

## Bernice Self



Dorothy Bernice Self, known as Bernice, was born in 1922 and started at the St Albans primary school in 1928. She must have been a conscientious student because in 1930 she received a prize for 100% attendance. She was the youngest of the three Self sisters and was still in primary school when her older sisters, Margery and Edna, started working in the family store in 1932.

Bernice started taking piano lesson while at school, and that was most likely with Miss Kath Feeney who ran a music school in Sunshine. Bernice must have been an avid pupil, as her first public performance occurred in 1933 when she was only 11 years old. "Miss Bernice Self" performed a pianoforte solo at the Mechanics Hall for the primary school committee's end-of-year speech night.<sup>1</sup>

In 1936 she was in the public light again in raising money for the school mothers' club. Between them, Valma Bedford, Clara Lodge and Bernice raised over £50 which was a good total. Bernice was Queen of Roses.<sup>2</sup>

In 1937 Bernice was one of "fifty talented children to stage an operetta" at the Sunshine Town Hall:

*Forty pupils of Miss Kath Feeney, assisted by members of Miss Donald's dancing class and other artists, will present a big concert in the Sunshine town hall on Thursday next, including an operetta in which the ages of the actors range from five to fourteen years. Among the high spots of the show will be a triple trio, three children on each of three pianos, and 25 violins will supply the music for the opening number.*<sup>3</sup>

Bernice passed her ALCM examination in music in 1937, and her LLCM examinations for piano in 1938. In 1939 she received a credit in the exam held at the Melbourne University.<sup>4</sup> At this stage she was aged 17.

She started teaching the piano in 1940 at age 18, and in that first year several of her students sat their examinations at the London College of Music in Melbourne.<sup>5</sup>

Bernice had also been active in the local girls' gymnasium club. In 1937 she was one of the prize winners at the Mechanics Hall.<sup>6</sup> In the following year, the Keilor Shire President awarded her first prize in the senior section.<sup>7</sup> Soon after-wards, it appears that Bernice took over the musical accompaniment for the girls' gymnasium club and supported them musically for many years, and also the calisthenics group.

Bernice had started a Domestic Arts course at Footscray in 1937, and it's likely that she started working in the family grocery store soon after, probably when she was 16 or 17.

In the early days the Self sisters baked cakes and pies to sell in the store. They also made their own ice cream before refrigeration was available. At first Margery and Edna were making the ice cream at home overnight. Later, one of Bernice's tasks was to buy ice cream from the Peters Ice Cream factory in Richmond. There were no instant delivery services available in that era and few people had cars, so Bernice would travel by train to collect the order of ice creams and then carry them back on the train in dry ice containers.

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1        Sunshine Advocate 5 January 1934 p5  
2        Sunshine Advocate 2 October 1936 p2  
3        Sunshine Advocate 17 September 1937 p5  
4        Sunshine Advocate 13 October 1939 p1  
5        Sunshine Advocate 6 December 1940 p6  
6        Sunshine Advocate 26 November 1937 p5  
7        Sunshine Advocate 9 December 1938 p4



Lewis & Marion Self with children circa 1955

At this stage Self's Store was in East Esplanade and Bernice would teach her piano students in the family home behind the shop. This combination of working in the family store and giving private piano lessons continued for at least a decade. She also performed at various community events in the district and occasionally joined Tom Smith's Musical Nights on their gigs.

In 1947 Bernice became engaged to Alf Samuel Goddard and the occasion was celebrated in style at the Mechanics Institute:

*A very successful evening was spent at the St. Albans Hall on Monday last, when some 200 residents attended to wish Miss Bernice Self and Mr. Alf Goddard, the very best wishes on the eve of their marriage. Cr. Davis (President of Shire of Keilor) in a very happy speech made a presentation of a standard lamp on behalf of the residents. A further presentation was made by Miss Hazel Ankers on behalf of Miss Self's many pupils. During the evening dancing was indulged in and Mr. Harold Easton sang two songs in his usual capable manner. He was accompanied by Miss Joyce McIntyre, one of Miss Self's pupils. A very nice supper was served. Mr. Gordon Fawns proved a popular M.C.<sup>8</sup>*



Alf Goddard and Bernice Self

Bernice and Alf married at St Alban The Martyr Church of England on Saturday, 22 March 1947. The wedding breakfast was held at the Mechanics Institute Hall and was later followed with a reception where dancing was enjoyed. About 150 friends and relatives wished the newly weds all happiness.<sup>9</sup>

Alf was born in Warrnambool but he was a St Albans boy. His parents were Alfred Samuel Goddard and Agnes Elliot Holmes who came to St Albans in 1926. (Alfred snr died in 1934 and Agnes nee Holmes died in 1954.)

Alf and Bernice built their home in Victoria Crescent. As an extra feature to their home they built a tennis court, and it was even more special because they installed lighting. Sometimes, when daylight was running out, a few players from the public courts would come to finish their game at Goddard's. They were made welcome.

The 1950s was the migration era and the Self family responded by building a bigger shop on the corner of Victoria Crescent. Bernice and Norman Self's wife Eileen carried on in the small shop, while Mr Self, Alf Goddard and the boys built the new supermarket. It became known as Self Brothers and Goddard. It was the first of its kind in the area: a big self-service supermarket including a butcher, delicatessen, fruit and vege-tables, groceries, and (later) a liquor section.

The Self brothers were Norman (married Eileen Pyle), Dudley (married Betty O'Hare), and Lance (married Shirley Greig). They became the new generation of managers at the supermarket.

It was still a family business and everyone worked at something, even after hours. At the start everything was still done by hand and weighed using basic scales. Brenda Self recalls bagging oranges into net bags. Boxes of dried fruit would be spread out over the table and picked over for any bits that shouldn't have been there and then packed up. Potatoes were all hand packed. Broken biscuits were packed into bags because nothing was wasted.<sup>10</sup>

Bernice and Alf Goddard had four children: Heather, Bronwyn, Sandra, and Andrew. Norma McKay, one of her former piano students, recalls that it must have been a busy time for Bernice, as she continued giving piano lessons, working in Self's grocery shop, and raising four children: "It became just too much for Bernice when her last child was born and she stopped giving piano lessons."<sup>11</sup>

Alf Goddard died unexpectedly in January 1964 at age 42, while holidaying at Raymond Island. He was given one of the biggest funerals ever in St Albans, with several hundred people attending the service in Anglican Church and over 140 cars joining the cortege.

The next generation of Self brothers and Goddard were Colin Self, John Self, Andrew Goddard, and Phillip Self. Their wives and children worked in the store part time. About 100 staff now worked at the supermarket.

At some stage the Goddard name was dropped and the store continued operating as Self Bros. Licensed Supermarket. At this stage, five of the Self grandchildren — John, Anthony, Colin, Phillip, and David — were responsible for its day-to-day operations. When they decided to retire the store was put to auction but did not reach the reserve price. It was then sold in 1988 to Melray, who sold it on in 1992.

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<sup>9</sup> Sunshine Advocate 28 March 1947 p3

<sup>10</sup> Refer to chapter about Self & Goddard in *Stories About St Albans : Celebrating 125 Years*, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Recollections of Norma McKay nee Smith.



Colin Self, John Self, Andrew Goddard, Phillip Self

When interviewed by a reporter at that time, Bernice confirmed that the store held many happy memories for her:—

*I am very sad about what has happened to the present owners. But it is very hard for anyone to make a living in business these days ... We were lucky. The area expanded with us. Forty years ago we had the largest delicatessen space and stock in an independent store in Victoria. The business just built up over the years. We got on well together as a family. We worked and holidayed together. It was a great time for us.*<sup>12</sup>

Bernice Goddard nee Self died in October 2004 at Southport, Queensland, at age 82.



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