

Vale Joy Coleman – family, orchard, art, community

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Joy Coleman

HASTINGS resident Joy Coleman passed away on 21 August after a short illness. She was 87. A memorial service was held at Holy Trinity Anglican church, Hastings, on Tuesday 29 August with the Reverend Tim Anderson officiating. Joy's children, Cathie and Rohan, were responsible for the eulogy which was to a large extent based on her book "Days of Joy", published in 2003. Tributes were given by her nephew, Michael Nolan, and niece, Kaye Campbell, and three long-time friends: Patsie Coates, Lois Carter, and Shirley Davies. There were also family readings by Joy's granddaughter Charlotte Coleman and her father, Rohan. This obituary is drawn from the contributions of the various speakers, and from Joy's autobiography.

Regular readers who turn to an obituary expect to find a page, perhaps two. This is an exception; it is both a tribute to Joy Coleman and a local history piece. Because Joy was connected to a number of the district's pioneer families (Unthinks, Webbs, Colemans), and with so much material in her splendid autobiography, the temptation to extend this obituary was too great. Although the article might be longer than expected, I'm sure you will enjoy it; the story about the arrival of the green van conveying the school dentist can't help but raise a smile.

EILEEN Joy Webb (always known as Joy) was born on at the Somerville Hospital on 2 October, 1929. She was the youngest of three daughters (Marie, Diana and Joy) born to orchardists Ken and Eileen Webb (nee Unthank).

The Webbs

George Octavius Webb, a government shorthand writer, retired to Somerville, found clay on his property which was suitable for ceramics, and established the Webb Brick and Tile Company with three of his sons: George, Jack and Ken.

Although a number of local buildings such as the Somerville hotel and the Anglican church feature Webb bricks, the manufacture of bricks and tiles was premature and the production process was altered to make agricultural pipes.

Ken enlisted soon after the outbreak of the Great War and his father died during the five years that he was away.

On his return Ken lost no time in exercising his interest in sport, playing both cricket and football and winning a best-and-fairest in the latter in 1920. In subsequent years he became heavily involved in community affairs, holding executive positions on the local council (he was Shire President of the Shire of Frankston and Hastings on two occasions), Rotary and the local branch of the Liberal Party.



Eileen Joy Webb, 1932

The Unthinks

Joy's mother, Eileen, was a great granddaughter of William Unthank who came to Australia in 1853 with his wife, Sarah, and eight of their twelve children.

Sarah died in 1870 and William later married Jane Twyford, a widow with five children. They settled in Somerville and started a long tradition of farming and orcharding through their descendants.

When he was nearly seventy and she was forty-six, William and Jane were blessed with twins – Joseph and Lydia – making nineteen children between them.

Accordingly, even today, when meeting someone for the first time in the Western Port area, it is wise to exercise a degree of caution; if you are not actually talking to an Unthank then it is more than likely you are meeting a member of the wider family.

One of the twins, Joseph, married Anastacia Hoban and they had six children, one of whom was Eileen Lilian.

In 1921 she married Kenneth Heywood Webb and the couple established an apple orchard in Webbs Lane, Somerville.

Ken gave the property the unusual name of Dhera Doone; he had visited a resort called Dhera Dun in Kashmir and thought it was paradise.



The wedding of Ken Webb and Eileen Unthank, 21 June 1921



Joseph Unthank and his bride Anastacia Hoban, 18 May 1895



Hastings FC premiershipeam team, 1948. The Coleman brothers John (left and Albert (right) circled.



Albert and Joy enjoying a picnic

Young Joy

Photographs of the young Joy show a pretty little girl with dimpled cheeks, dark curls, and very large blue eyes which were the bane of her life.

In later years she liked to recount the story of how an old resident stopped her mother in Somerville one day when she was wheeling the pram containing the latest addition to the Webb family: "Good God," he exclaimed, "she's got eyes like a howl."

Her autobiography reflected an early interest: "I loved drawing pictures and colouring them in with oil pastels. Every year I would desperately wish for a new box. Mum never understood what it would have meant to me to have the pleasure of owning new pastels, straight and pristine, resting in their little cardboard corrugations. Instead, I had to rescue broken ones passed down..."

School Days

Joy began school at Somerville in 1935 and a short cut across the paddocks reduced the long walk.

“Hazards abounded, both real and imaginary. Gomm’s bull was not pleased to have chatting children trudging across his territory, and Rick Unthank’s dog did not take kindly to it either...I was a nervous wreck even before we got to the school gate.”

“Going to school in winter meant getting soaked on the way and sitting in damp clothes all day.

“The only heating was a fireplace in the corner where a dismal little flame struggled and smoked from the wet wood trying to burn. It offered no comfort.

“In summer the room would be airless. Putrid smells of perspiration, chalk dust and old banana skins permeated the room, even with the windows wide open.

“School had a routine which never varied. Monday mornings involved the ritual of falling into line in a rectangle around the flagpole to watch the big boys raise the flag. Thence, to place our hands over our hearts (which often was anywhere from shoulder to stomach) and recite: ‘I love God and my country, I honour the flag, I will serve the King and cheerfully obey my parents, teachers and the law’. We then observed two minutes silence and marched into our respective rooms to stand beside our desks for the morning inspection. Then the teacher looked to see if our hands and nails were clean, and our shoes. We would also have to show our hankies...”

Joy proved to be a good student, generally competing with the son of the local doctor for top marks. In country schools it was not uncommon for the more capable students to lend a hand to those less talented.

“In the senior grades I not only did my own work, but Cousin Barrie’s and his friend Kevin Thornell’s as well. I would write answers on a note that I dropped on the floor. One of them would drop their ruler, scramble under the desk for it, and retrieve my note. That was probably the most devious thing I ever did at school, and it was not even to my benefit.”

While the annual school picnic, held in December at Mothers Beach in Mornington, was a highlight of the year there was a dark cloud.

“The annual visit of the school dentist was the one black spot on my happy school days. I will always remember the feeling in the pit of my stomach as I watched the dreaded van pull into the schoolyard and park under the big gum tree.

“We sat on the shiny seats where we normally ate our lunch, terrified patients awaiting our fate. A school monitor was appointed to take the luckless children, in alphabetical order, to the van. We all had a card with our details on it. As my name started with ‘W’ I could delay the trip of doom for several days.

“Pupils had to carry on at school if the dentist had only filled their teeth, even though they had endured prolonged drilling and holes filled with black amalgam. Pupils who had extractions could go home.

“The normal thing was to hold up your fingers to indicate to classmates the number of teeth that had been taken out. Thin little Alison Currie was the bravest in our class...up went six fingers. I looked on with astonishment and admiration; she was still on her feet and trying to smile.”

Apart from attending school, Joy experienced the many other activities of a young girl growing up in a small country town in Victoria in the 1930’s: Sunday school, the concerts put on by Miss Vesper who taught singing dancing and acrobatics, piano lessons, and winning an award for singing on 3DB’s Amateur Hour.

Ingrained in her memory was the massive bushfire which destroyed a large part of Somerville, including the big hall in the Showgrounds, in March of 1944.

Into the Workforce

After her school days Joy thought she might like to be a mothercraft nurse and, to fill in some time prior to the next intake, she took a job as a nanny in St. Kilda for a family which operated a restaurant which subsequently became The Stokehouse. However she missed the country life and returned home before the year was out.

Various small jobs such as working for a time as the receptionist in the doctor's surgery provided a break from housework and orchard duties.

Then came a phone call from the headmaster at Somerville primary which led to Joy returning to her old school as a student teacher.

This two year appointment was followed by five years working in the office of Poultrymen and Farmers, the produce store in Somerville.



Joy with her sisters Diana (left) and Marie on her wedding day.

Marriage

In 1947 Joy noticed a young man named Albert Coleman playing football for Hastings.

A few weeks later their paths crossed at a dance at Hastings and a romance began.

By this time tennis had become a great interest for Joy, and members of the Coleman family joined Joy and her friends and extended family on days of picnicking and playing tennis.

In 1949 Joy was able to share Albert's excitement as his brother John made his debut with Essendon and went on to kick 100 goals.

Joy and Albert became engaged in 1950 and married in December, 1951. The newly-married couple took up residence at Devon Farm, a fifty acre property, mostly under orchard, on the corner of Coolart and Hodgins Roads.



The wedding party, 1 December 1951.

The house was somewhat rundown so Joy was kept busy furnishing and renovating her first home.

To quote from her book: "It was always said 'If you married an Unthank, you had a paintbrush in your hand for the rest of your life.'"

Renovating, establishing the garden, and helping Albert with the orchard meant that Joy was no longer able to keep her position with Poultrymen and Farmers.

Although tennis remained an interest, Joy was persuaded to take up bowls about this time; as the years went on it absorbed more of her spare time.

In October 1956 Cathie was born at the Hastings Bush Nursing Hospital and in November 1960 Rohan arrived to complete the family.

Orcharding had its ups and downs. In 1959 Albert built a new dam which proved to be a handy spot for the children to cool off as they grew up. Then he had built a coolstore with a capacity of 4,500 cases, only to find that a heatwave in March of that year caused the fruit to fall from the trees with a poor result. (Joy was not unfamiliar with setbacks of this nature; she could recall the loss experienced by her father when a huge hailstorm swept through Somerville in 1935 and again in 1940 when, with the outbreak of war, the main market for the apple growers suddenly disappeared.)



Albert at work in the orchard, wearing a No. 10 Essendon guernsey passed on by John.

However the shed, like the dam, was a good place to cool off on hot days and, when empty, it was a great square dance and party venue.

Then the arrival of the family's Chrysler television set in 1958 put an end to the square dancing evenings as no one wanted to leave this new form of entertainment.

On the Move

By 1961 the family had moved to a new home, Holmwood, built in Victoria Street, Hastings, just in time for Cathie to start school at the nearby primary.

A big change took place in 1967 when Albert decided to sell the orchard and go into vealers. This led to the purchase of Caramar; it was 116 acres in Hendersons Road with an old dwelling.

Twenty acres had been annexed previously and, when the opportunity came to purchase, it was rejoined with the original holding; called Yalinga, it had some good shedding.

The year 1973 can only be described as tumultuous. In April the sudden death of Albert's brother, John, was an enormous shock to the family. Then Joy and Albert sold their home in Hastings and bought View Point on the Esplanade in Mornington which would be more convenient for Rohan's schooling.

To cap it off, beef prices plummeted when the newly elected Whitlam government had not regained the American beef contracts.

For the next decade Albert was forced to work the farm by day and then man the bottle shop at the Dromana Hotel in the evenings.

By 1982 Rohan had finished his schooling and when advice was received that town water was now available at Yalinga, Joy and Albert decided to sell View Point and build a new home on their property.



Joy and her children, Cathie and Rohan

Community Involvement

When he was at kindergarten Rohan's best friend was Stewart Carter who had been born at the Hastings hospital at the same time as Rohan.

His mother, Lois, and Joy formed a close bond which extended right up to Joy's death.

They contributed to many committees and later worked together for over thirty years.

With a small band of mothers, including Patsie Coates who, with Lois, paid tribute to Joy at her memorial service, they set out to build a kindergarten in Hastings.

This was only achieved when Rohan and Stewart were ready for school but many children of subsequent generations have benefitted.

As a group they moved on to the Mothers Club, Brownies, Guides, Scouts, netball, tuckshop, Red Cross, and other community causes.

Joy and Lois worked particularly hard for the Hastings Bush Nursing Hospital and both were nominated for the Hospital Board.

Joy was awarded a Life Governors honour and was instrumental in the formation of a voluntary helpers group – the Pink Ladies – in 1971.

Another of Joy's lifelong interests was the history of her family and the district in which she lived. She was a member of the Hastings-Western Port Historical Society for 44 years, having attended the inaugural meeting at the offices of the then Shire of Hastings on 22 June, 1973.

The process to award Joy a Life Membership was already in train at then time of her death and long time member of the Society, Shirley Davies, spoke at the memorial service.

Her contribution to this Society notwithstanding, it should also be noted that Joy maintained her interest in her "home patch" and was also an active member of the Somerville, Tyabb and District Heritage Society.



Ken and Eileen Webb, taken in Queensland in 1964, just prior to ken's death

Return to the Workforce

After a break of 22 years from the workforce, spent looking after the family and garden, playing tennis, and serving on eight or nine different committees, Joy was successful in her application to become a part-time tour guide at the newly-opened Lysaghts Steel Mill.

She was soon to be joined by her friend Lois Carter and they carried out their duties with distinction for over thirty years.



Joy with personnel from HMAS Cerberus, 1980

Art and the Red Hill Market

In the mid 1960's Joy and several of her friends joined the newly-formed Two Bays Art Group which gave her great enjoyment over many years and later became an interest she shared with Cathie.

Twenty five years as a stall holder at the Red Hill Community Market began in 1975 when the Art Group paid \$1 to hang some paintings on the fence of the tennis court.

After two or three unsuccessful days, the Group dropped out, but Joy decided to continue.

She added collages made from pressed wildflowers to her paintings, then jams and pickles and potted plants.

Albert and her friend Lois helped her with the popular stall.

The Family

By 1982 Cathie had completed her teaching qualification and was living back in Hastings in Carimar (a.k.a. The Swamp).

For some time she taught art at Hastings High School (as it was then known), pausing to marry Marcus Laugier in 1987. Over the next four years two boys, Tate and Mason, were added to the family. Cathie is still teaching art and is an enthusiastic artist.

After leaving school Rohan joined Allan Maw in his earthmoving business just as the golf course construction business was starting to boom.

Eventually Rohan decided to go out on his own and Select Earthmoving was formed.

The first big job was to construct a golf course for a Japanese-backed company in Camden (NSW).

Then in 1993 Select had the opportunity to be involved in a new Peter Thompson-designed course in St. Andrews (Scotland).

It is not hard to imagine the local reaction when a group of Australians, complete with their machinery, rolled up to the home of golf and announced that they were there to build a golf course!



The three Webb sisters in more recent times: Marie, Joy and Diana



A family group at "The Swamp" 1986: Marcus, Joy, Albert, Leisa, Rohan and Cathie (plus Monty)

Meanwhile, Rohan had married Leisa Wharington in 1990 at Peppermint Tree Farm which was at the back of the original property. In 1991 Charlotte was born, followed two years later by Sophie. Leisa, Charlotte and eight-month old Sophie followed Rohan to St. Andrews and lived in Scotland for a time. Then in 1996 Leisa gave birth to Max.

As Carimar and Peppermint Tree Farm are only a short stroll across the paddocks from Yalinga it goes without saying that Joy and Albert saw a lot of their five grandchildren and took great pride in their achievements.

Rohan is still involved in the earthmoving industry.



Joy with her grandchildren in their younger days: Sophie, Mason, Max, Tate and Charlotte

Travel

Joy was an inveterate traveller, heading overseas on two occasions with her friend Lois: to the United States in 1979 and to Europe in 1987.

Then she and Albert took advantage of the opportunity to visit Britain and Ireland when Rohan was undertaking his golf course project in Scotland.

The overseas trips notwithstanding, Joy and Albert used their caravan frequently, travelling around Australia on two occasions (1993 and 1999).

However Wilsons Promontory always remained her favourite destination.

Latter Years

Albert's health began to fail and he passed away in 2009.

Later that year Joy left her home and moved into the Hastings Cove retirement village in Hastings.

Based "in town" Joy was able to find some new interests such as Probus and the Knitting Group which knits caps for premature babies.

She was also involved in fund raising activities in the Village and although she was quite settled there, it would be true to say that her heart never left her beautiful family farm and garden at Yalinga.

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