

## GWLADY BARLOW: HOME-MAKER, PARENTS AND FRIENDS ASSOCIATION TREASURER

### Background



Gwladys (nee Latch) and Fred Barlow and their two children, Jeff and Glenda, came to St Albans in 1949 and stayed until 1964. She was named Gwladys (not Gwladys) after the old Welsh name for reasons that are unclear as her mother was from Dundee in Scotland and her father was from Australia. Fred is remembered as the iconic milkman of the fifties and early sixties doing his pre-dawn deliveries by horse and cart. Gwladys had a less visible public presence, being involved in caring for the home and children and also working in various retail establishments in the town as well as in the first child minding service and contributing to the development of St Albans High School through its Parents and Friends Association.

Gwladys Latch, born in Melbourne on 22 January 1923, to Henry and Nellie Latch, was the third of 6 children. She married Frederick Barlow after a very short courting period of about two weeks, when she was 20 years old, in April 1943. She and Fred had five children: Jeff born in 1944, Glenda in 1945, Steven in 1950, Tony in 1953, and Paul in 1966. At the time of writing both Fred and Gwladys were deceased as were the two youngest boys, Tony and Paul.

### Early Years

As her son Jeff recalls, Gwladys was not one to talk much about herself so not a lot is known about her early life. She grew up in East Brunswick, Brunswick and Fitzroy. She did say that she did not suffer the financial deprivation that she later heard her husband Fred talk about in relation to his own early life. Her mother did not work outside the home. Her father was in paid work most of the time and for a significant period of time also was self employed running his own brass foundry in East Brunswick in a factory behind their house.

#### Menu

[People](#)  
[Photos](#)  
[History](#)  
[Albas](#)  
[Top of Page](#)  
[Home Page](#)

Gwladys did tell Jeff that when she was a child her grandmother on her mother's side came from Scotland to stay with them but she was not made welcome by the father, Henry, and the visit was apparently a disaster with much suffering and tragedy.

Gwladys went to a local 'Central' school that in those days went from grade 1 to grade 8, and in grade 8 most children would have been around 14 years of age and able to leave school. Gwladys's parents had no ambition for their children to go on with their education as they were keen for all of them to contribute to the family finances as soon as they could, so Gwladys left school at the age of 14 and went to work. Like many girls of her generation she did not have the opportunity to develop her intelligence even though she enjoyed school. According to her all the kids left school at the end of grade 8 or earlier. Once she was working she gave her whole pay packet to her mother who gave her a small amount of pocket money to spend. She was also expected to assist with the housework which she continued to do right up into her early adult years, even after she was married and her husband was at war in the navy. Fred once said to Jeff that he thought she was like a domestic servant for her mother. Gwladys spoke of the hard toil that housework was in those days. The laundry was all done by hand, boiling everything in the copper and wringing out the water by hand or with a mechanical wringer, and ironing was done with metal irons that were heated on a wood stove. Floors were scrubbed on hands and knees with soap and cold water.

Gwladys's father ruled the house with a firm hand and she was frightened of him. Corporal punishment was the norm for transgressions for the boys but not for the girls. She was not close to her parents but did feel close to her older brother Jeff, her older sister Gwen and her younger sister Nellie. She spoke about going to work and having to start work at 6.00am and not finishing till 6.00pm, six days a week, with very little time to socialize given all her housework commitments at home. She occasionally went on social outings to the cinema, to dances and to the beach. She had a strict time curfew on her social outings which she dared not disrespect out of fear of her father. She spoke of having a few casual boyfriends, but nothing serious. Jeff remembered her saying how excited all the Australian girls were when the American navy came to town during the war and how they handed out free luxury items, which were not readily available in Australia during the war, to their 'girlfriends'. For Gwladys, getting married was a way out of the enforced drudgery of her family existence and she longed to escape. A husband and children were her pathway to separation from her family of origin as was the case for many women of that generation.

## Marriage

Gwladys and Fred met as teenagers: she was 17 and he was 18. Fred had just joined the navy before war had been declared. When on leave he went to visit his mate Jeff Latch and that's how he met Jeff's sister Gwladys. She was out the front of the house sweeping the footpath. Jeff introduced Fred to his sister and that night they went to a party together. Fred discovered that Gwladys was having her birthday in a couple of days so he gave her a big box of chocolates that cost half his pocket money. Gwladys always used to say that it was her first ever birthday present.

They met again three years later when Fred returned on leave from overseas naval service having corresponded with each other in the meantime. He returned to Australia on the 1st April 1943, was on duty the first two nights in port then went off duty on the 3rd April, and that's when he met Gwladys again. They started to go out together, got engaged on the 7th April 1943 and then married on the 17th April 1943. Jeffrey was born in January 1944 and Glenda in November 1945.



The wedding of Gwladys Latch and Fred Barlow, 1943.

After their marriage Fred went back to war service and Gwladys lived with her parents in Fitzroy. As her father had his own brass foundry the Australian Government co-opted him for

work for the munitions industry and moved him and his family to Tasmania. Gwladys was pregnant with Jeff and he was born in the Hobart General Hospital. When Jeff was a few months old the family was again moved by the Government back to Brunswick and later to a housing commission home in Sunshine where Gwladys lived with her son Jeff, and later, also with her daughter Glenda, in a small, one-room bungalow at the back of her parents' house

## Isolation and Fear

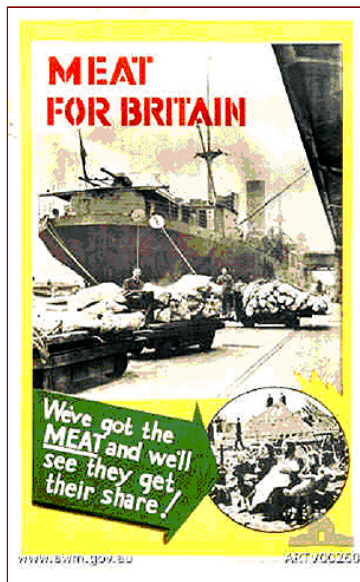
This was not a happy time for Gwladys. Her husband was in active war service fighting the Germans in the Mediterranean Sea (the Evacuation of Crete and the Siege of Tobruk) as well as being involved with protective naval convoys for the British merchant navy in the North Sea and could have been killed at any time. Her elder and closest brother, Jeff, who was also in the navy, was a prisoner of war of the Japanese in Burma and Thailand, having at first been reported as missing in action after the Japanese had sunk his ship, HMAS Perth, in the Java sea in March 1942. Just a short time after his friend Fred (later to become Gwladys's husband) had been transferred from the HMAS Perth to another ship. In fact, the family did not know if Jeff was dead or alive for over a year. She so missed her brother that she called her first-born son, Jeff, after his uncle. In addition, two of her other brothers were in the Australian Army and one of her sisters. There was a constant fear of loss.

Gwladys was frightened like many in Australia at the time. There was fear of Japanese invasion of Australia as Darwin and its port and airfield had been severely bombed in two air raids with horrific damage and loss of life in February 1942 by 242 Japanese planes, followed by nearly 100 other additional air raids on Australia's north and north-west coast between 1942 and November 1943. Gwladys had become pregnant with her first child in April 1943 and was afraid that her first child would be born in an occupied Australia. Additionally, Japanese submarines had been sighted in Sydney Harbour in June 1942. Australia's Prime Minister Curtin was quoted in the Argus newspaper after the first Darwin raids: "The Government regards the attacks as most grave and makes it quite clear that a severe blow has been struck on Australian soil." The fear was so great that people were digging air raid shelters in both private and public gardens and schools in Melbourne.



On the domestic front, during the war, life went on with daily monotony for Gwladys. She did most of the housework for her parents and her younger siblings while living behind their house in the bungalow and also caring for Jeff and later Glenda. Gwladys's father, Henry Latch, who had been wounded in the head in the First World War in France and who had suffered severely from the battles there, was a heavy drinker and prone to occasional violence so there was even fear on the domestic front. The domestic violence she witnessed at home created in her a fierce determination to never experience the same thing in her own marriage.

## Rationing



This was a time of food and clothes' rationing in Australia and her parents used their small garden for growing their own fruit and vegetables and chickens and at one time even had their own sheep: life was simple and basic but very stressed. They would send parcels to her brother Jeff through the Red Cross, there were letters to and from her husband but these were months apart due to the war and the long distances involved. Australian women were also encouraged to support the war effort with knitting and Gwladys did some of that as well as working for a short period of time in a munitions factory. Blackouts were required every evening during the war so that planes (that were anticipated but never came to Melbourne) could not see the towns and bomb them. So every night the blackout blinds had to be drawn.

There were no cosmetics and no nylon stockings. In June 1942 the rationing of clothing and some food began, with the use of ration stamps issued by the Government.



By January 1944, the month Jeff was born, meat rationing had begun and there was also rationing of margarine, tea, coffee, rice, prunes, potatoes, many fresh fruits and vegetables; there were shortages of firewood for heating, cooking and washing and gas was also restricted. This was a very difficult time for many people in Australia but the hardship fell particularly on women with children especially if they had family members in active service. Of course the suffering in Australia was nothing like the horror that millions of European and Asian civilians had to endure as war raged through country after country with the civilian population being a significant target in bombing raids and in troop invasions and of course she knew nothing of the Nazis' 'final solution' and the resulting Holocaust until after the war. Gwladys kept herself busy looking after her

parents' house and caring for her two children. She took fright one day when Jeff was just a toddler and pulled a jug of boiling water onto his arm, scalding it quite badly. Her mother, Nellie Latch, told her that in Scotland they would put raw grated potato on burns so this was done with serious infection and a very sick child being the result, with life-long scarring to his arm. According to Gwladys the doctor was very angry with her and said that her son was dangerously ill with septicaemia and could have died.

### After the War



After the end of the war in Europe, in May 1945, the war with Japan continued till August 1945, when her son Jeff was 19 months old and Gwladys was 6 months pregnant with her second child Glenda. Her husband remained in the Australian Navy till 1947 on ships doing mine sweeping work. This was very dangerous work ridding the south Pacific of war-time explosive mines that the Japanese had laid in harbours and along shipping channels. This ensured that post-war commercial shipping could be secured. He

suffered terribly toward the end of his time in the navy with very bad dysentery, Malaria, and severe eczema over his whole body. Fred said that he flew back to Melbourne from a military hospital in New Guinea in an army plane, sitting on a bucket and covered in calamine paste

over the whole of his body to stop the fluid leaking from the severe eczema. Every time he moved the calamine paste would crack and fluids would leak through his skin.

He spent time at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital for some months after returning to Melbourne from the waters around New Guinea and Gwladys visited him when she could but it was difficult getting from Sunshine to Heidelberg. Like most men who saw dangerous active service Fred returned home at the end of 1947 a changed man. In that time he had seen very little of his wife, his 3-year-old son and his 2-year-old daughter, apart from a few short visits when his ship returned to Australia. Gwladys's brother, Jeff, had returned from his time as a prisoner working on the Thai-Burma railway, having been repatriated in September or October 1945, and on one occasion only, and never again after that, he recounted to her some of his horrific experiences. Jeff remembers Gwladys talking about her brother often, always expressing her love and admiration for him. He was given special food by the Australian Government in order to rebuild his body so badly damaged by lack of appropriate nutrition as a POW of the Japanese. Gwladys noticed how he had secret hiding places for this food which she thought was necessary because the parents did not understand and, in her opinion, would have taken the food for themselves.

She found it very difficult adjusting to these returned servicemen who had been so profoundly impacted both physically and emotionally by their war experiences. As the men did not want to talk about their experiences, she did not really understand the impact the war had had on them. Nor did anyone understand how this impacted the men's relationships with family. And of course, for some considerable time after the war there was still rationing of food and significant shortages of material goods. Life was a hand-to-mouth existence, although Fred had a little money from his war service.

## Reuniting

After being discharged from the Navy on medical grounds in 1947, after 6 years of war service followed by two years minesweeping in New Guinea waters, Fred started work at Smorgon's Abattoir at Brooklyn while Gwladys stayed at home caring for the children. For a while the young family of four were living in the small one-room bungalow at the back of Gwladys's mother's place in Sunshine where Gwladys had been living since the marriage. They then moved to a rooming house, which was a little bigger, in Moonee Ponds, but had to move from there after a few months to protect the children from a cruel landlady and her emotionally disturbed adult son. A friend was living next door so they obtained a very small caravan which they put in the friend's backyard, and the family lived there for a few months. Jeff Barlow still has a memory of the caravan (he was about 3 years old at the time) and he can recall cold mornings with ice on the water in a basin inside the caravan and newspapers for insulation between the blankets! Gwladys remembered that time as being very difficult, before they were allocated a Housing Commission house in Maidstone, a nearby suburb that was just developing. They lived there in a very small three-bedroom house with two relatives who had problems finding accommodation and it was very crowded with four adults and two children.

## Moving to St Albans

Fred and Gwladys wanted a place of their own so when a workmate at Smorgon's abattoir told Fred about a block of land he'd bought at St Albans for £50, Fred thought that sounded like a good deal. He went out to St Albans to have a look at the land and without any consultation with Gwladys, then bought a quarter-acre block in the middle of a paddock with no roads and no water or electricity. In those days, according to Fred, the father was the head of the family and did whatever he wanted to do, more or less. Gwladys was excited that she was going to have a house of her own. Fred and Gwladys were living in Maidstone, so to look at the block of land they got the bus to Sunshine and the train from Sunshine to St Albans and walked from the St Albans railway station across what seemed like open paddocks. In Fred's

recollection, when Gwladys saw the block she nearly fainted. It was covered by waist-high grass from the St Albans railway station round to Percy Street and it took them half an hour to find the pegs that marked out the block at 21 Beaver Street. But Gwladys wanted a house of her own and this was the best that they could afford. They had grown up during the depression when life was tough financially and had endured the privation of the war years. Fred had experienced severe poverty, living in substandard housing, and quasi-homelessness when he was a boy. Gwladys had been more fortunate in that her father had been self-employed for a number of years and she had not suffered as severely as Fred had. However, after her father lost his business, life was tough for her as well. A home that was their own was what she and Fred and most of their generation badly wanted and housing was in short supply as was money.



Streetscape: (L-R) Tony Barlow, Ian Sharp and friend, Beaver Street, c.1960/61.

There was a builder who'd started building homes around St Albans, and he said he could put up a three-bedroom, weatherboard home for £1,400. So Fred signed up with him using some deferred pay from his naval service and a 'War Service Loan' from the Commonwealth Government. When they moved into the house in late 1949 Gwladys was pregnant with their third child, Steven, who was born in February 1950, three to four months after they moved in. According to Gwladys the house had all the 'mod cons' such as electricity (which had by then been connected to the area), a copper for boiling up the water for the clothes and a hot water service, though at the beginning the water supply was a 44 gallon drum that was filled with a hose from the neighbour's tap. At least the water was on site whereas later many of the new migrant families had 'stand pipe' taps at the end of their streets! Gwladys and Fred even had an indoor chemical toilet (a big improvement on the outside open pan toilet they had been used to), which Gwladys often recalled had a terrible chemical smell.

Fred and Gwladys became proud home owners, planting a front garden of flowers and shrubs, establishing a veggie patch and chooks out the back, but the front yard was their pride and joy. It was in this house in St Albans that the family made their home and where they lived throughout the 1950's and 1960's, with their fourth child, Tony, being born in January 1953. For Gwladys her house was her palace and she was constantly doing things to make it look lovely and 'homey'. She took great pride in the curtains she made, the painting they did, the building renovation work and additions that she insisted Fred did, and of course, pride in her garden. The building of the patio was a very special development for her and she spent a lot of time choosing the wrought iron design. Keeping her house neat and tidy and very clean was very important to her. After all, she was the one responsible for the children and the home, just as Fred was responsible for being the financial provider. They were a team and the members of the team had their designated responsibilities. One of her greatest pleasures was

standing in her garden, water hose in hand, in the summer evenings, watering her garden as darkness fell. The house was only two bedrooms and an open sun room when they first moved in and the three boys shared one bedroom, with Glenda in the sunroom, which was eventually transformed into a third bedroom. Later a garage was built and when Jeff was a teenager and needed space to study, a separate bungalow was built in the back yard while the two younger boys still shared a bedroom.



## Home and Neighbourhood

St Albans was a small place in 1949 when the Barlow family of four arrived in their rented furniture van all sitting in the front seat with the driver and the two children on their parents' laps. Jeff still remembers the excitement of the trip in the truck although he was only 4 years old at the time. There were only a handful of cars then and all the roads were unmade. The mail was delivered on horseback by Mr. Eric Perrett. Self Brothers and Goddard had a little country store with a milk bar alongside. These were the two main shops. There was a butcher shop and Eric Perrett's little store to which he had the post office attached. Hampton had a clothing store on the corner of Main Road East and East Esplanade. Refrigeration was not available at the time so people relied on ice-chests, for which Self Brothers and Goddard used to deliver ice in the back of a covered-in truck. The ice man would come into the kitchen with the ice on his shoulder, protected with a Hessian bag. He would use an ice pick to break the large block of ice so it would fit into the ice chest and there would be shards of broken ice over the floor that Jeff used to love to collect and crunch up in his mouth. Bread was delivered by a baker in a horse and cart. Jeff can still remember the smell of warm bread and riding on the rear step of the cart when the baker would move his horse on to the next stopping place for another delivery. Gwladys would then get Jeff to go outside with a shovel and bucket to collect the horse manure that was kindly left behind to fertilize the garden. Milk was delivered by horse and cart and Gwladys would go into the street with her 'billie' (a metal container with a fitted lid) when the milkman called out. He would ladle out the milk from his large can into the billie and continue on to the next house. Sometimes a number of women would gather around the cart and conversations would be part of the milk delivery time.



Gwladys got to know all the shop keepers taking great pride in being able to get good quality fruit, vegetables and meat. If ever any poor quality goods were given to her she would always take them back and get cross with the shopkeeper. And she would make sure that the whole family knew she was not going to be 'ripped off'. She taught herself to cook healthy meals (mainly meat and three veggies) with cheaper cuts of meat and Jeff recalls with some dismay how she would try to get him and his sister Glenda to eat sheep's brains, 'sweet bread' (the thymus gland of the sheep), liver, kidneys, tripe (cow's stomach), pigs trotters and also animal fat smeared on bread with salt and pepper for flavour. These cheaper cuts of meat became a staple when Fred would be on strike from the abattoir for better pay and conditions. Gwladys tried very hard to make these cuts palatable for the children. However, as the children would not eat much of the offal Gwladys found economical ways to serve more expensive cuts of meat. She also liked to experiment and loved to cook Chinese dishes, with her sweet and sour pork and boiled rice and chow mien being a great hit with the family. Friday nights were often fish and chips nights once this was available locally. Sunday was frequently the day for a hot lunch of roast lamb and roasted vegetables with baked apple pie and whipped cream, which every one loved. Gwladys would spend all Sunday morning preparing this special family meal. When Fred or Jeff had been out hunting rabbits, roast or braised rabbit became relished meals.

Fred was working at Smorgon's abattoir and would catch the train from St Albans to Footscray and then get a work-provided furniture van used to transport workers, from Footscray to Brooklyn. When Gwladys bought him a bicycle for Christmas one year, after having it 'on layby' for many months, Fred rode that daily to work. It was an effort because he would dink one of his brothers-in-law to work on the cross bar of the bike and they would reverse roles on the way back. (In fact, when Jeff was about 16 and was working at Smorgons during the school holidays he also rode his bike from St Albans to Brooklyn and return, for the first week or so, and he found it exhausting!) Gwladys always provided her husband with a hot lunch to take to work (usually food left over from the previous evening meal) which Fred would heat up at work. For Gwladys, it was really important and a source of pride for her, that she could ensure that her husband and family provider was well looked after with food at work. She considered supporting her husband in this way, through nourishing food, to be a central part of her role as wife and mother.

## **Life and Work**

Gwladys took a great deal of pleasure in creating a comfortable home for herself and her family. She saved money and put items on lay-by to gradually get the soft furnishings she wanted. Usually she sacrificed her own needs regarding clothing for herself in order to provide a more comfortable living environment for the family or to ensure that the children had the shoes and clothing they needed. She worked part time at the Tin Shed on Errington Reserve for a while; there was a crèche and she was looking after the kids for two or three days a week, but it wasn't for long. It was from there that she went to Croftbank Dairies that was just across the road from the Tin Shed, where she worked on and off over a few years including some part-time weekend work in the milk bar attached to the dairy. She also worked sometimes for Don Martello in his milk bar in the evenings, Self Brothers and Goddard in their grocery store, and even tackled some house cleaning when the family budget had to stretch for children's shoes and school uniforms. At one stage she got herself work in a small café on Collins Street in the city, called Le Jardin, and she loved being in what for her was a more up-market establishment. She worked incredibly hard, as did Fred, and they passed on this value of hard physical work and thrift to their son, Jeff, who can still remember his mother talking to him about how one earned respect from others through honesty, integrity and hard work and how important it was for children to contribute from their earnings to the common good of the family.

Gwladys encouraged Jeff to get work from the age of 8 or 9 and to use his pay for his pocket money and school expenses. At first it was selling newspapers at the St Albans railway station to the workers as they walked past to catch the train. Later Jeff 'progressed' to his own



newspaper 'round' delivering newspapers to houses on the unmade roads, which were thick with wet clay in the winter and hard and rutted in summer. Gwladys always supported him in this work, waking him in the early morning and getting him a warm breakfast, making sure he was warmly dressed before he headed out into the cold, dark mornings. Jeff remembers Gwladys comforting him in the times of distress occasioned by the difficulties of his work – like not being able to ride the bike as it was clogged up with clay from the roads of mud or being chilled when he got home after his delivery on frosty mornings or simply not wanting to do that work. She continued to support this ethos of hard work throughout his time at home. During this time he worked at the dairy cleaning out horse stables; worked for a while with Self Brothers & Goddard in their expanded shop repacking butter, sugar and flour from bulk packaging into smaller packages; selling hardware at Steven's Hardware Store on Saturday mornings, collecting empty liquor bottles from local residents for resale to the recycling 'bottolo' who collected them every few months, working with Fred cleaning the local primary school every day after school from the age of 12 to 16; and later delivering telegrams in Footscray on Saturday afternoons, selling pies at the MCG football matches, working on farms carting hay and at Smorgon's Abattoir during the school holidays from the age of 16. Gwladys was proud of how she was raising a son in whom she had instilled her own work ethos and values, yet now we might think of all this work as child abuse. Jeff took it in his stride with this work being, from his perspective, just what kids did. Gwladys and Fred seemed to be unaware that in prizing this hard work and supporting Jeff to work as much as possible that he actually had no social life and no time to play sport after school, a source of great sadness and loss to Jeff which he only shared with his parents much later in life. This also meant that he became somewhat constricted in his social and relational skills for many years into his adult life.

## Family Life

All her children were very important to Gwladys and she loved them, cared for them, disciplined them, and taught them to be responsible and courteous people. Fred thought she was a wonderful mother and housewife and he was proud of her for this. Fred was the absent father because like most men in those days he left home in the dark in the morning and arrived home in the dark at night. When Gwladys felt she was not able to discipline the children herself she would ask Fred to do this when he came home. The leather strap was frequently referred to as a threat in order to maintain discipline but was only used occasionally on the boys, much to their chagrin. Gwladys, just like Fred, had a clear understanding of traditional male/female roles. She taught her daughter, Glenda, how to cook and required her to help with the house cleaning, neither of which was required of her boys. They would feed the chooks and help Fred with outdoor chores but even making their own beds was not a requirement!

Domestic violence was not uncommon in that period and both Gwladys and Fred had been raised in families where domestic violence occurred. However, that pattern stopped with Gwladys and Fred. Their children did not have to suffer from the effects of domestic violence largely because of Gwladys's strength in standing up for her rights. Fred was also able to commit himself to family life and avoid regular heavy drinking as well as focusing on controlling his temper. Fred told the story that just after he and Gwladys were married they got into an argument and Fred was getting angry. Gwladys, fearing violence might occur, told him that if he ever hit her, even once, she would leave the relationship. She must have spoken with some conviction because Fred took her seriously and violence never occurred. He was convinced that Gwladys 'made' him as a man and would say this openly to Jeff many times when Jeff was an adult. He was of the view that he would not have made a 'good family man' without her and he always valued the contribution she made to his development as a person. Their love and commitment to each other was obvious to the children and this created a sense of security for them. Neither Fred nor Gwladys had seen open expressions of intimacy in their own families and Fred had no recollection of ever having been loved, or even hugged, at home as a boy. Despite these experiences, Jeff recalls seeing his parents kissing and hugging

each other in the kitchen on occasion or holding hands when they were walking together. He also remembers the arguments and the silences, sometimes for extended periods of time when neither would give ground. Jeff recalls getting angry once when they were both asking him to communicate for each of them to the other when they were all sitting at the same table! He could not contain his frustration and yelled at them, 'Do it yourselves!'

St Albans in the late 40's and early 50's and even into the early 60's was very much a rural area with many farms and paddocks in close proximity to the housing developments. The surrounding countryside was a source of food on occasion with the Barlow family going to hunt rabbits. One hunting trip became a very traumatic experience for the family when Steven was just a baby, Glenda was about 6 and Jeff was about 7 years old. The family went with one of Gwladys's brothers-in-law, Dick Spicer, in his truck out into the countryside somewhere north of St Albans. They had a large canvas cover over the back of the truck in which they slept and they cooked over an open fire. However, on the second day camping when Fred and Dick went to find rabbits to shoot and Gwladys was at the truck with her three children looking after them and tending the fire in the hollow of a tree, a heavy, hot north wind blew up and sparks from the fire were blown into the truck starting a serious fire. There was panic as Gwladys tried to keep her children safe and got Jeff to try to put the fire out on his own with handfuls of loose dirt, as she did not have enough water.

Fortunately some other men who were hunting nearby heard her screams and came to help. The fire was put out but some of the bedding and part of the back of the truck was burnt in the process. To this day Jeff remembers the awful fear he felt being the only one trying to put out the fire with just small handfuls of dirt and feeling helpless as the wind fanned the fire through the back of the truck. He remembers his deep sobbing afterwards and feeling very much alone as Gwladys took care of Glenda and their possessions which were still smouldering. For Jeff, this feeling of being totally alone in his vulnerability and his suffering became a life-long pattern as it seemed no one was interested in his feelings. He also remembers Gwladys frequently telling him that he should not cry as he 'had to be a man'. He first remembers this being said when he was about 4 years old and it was taught to the other boys as well. Later, as an adult, Jeff heard the term 'tough love', and thought that explained the family exactly. Focus on the externals, not the inner life of the person.



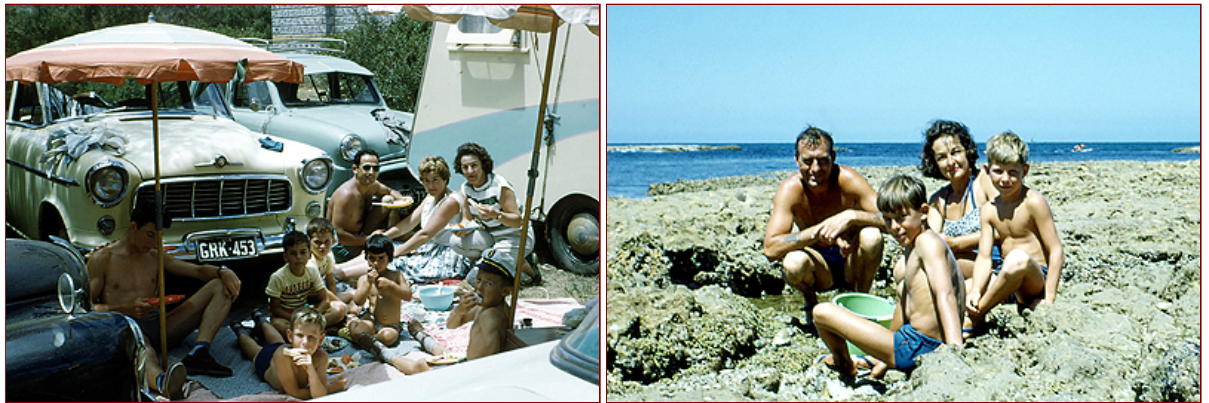
Jeff and Glenda Barlow with their parents at the High School Debutante Ball, 1960.

Jeff Barlow started at the St Albans High School in 1956 when it commenced in Sunshine. It was very convenient for him when the school opened in St Albans a year later because it was just across the road from the family home in Beaver Street. Glenda started at the new high school building in 1958. It was around this time, in 1957 that the family got their first car much to everyone's excitement. It was a little Fiat 1100 and although they all loved the car

Gwladys could not understand why Fred bought a four-seater car that was too small for their family of 6. In 1957 this was traded in on a brand new Holden GHK 453 which better accommodated the family. With a car the family was able to go on trips on the weekends and the 'drive' to nowhere in particular was an occasional pastime as was visiting relatives and going to the beach or to Mount Donna Buang for a day's outing.

Sometimes a friend of one of the children would come on the trip with them. Fred later bought some camping equipment in the form of an old ex-army tent with very heavy wooden poles and built a trailer in which to carry it all. Each year over the summer holidays he would take the family to the beach for a camping holiday to places like Rosebud, Torquay, Barwon Heads, Ocean Grove or Anglesea. Gwladys loved these holidays but after a while began to complain that they were not really 'holidays' for her as she had all the cleaning, cooking and washing to do herself, which was much the same as at home.

Nevertheless, these holidays were very important annual events for the family over a period of 5 or 6 years, after which the tent was traded in for a small caravan and annex. Gwladys loved the caravan and really enjoyed the holidays at Lorne or Torquay in more comfort than was possible in a tent.



Fred and Gwladys both worked at the local schools, but in different capacities. After leaving Smorgons due to an outbreak of eczema on his body and getting advice from the doctor to get alternative work, Fred became the cleaner at the St Albans Primary School. He was then able to combine that with his other local job as a milk delivery man with Croftbank Dairies as there were different working hours for each job. He also worked part time for a while for Self Brothers and Goddard on Saturday mornings delivering the groceries.

Gwladys was often shy around new people and did not make friends easily. She would socialize with some of the neighbours such as Gladys Sands, Marge Brotchie, Mrs Sharp, Mary Thurgood and some other local women, including Dorothy 'Dot' Baulch, an English migrant who arrived some years later. Dot was originally from London, became involved in local dramatics and established a social group for women who were UK immigrants; they met every month or two and went on outings together. Dot invited Gwladys to join the group, which she did. But apart from this, Gwladys mainly kept to herself in looking after her family and her house and doing paid work as well. One of Gwladys's sisters, Nellie, and her Greek-Cypriot husband, Con Damaskinos, lived nearby in Lyall Street for a number of years and there would be visits between their respective houses quite frequently. Jeff remembers the local women borrowing food from each other if they ran out when the shops were not open. On many occasions Jeff was asked to go to a neighbour to 'borrow' some tea or sugar or butter. He also remembers the funny story of Con asking Fred how to make concrete for the paths he wanted to lay at his house. Fred told him what he should do to make concrete 'by hand'. A few weeks later Con came to Fred complaining about his very sore and damaged hands. Fred asked him what he had done and he said it was from making concrete 'by hand' – he had taken Fred literally and had used his hands to mix the concrete instead of using a

shovel. This became a treasured family story for many years and even Con found it very funny – eventually!

For a number of years a number of Gwladys's adult siblings, with their respective spouses and children, would meet about once a month for a picnic out in the bush or at the beach. These were always memorable occasions and a welcome relief from the daily grind of work. The children played in the bush and rivers, climbing rocks, and helping collect wood for the fires used to barbeque the meat. Gwladys always remembered one of these picnics when her Greek-Cypriot brother-in-law, Con, told her he was going to cook a surprise meal for them at one of their picnics. To Gwladys's horror and disgust he roasted sheep's testicles over the fire, which, needless to say, she not only did not eat but told the story for the rest of her life always with a tone of shock and horror. It made a big impact on her!! Con could never understand why she would not eat what he thought was a delicious meal. Later, in the late 50's Con spoke of going back to Cyprus to live and Jeff recalls Gwladys and Fred talking seriously with the children about whether they would all leave Australia and go with Con and Nellie and their children to live in Cyprus. The issue that stopped them going was that there was no guarantee of work for the men but Gwladys also was not really interested as she did not want to leave her home.

Occasionally Gwladys and Fred would go to a party with friends or to a ball and Gwladys loved these outings and loved getting 'dressed up' for the event. Sometimes they had parties at their home and Jeff remembers the drinking, the dancing, singing and general conversation with the women inside and the men in the laundry standing around a keg of beer, drinking. When Jeff was involved with 'Doc' Walsh's drama group and travelled around Australia in 1957 and 1958 the parents were expected to raise some of the money that was needed. His parents raised the most money by holding parties at home where they sold illegal raffle tickets and illegally sold beer to the neighbours and some of the other parents who were present.

Gwladys would sometimes visit the children's schools on Education Day when they were open for parents to visit. Apart from that and generally being supportive of the children going to school she did not involve herself in their education. She would occasionally read stories to Jeff and Glenda in the evening before they went to sleep, when they were small. Jeff recalls the dramatic and emotional way she would read the Grimm's Fairy Tales which were for both Glenda and him very frightening. They would cry in the scary bits and Gwladys would laugh and cuddle them. She sometimes exhibited a hard or insensitive streak towards them, as well as tenderness and care, and Jeff thought this sometimes bordered on emotional cruelty which was very confusing for him, causing him to get angry with her. Sometimes she would find ways to deliberately frighten Jeff by hiding in the dark and jumping out at him with a loud, 'Gotcha!', laughing and cuddling him as he screamed in fear. At other times she pretended to phone the police to take Jeff away to an orphanage as a way of disciplining him, despite his frightened crying. This seemed to create for her some power and control that she needed. It certainly fostered in Jeff a lack of trust in people. One day as a child about 7-8 years old he said he was going to leave home and Gwladys helped him to pack his bag which he took out into the street, sitting in the gutter not knowing what to do till finally he realized he had to go back inside, feeling humiliated but also feeling more secure than on the street.

Most of the time Gwladys did not assist with homework as she felt inadequate due to her own truncated education. She felt embarrassed meeting teachers as they were much more educated than she was. However, Jeff does recall that she attended the school sports one year when he was competing and feeling embarrassed as Gwladys loudly screamed, "Come on Jeff!" However, he did win the race which again made her proud. She felt a better person when she could be proud of her children for the way they dressed, the way they behaved or for their achievements, no matter how small, especially when others made a positive comment to her about her children. A child of hers being well received by others was a reflection of how good she was as a mother and as a person.

## Parents and Friends Association



Gwladys became involved with the St Albans High School because two of her children attended there. The school was looking for parental involvement and thus Gwladys joined the Parents' and Friends' Association and she took on the role of voluntary treasurer of the group in 1960. Jeff remembers her feeling very anxious about getting involved but some of her friends were also standing for election and they encouraged her. But she felt very uncomfortable doing this voluntary work for which she was not trained and for which she had no experience, even though she had the aptitude and did an excellent job.

An interesting observation, from a historical point of view, was that there was a definite imbalance in the gender composition of the school's Advisory Council and their Parents' and Friends' Association. The Advisory Council tended to be the larger committee and was almost exclusively men, including local business leaders and councillors, who in that era were almost entirely men; occasionally there was a sole woman on the Council. 1960 was a breakthrough of sorts, because the three top executive positions in the Parents' and

Friends' Association were all taken by women and two of them were Gwladys's friends: Mrs J. Sharp was President, Mrs N. T. Thurgood was Secretary, and Mrs F. Barlow was Treasurer. In the quaintness of 'olde-worlde' custom these women were being referred to by their husband's name, i.e. Gwladys Barlow was being referred to as "Mrs Fred Barlow" and the same applied for the other women. It was a formal custom of the times. Although the women did not know it then, this time saw the gradual emergence of the emancipation of women from the control of their husbands. Jeff still remembers the rows between Gwladys and Fred about when she wanted to go to work so she could be more independent. The core issue, as he recalls, was that Fred felt his role as the 'bread winner' was threatened by a working wife and this was a source of humiliation for him as a man. It is important to keep in mind that at this time married women could not work in the banks or the public service, having to leave work once they were married. This was also the beginning of Jeff's 'education' in the liberation of women from forced domesticity and the liberation of men and women from rigid gender roles.

## Migrants

By the late fifties another phenomenon occurred and that was the growing inclusion of more obviously "ethnic" names into the school's Advisory Council and the Parents and Friends Association: names like Kulbys (1958), Setek (1960), Galea (1962), Iskov (1962), Schwab (1962), Schneider (1969), Zeimester (1969), Schwartz (1970), and Svent (1970). This reflected local population trends. When Gwladys and Fred came to St Albans in 1950 the population of the district was about 1,000 people. By 1960 when "Mrs Fred Barlow" joined the P.F.A. the local population had already reached 7,000 people and by the end of the decade it was over 13,000 - the vast majority of whom were soon being referred to in sociological terms as persons of "Non-English Speaking Backgrounds." The NESBs had arrived in force and changed forever the composition of the district, making it one of the most cosmopolitan neighbourhoods in the nation.

This huge increase of people from Europe, often, but not always, from displaced persons' camps, were seen as a threat to some Australians in St Albans. Jeff remembers some of the verbal hostility that was expressed amongst the adult 'Aussies' as they complained about foreigners taking their jobs and changing the 'feel' of the local area. He also recalls his father

staunchly and bravely standing up for the new arrivals telling some of his 'Aussie' neighbours and work mates how he admired the guts and determination shown by the new arrivals. The fact that through his marriage to Gwladys he had brothers-in-law from France, Germany, Poland and Cyprus, probably motivated this protective and compassionate stance towards new migrants. Perhaps also this compassion arose from his war experience in the navy, and his experience of the evacuation of Crete where he witnessed the horror of the Greek people as well the Allied soldiers. He knew about war and what it did to people first hand. He had used a shovel and bucket to scrape bits of corpses from the ship's deck after a German bombing raid and he knew what circumstances many of these migrants had come from out of war-torn Europe. Of course, he was also one of the 'underdogs' in society and maybe he also felt some identification with people who had nothing in the way of material possessions or money or opportunity, making a go of life and being able to build something out of nothing for themselves simply by their hard labour, their grit and determination, as he had done.

In later years Jeff recalls his father's deep attachment to the movie 'Rocky' where a man rises from the abject poverty of the city slums to success, suffering incredible beatings in the ring in the process, and Jeff realized how deeply this movie impacted his father and how it was in some ways a symbol for his own life, although Fred never made his feelings about this known. However, on one occasion when Jeff was an adult he challenged Fred on why he was such a fan of the movie and Fred became enraged with him. Jeff knew then that this was not just a film and that the movie had deep meaning for his father.

Gwladys did not seem to have any response to the new migrants, probably because her own sisters had married migrant men and she always welcomed Jeff's friends, many of whom were from migrant families. Jeff recalls Gwladys being bemused when one of his new-found, just-arrived migrant friends came around to visit him. He was from Poland and greeted Gwladys with a click of his heels and a brief bow of his head, called her 'Madam' and kissed the back of her hand. Now this was something she had never experienced from an Australian male and she later said to Jeff with a bemused smile, "Now that is a gentleman!" Jeff recalled feeling somewhat inadequate! There was an obvious implication that he should also be a 'gentleman' like his friend.

## Gender Issues



Family life during Jeff's childhood and adolescence was generally a secure routine with both parents in very clearly defined roles. Gwladys had a very clear role as wife, mother and home maker/house keeper. She taught her daughter how to cook and do housework but not her boys. To that extent, although wanting to break out from the house-bound role of the subservient woman, she instilled in her sons an acceptance of their superiority to women; they belonged in the outside world and were to take risks and women belonged in the house and were to be more timid. The boys' role as males was to become 'bread winners' and they were to aim to marry women who could be good home makers for them. This was never spelled out in words but was always implicit in behaviour and tones of voice. In later years as an adult, when Jeff was involved with men and women arguing the merits of women's liberation and bemoaning the power of men and the rigid roles in which men and women were located, Jeff always recalled how in his family it was his mother and his father who inculcated in the children, through their implicit behaviour, the 'right' of male supremacy and domination and the need

for the rigid roles of men and women regarding work and home duties. Even though Gwladys through her actions in demanding the right to work and forcing this as an issue in the family, much to her husband's chagrin, she nevertheless found her identity in the roles of mother and house-keeper, and any money she earned was spent in ways to support that identity.

The Barlow family moved from St Albans to Seaford in 1964 when Fred and Gwladys purchased a milk bar in Seaford on the Mornington Peninsular. At that time, their eldest son, Jeff, had finished his secondary school education at St Albans High School and had gone to Monash University. Their daughter Glenda, and the two younger boys, Steven, then 14 years old, and Tony, then 10 years old, moved to Seaford with their parents. After a couple of years in the milk bar Fred and Gwladys had a fifth child, Paul, and they then sold the milk bar. That was when Fred was employed by James Richardson & Co and became a salesman and manager until his retirement in 1963 when the company was taken over. Gwladys stayed at home caring for her son Paul, who was raised essentially as an only child as the other children were so much older than him.

In the mid 1970's when Jeff and his wife Joan were living in Manchester in the UK, Gwladys and Fred and their youngest son, Paul, came to visit them as part of a European trip they did – their first ever trip abroad together and Gwladys's first time out of Australia. Gwladys wanted to visit Dundee in Scotland from where her mother had come so Jeff and Joan arranged to take them there as part of a bigger tour of Scotland and Northern England in their VW camping van. Gwladys was deeply moved to see the house where her mother was born and raised and the school she went to. The house was marked for demolition as part of an inner city reclamation and modernisation so she was actually very lucky to see it and treasured the photo of both the house and the school that she kept for the rest of her life.

Gwladys died from lung cancer at her home in Seaford on 5 October 1994 with her adult children close to her. Fred continued living at Seaford alone for a further 14 years, till he could not cope on his own any longer. He lived in RSL supported accommodation in Frankston till his death from pancreatic cancer at the Frankston hospital, surrounded by his adult children, on 31 August 2008.



Gwladys Barlow and family at races, Hanging Rock, late 1950s.



Fred and Gwladys Barlow at the beach with their 1957 Holden, late 1950s.



Nellie Damaskinos with child, Mrs Nellie Latch, Gwladys Barlow, possibly Lederderg Gorge.



Gwladys (second from left) and Dot Baulch (third) with friends at the beach.





(L-R) Glenda Barlow, Gwladys, her sisters Nellie & Nancy, and their husbands Ziegfried & Con.

### Jeff Barlow, March 2016

I would very much like to thank Joe Ribarow for his support and encouragement in the writing of this short anecdotal piece about my mother. Although it is not a complete history of Gwladys Barlow's life and although it is told just from my perspective, it was a deeply touching experience to take the journey back in time to reflect on these aspects of her life and in that process to revisit some of the memories of my earlier life in my family. This is history now and I thank you Joe for your continuing enthusiasm, encouragement, interest and support, and for bringing the history of St Albans and its inhabitants alive for other generations to read about.

---

Family photographs supplied by and copyright Jeff Barlow.

Melbourne air raid shelter #1 c/o State Library of Victoria an0003315

Melbourne air raid shelter #2 c/o John Bonnechrome [www.flickr.com/photos/116807687@N06/12853963904](http://www.flickr.com/photos/116807687@N06/12853963904)