, such was his beautiful temperament.

To get to the Island in 1969 there were no ferries during the week except weekends. So my father would take my mother to work and myself to school in an open timber dingy with a 6HP Seagull outboard. It was such an adventure although when the wind was strong it was challenging. In 1970 Bill Flynn who was the owner of Katandra Holiday units, began using Dick Whitehall's Ferry ("The Kooraloo") during the week once in the morning at 07:15 and once in the afternoon from Victoria Point at 4pm, this was progress It felt strange being the

only school pupil on the Ferry however I quickly began to know everybody. On weekends Dick would run the ferries from 8am until 5pm by himself no deck hands in those days. However a lot of kids and adults would often be up in the wheelhouse conversing so depending on who was closest to the ropes would tie up at the jetty. Once in my early teens it became a done thing you would tie up an experience we all grew up with. Dick Whitehall was ex Navy during WW II in the Pacific, and like most returned vets would not talk much about his experiences in the Pacific. However there would be the very occasional times when I might be on the Ferry by myself talking with old Dick as many of us would. Something in the news may have come up about WW II which would at times prompt conversation.

I'm not embarrassed to say he could have me in tears as he quietly mentioned experience's he had. One such story was the gut wrenching decision to reverse the barge over soldiers in the water in order to save the fully loaded Barge of wounded soldiers on board whilst under enemy fire. The conversations like this would just quietly finish with not another word said other than Dick having another mouth full of beer from his stubby. Like many returned service personal these memories never left them and not everybody would listen. Some people would criticise and others simply laugh and say "that's old Dick Whitehall" more in regards to his drinking habits whilst driving the Ferry which was the norm and accepted practice. For me I could never criticise him as there were many more stories, some not all sad and a hearty laugh could be shared. In my eyes he was a hero, and held in high esteem. Today he has his name on the Pioneers Seats on the front near the jetty park area, a well earned and deserved spot.

My memory of the number of homes on the Island when we arrived was approximately 40 houses and 12 permanents, so it was a very close nit community. Each year more retired folk and families would come to live permanently which ment more land clearing and building of homes.

As time went on I quickly learnt from the locals about the achievements of Doug Morton and the things he built was even as a youngster simply amazing, from the jetties, enclosed swimming pool, and various tracks in the mangroves to access boats etc. He was a WW1 return veteran and an incredibly strong hard worker. I had the honour to meet "Mr Morton" as I addressed him, he and his wife Mary still had a small block and a shed (which still stands today) not far from the farm. It was a meeting I have never forgotten," you've been well brought up young man" he said. I was enthralled we spoke for over an hour, his health wasn't the best but he was taken back that a young person would be interested in an old man. He described how certain crops would grow well such as Sugarcane, Bananas, and how he built certain things along with the challengers he faced doing these things on his own. I asked him why he still wasn't living here anymore he simply replied "too many people and too many Council rules" we both had a hearty laugh. He said to me we will meet again and talk more, sadly that time never came he passed away a few months later. How does one forget the meeting of a true pioneer, a moment in time of conversation that has always remained close to my heart.

The Farm and The Army DUKW

My parents sold the two blocks of land in Elizabeth/Orange Grove to put a deposit on 5 acres of land on the corner of Eprapah Street and Victoria Parade which had beautiful rich red soil. The house was made up of three old army huts joined together. After living in a small caravan for two years, the small house felt like a palace. There was only enough space around the house to walk around the rest of the land had to be cleared by chainsaw, brush

hook, axe, and brute strength. My father discovered half an acre of orange tree's which were saved and produced beautiful fruit once all the lantana and "Elliot's curse" (wild Violet) was removed. We learnt that Mr Elliot had brought cattle to the Island by swimming them across from Victoria Point, planted the Wild Violet much to the disgust of Doug Moreton and others as it had so many sticky little leaves that would cling to everything and of course you would spend hours removing it from your clothes. It was said to be "good for cattle", as others disagreed it became labelled as "Elliot's Curse".

The Orange trees were called Washington Navels, the fruit inside was perfect unfortunately we could not sell them due to the speckled brown patches on the on the skin. If it wasn't bright orange then it was no good. We thought they were wonderful and so did our neighbours.

Once the farm was acquired the real work began, for me as well. The first piece of machinery was a walk behind Howard rotovator which was excellent for turning the soil though hard work keeping it the two handle bars straight or stopping it from rearing up when a stump or a large root was discovered. When other people herd of the machine they would hire my father and I to clear land to assist in getting rid of long grass and rid the soil of noxious weeds. As time went on the reality of the work load was increasing both on the farm and privately. So a tractor was bought at an auction, which was Parkinson's Nursery. Five acres between Mt Gravatt and Coopers Plains which of course is all under housing now. The tractor was a grey Massey Ferguson 35 diesel which over time everybody on the Island referred to it as "The Little Fergy". We purchased a rear slasher and blade which made a big difference in clearing the farm. However this also increased the demand being the only tractor on the island to clear land and asked to keep it mowed which became a business, regrettably not a profitable one.

My father meant well, but he was always afraid to charge too much, sadly when machinery broke down it often meant money made money spent. With the work the need for fuel was a frequent challenge which required the need to bring it over from the mainland. Bill Phillips was bringing fuel over in his fishing boats, however it wasn't always when it was needed. My father through the help of an ex service man Ivan Barr at Wellington Point (The BP Service Station is still there owned by his son's) convinced my parents the best thing would be an "Army DUKW¹" or latter simply called "The Duck". Mr Barr was an ex-Army DUKW driver in the Pacific and knew everything there was to know about Army DUKW'S It was bought from Cannon Hill Army Auctions in 1972. As the Island didn't have town water only tanks the first DUKW rusted out after several years.

The second Army DUKW was bought and transported from Melbourne. It had been used as a rescue vessel so was painted yellow compared to the first one which was jungle kaki green. The DUKW attracted a lot of attention some not so good, however it was an amazing machine for its age. It had an internal compressor which allowed it to pump and deflate tyres as required depending if it was a road surface or soft sand. The amphibious vehicle carried fuel and gas, furniture and building materials. I'm proud to say such building as the Church and the Shop had materials brought from the mainland in order to keep things going.

Church land was cleared by my father and I, to his credit it was all done voluntarily and we were proud of that. Reverend Robert Ament and his dear wife always made sure we were well nourished and feed with beautiful fresh cut sandwiches and cold fluids. I was 14 at the

¹ Amphibious truck

time so using chainsaws and driving the tractor to the tip dragging tree's all became second nature, until someone complained, not about the tree's being dragged to the tip it was the under aged driver, such was progress.

Discussion: Alan Marshall with Keith Stebbins 26.10.18

Childhood: where bought up; childhood memories

Life on the family farm:

Alan was bought up on a five-acre farm on the corner of Deanbilla St and Victoria Pde West Coochiemudlo Island. His parent bought the farm in 19XX. Alan's father cleared the farm by hand, but there was remaining some Washington Navel Orange trees. The oranges were delicious but were hard to sell as there were brown flakes on the oranges skin. The family planted rows of passionfruit vines and a pattern where there was a 'picking' row between double rows of vines. The farm had a 100-foot-deep well where water was collected each day. However, the water would run out after one hour. They also grew watermelons and Queensland Blue pumpkins on their farm. Alan's mother was a registered nurse.

The farm was sold to be a church camp 41 years ago in 1977, but the church camp was never built and the land is still vacant today, but there is a stand of Guavas on the land.

Alan bred German Shephard dogs that he took to dog shows. He also has the model of a duck that his parents gave him as a gift as a child. He learnt to play the piano accordion as a child and still has his piano accordion.

Alan's father bought an army duck from the Camp Hill Army disposal stores after WW2 and bought fuel and gas to the island to sell to residents. The Underwoods also sold fuel and gas on the island as there was no electricity and residents had generators. Alan remembers how each generator had its own distinctive sound and so he knew whose generator was starting up on the island.

Their first army duck rusted quickly as it was hard to wash the salty sea water off the duck after the sea trip. When water was connected to the island, Alan's father decided to buy a new Army duck, but had to get it from Melbourne as there were none available in Queensland. It was transported by truck from Melbourne to Brisbane. The Army ducks were 2.5-ton Army Blitz tanks with a hull around them. The mechanic at Wellington Point was good at servicing their Army ducks.

Jones Sewing Machine owned by Evelyn Marshall 26/12/2018

The Jones pedal machine was originally from the outback and then transferred to Russel Island for approximately 20 years. It was bought by Evelyn Marshall in the early part of 1972 along with a Lister diesel generator. The sewing machine has experienced all modes of transport that many people may not have even experienced in a life time.

The dear folk that it was bought from had lived in outback Queensland on a farm, which indicated the machine had travelled a long distance by truck and train, another truck and then onto a barge to Russel Island. When my Mum bought the two items, the frequency of barge and ferry services was nothing like it is today. A barge might come to Coochie once a month, and the availability of utilities was scarce.

In the good old days there used to be three fishing families with large trawlers that moored regularly at Victoria Point. Peter's brothers were a well known, especially the trawler they had called "The Tempest". Because it was often moored near the Southern boat ramp, fish could be bought from them from time to time. More importantly they were a young energetic group who were game to tackle most things. My mum innocently asked when buying some fish one afternoon, if they knew of anybody who could transport a generator and a sewing machine. They all laughed exchanging ideas as to who would carry the sewing machine etc.

In the end they kindly offered saying "it would be different to hauling in fish." Using their boom net holders they lifted each item onto the trawler, and I can always remember their reaction of the crew when they first saw the sewing machine and conversation's that was created about their memories of their grandparents having a peddle sewing machine.

Upon arrival at the Coochie jetty my father managed to reverse the tractor the full length of the jetty with only millimetres to spare, to get close enough for the booms to unload the generator and the dear old sewing machine. At the time the sewing machine had its own fixed wooden frame hence it had a degree of bulkiness. Despite enduring the rough swell and being transported at the back of a tractor over rough roads to a nice level floor, despite all the travels it worked beautifully. Mending, sewing, patching, it did it all, although I have to say my poor old mum's legs would ache from the peddling.

Once the power came to Coochie the poor old machine paled in comparison to the electric sewing machine and no aching legs for Mum. My mother didn't have the heart to sell it, decides "who would buy that old thing". Thankfully I was glad she donated it to the Historical Society in the late eighties. I had not seen the machine for over 25 years when I would enquire about it over the years no one could tell me, so to see it again brought tears of joy and great memories. Thank you to all who have cared for it over the years.

Regards,

Alan Marshall



Photo of toy Army Duck Alan was given as a child, replica of his Dad's real Army Duck



Alan's mother's sewing machine donated to the Heritage Society