

ROBERT "BOB" BOORER: BANK MANAGER, STUDENT 1956 - 1959



Introduction

I started at St Albans High School in 1956 when it was first established at the Presbyterian Church Hall in Anderson Street Sunshine. We were living in Albion at the time - in fact I grew up in Albion and went to the Albion Primary School. My parents were of Australian background for several generations. My uncle traced our family origins back to England, but some people have said the name Boorer actually came from Holland, going back a century or so, when there was an uprising in Holland and people left for the islands and then got over to England.

Mum and Dad were from Footscray and grew up there before moving to Sunshine and Albion. We moved to Albion in 1945, when I was one year old. I started primary school at the age of five, but half way through the first year they did another intake so we were moved up one grade. Effectively, I started school at the age of four.

Growing up in Albion

Growing up in Albion was much different to life these days, but it wasn't entirely horse and buggy days either. We didn't have a refrigerator, we had the Coolgardie on the back verandah and that back door was never locked. The ice man used to bring the ice every couple of days. The wood man used to bring briquettes because we had a briquette heater. The baker used to deliver bread with his horse and cart and when I was very young it was a big thrill to get up and sit on the cart and you'd go around the block with him as he delivered the bread and he'd drop you off back home. The milkman used to come in the night time and the horse knew where to go. The milkman would run backwards and forwards to the cart as the horse would trot along the road.

Recreation Activities

We also had billy carts and could play in the streets. You could play along there until 7 or 8 o'clock at night after you'd had your dinner. We didn't have daylight saving but your parents didn't have to worry about you because it was all safe.

Our recreation was cricket on the road and we also had billy carts. Later we would ride our bikes around the streets and sometimes we would ride all the way to St Albans. I had a go at athletics but because Mum and Dad didn't have much money I didn't go ahead with that. There was a coach by the name of Franz Stanful and I was going to train with him but it would have cost a bit of money and travel - not so much money for him but travelling into the city for regular training. He was at the Melbourne University. I went there a couple of times but couldn't afford the train fares.

Later as a teenager when I was working we used to go to Footscray to dances at the Orama, but not that often because I wasn't a great dancer. We used to go to football ever Saturday and barrack for Footscray.

We had bonfires, which we'd build on the vacant blocks. Weeks before we'd go around asking people if they were chopping down any trees could we have all the branches. If we saw another bonfire we'd raid that a couple of days beforehand and put a guard on our bonfire. On bonfire

night people from all the area would come to enjoy the fire and the fireworks, then you'd cook your potatoes in the embers.

Mum and Dad played golf as their recreation, which they did through the Sunshine Golf Club.

The Neighbourhood

It was a very old area where we were living: Sydney Street and Adelaide Street west of Anderson Street. It was a built up area because the government had bought some of the farming land after the First World War as part of the soldier resettlement efforts. At first it was empty paddocks and unmade roads because it had been used as farming land for growing oats. I remember in the 'fifties there were gum trees down the side of the road and the bitumen was only in the centre of the road and then gravel about three feet on either side. When you go back and visit now the houses look really old. A lot of them have been knocked down and replaced with brick homes or flats in their place.

You walked to school, which wasn't far away, just on the corner of Adelaide Street and Ballarat Road. It was pretty free and easy in those days, and Mum didn't have to drive you like they do these days, even though we were fortunate enough to have a car. We had an old canvas roofed T-model Ford.



Grades 1c & 2a, Albion Primary School, 1951. Bob Boorer is fourth from right, top row.

Father's Employment

Dad was a motor mechanic. During the war my father worked for Masseys, the Holden dealer in Footscray, who were very big at the time. I think three brothers started the business and then their children took over. They were there till about 1980, the biggest Holden dealers in the western suburbs.

Later my dad worked for Wunderlich in North Sunshine. He used to look after their big trucks that carried cement and the directors' cars. He was retrenched in 1961, so we dug a pit in our back yard, concreted around it, extended the garage and he went into the business of doing grease and oil changes. It was quite a good little business he had there.

Starting at St Albans High

I went to the St Albans High rather than the Sunshine High because we lived on the west side of the railway tracks and thus were further away from the High school.

I remember that first year in the Presbyterian Hall because it was a big step to go to from primary school to the high school. Albion Primary School was quite an established school in the area because it had started in 1926. Then in 1956, which I remember because the Olympic Games were held in Melbourne towards the end of the year, all the students that didn't go to the Sunshine High went to the new St Albans High in Anderson Street. It was just a big hall with partitions that were taken down every Friday and put back up again every Monday.

We had a sprinkling of migrants at Albion Primary but not a lot, so getting to know people from a number of nationalities was a big step when we joined St Albans High, which was, I think, probably made up of 90% migrants from all over the world.

One of the biggest things for me was that I had just turned eleven years of age when I moved from the primary school and I think I was one of the youngest pupils at the new secondary school as we went through the years. I found in Form 2 that what we'd learnt in Form 1 fell into place like a jig saw puzzle, so I did get through each of the years and it fell into place as I went along.

We were encouraged to take part in sports and enjoyed that because we had our friends there, and competed in the sporting houses. I became captain of Kurrajong. I was mainly involved with the athletics - the running, the high jump, and the long jump - because I was a big, tall, string bean in those days; there was not much meat on me, but I could flit through the air with the greatest of ease. I was also in the hop, step and jump, 100 yards, 220 yards - all those things. I represented the school several times at the Olympic Park inter-school games.



Football Team, 1956. Bob Boorer is in the back row, second from left.

One day three of us - Jeff Heaviside, myself, and maybe Douglas McCubbin - decided we'd had enough of school in the morning so we left at lunchtime. We made the mistake of walking along the railway line where our silhouettes stood out along the area where one of teachers, Mr Clarke, had a unit almost on the railway line. He was home having his lunch and washing his dishes when he looked out the window to see the three of us walking by. There might have been hell to pay next day at school, but I think we just got a talking-to, as Mr Clarke was a very fair teacher.

Travelling to St Albans

When the high school moved to St Albans I was travelling there by train. Between the Albion station and the school in Main Road East was all paddocks. Sometimes after school we'd walk home through the paddocks and do a bit of mushrooming. It wasn't all that far, and there's nothing like good, fresh mushrooms.

There was a group of between 30 and 40, I suppose, that travelled backwards and forwards from Albion on the train. Because we had gone to primary school together and travelled together daily we stuck together and didn't mix much with the St Albans kids on weekends.

School Outings

I recall going down to Drouin by bus, which was a reciprocal visit to their school. It was quite interesting and we played sports though now I'm not sure how we went. We had a social that evening, but none of us knew how to dance. We city kids were billeted out to sleep at some of the local farms, so we had no idea where we were in the country; three of us ended up sleeping in a double bed in a farmhouse in the middle of nowhere.

Another time Doc Walsh took several of us on a trip by train to Walhalla because we had won events at Olympic Park. Three of us went on that weekend. He took a group of drama students to Tennant Creek to perform plays. I didn't go on that occasion because my parents couldn't afford for me to go. Those that went enjoyed themselves very much. Doc also held plays in a church hall in Barkly Street Footscray.

Teachers

Mr Alcorn was something of a unique teacher for me and a few others from Albion. I had him as a teacher for four years at the primary school and then he transferred to the St Albans High School and I also had him for four years there for some subjects. He is a teacher that stands out. He was also involved in the church as a minister.



Mr Alcorn and Grade 3b, Albion Primary School, 1952. Bob Boorer is fourth from left, top row.

Another teacher I recall is Miss Colquhoun, our Arts teacher. I was never very good at painting or drawing but at one stage we had to make a "stained glass window" by doing cut-outs in black paper and using coloured cellophane to make up a design for a church window. I really got involved in this. I remember spending hours on the design and sticking it all together and it was magnificent. I took it to school to be marked and she said: "No, you didn't do this on your own." You put all that effort in and ... After that I lost more interest in art.

Mr Lahy tried to teach us French. He was quite good. Mr Lahy and Miss Kennedy ended up marrying.

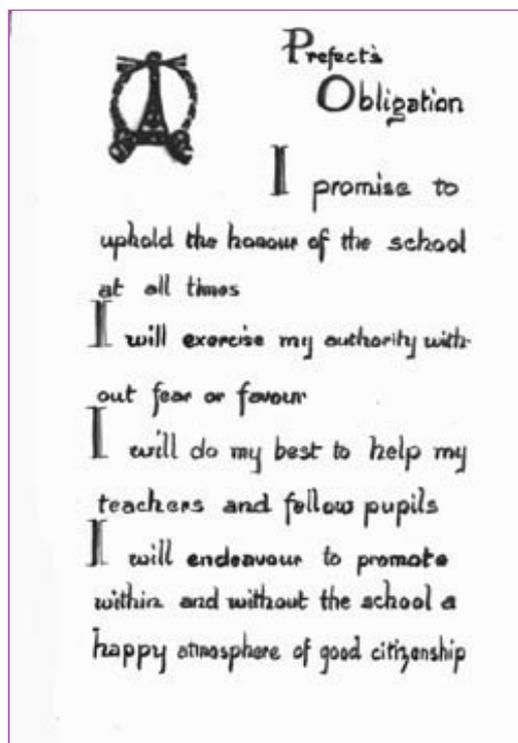
Mr Conroy used to look after us for tennis. He had an old Volkswagen and when we had to come to Albion to play tennis he'd cram as many of us as he could into the Volkswagen and take us down. It was like a family really.

Mr Murphy tried to teach us woodwork. The first year we had to walk to Sunshine Tech to use their facilities. When we did it at St Albans we had benches in a normal classroom with the big windows. We had some long pieces of timber and either Jeff Heaviside or Douglas McCubbin moved the wood along the bench into the vice when there was a big crash as the wood went right through the window. We got into a bit of detention because of that.

Mr Barker was the head teacher, and Mrs Barker was also on staff teaching the girls.

Although the teachers were often encouraging they were also strict about some things, especially uniforms. We had to wear caps: the boys had caps and the girls had berets. Everybody tried to get out of wearing caps but it was compulsory.

A Prefect's Obligation



I was a prefect at the school. You were sworn in and had to make a pledge to uphold a prefect's obligations. Being a prefect you were always expected to be on your best behaviour and to be squeaky clean. I remember taking out a St Albans girl - her parents had a hardware store - and it was probably the first date I ever went on. We went to the city by train to the movies. When I brought her back to her home she dropped her handbag at the front door and things rolled all over the place. I couldn't stay to help her because we weren't supposed to be going out together.

Joining the Bank

I stayed at the school until I completed Form 4 at the end of 1959. In 1960 I joined the National Bank of Australia Limited, as a lot of us in the fourth form did. I had just turned fifteen. The bank did in-house training for new employees. The first year we looked after the postages. They taught us to be

responsible for the small amount of cash in the postage tin, to balance that each week. You also ran errands and did the exchange, which was exchanging all the cheques with the other banks. That was done locally in those days. All the banks converged on the one bank, which was the Commonwealth Bank, once a week on the settling day. At the end you came back with an "in-house warrant" which was a piece of paper that balanced our bank's books. That was our introduction to bookkeeping. Each year the bank took in a new lot of staff and so you trained the new chum and you moved up to the next level. You did that process for about the next ten years, I suppose. After about fifteen years you ended up as an accountant - in bank terms.

In my second year at the bank we used to travel from Sunshine to Sunbury every weekday. We had a branch agency there, just a small place that didn't have separate staff. We'd travel there every day through St Albans along that bumpy road near the 3LO mast to the Calder Highway. It was around the time the car racing circuit was being built. Jeff Pay was also a St Albans High School boy who joined the bank a year after me. He would go up to Sunbury with this other chap in a Zephyr with the cash tin and a revolver. The manager would go up there once a month.

Progressing through the Bank Hierarchy

You moved from branch to branch after a couple of years. I started at Sunshine, then was on the relieving staff for about two years. After that I was at Yarraville and most of the western suburbs branches. Later I became an accountant at Footscray, which was a large branch. From there I went as manager on the relieving staff and progressed through several managerial roles. I became an auditor in the bank for four years. Then I was manager of the Melbourne office in Customer Sales and Service, where I had about 160 staff to start with. Then the bank started reducing its service to customers and I ended up with having about 60 staff.

My wife, Margaret, and I decided to go on long service leave that coincided with some big restructures going on. I think we were in Western Australia when I got word that I'd been made redundant, which happens quite a lot these days. I came back and found myself another job in the bank for ten months, then finally left and took the redundancy package and the superannuation that I'd been paying since I was fifteen years of age.

So, at 39 years, 7 months and 3 days at the bank - but who's counting? - I retired.

I saw many changes over this time, going from the old hand ledgers in some of the small country branches, to mechanical ledgers with the Burroughs electric machines, to the introduction of the computer, which was a huge one taking up almost a full floor of one of the buildings in East Melbourne.

Personal Life

Between all these events I married in 1967 and my first wife and I had two sons, one of whom is in the Federal Police and the other one works freelance in various positions. I divorced and married my current wife, Margaret, who also has two sons, so we have four boys between us. One of her sons is in Western Australia as a motor mechanic, the other is a chef in Werribee and they have children. So we have two grandchildren and one on the way.

We were living in Altona for 18 years and were quite happy there. Then just before I retired I took the advice to downsize from a large home and replaced the major household appliances so as not to have any large outlays when we left full-time employment. We moved to this home in Seabrook, and we've been living very happily here for about 8 years.

Since 1999 I am quite happy in retirement, though I still like being active. I drive a coach for an undertaker as a casual job when they're busy or staff are on leave. I also do the books for a business in Werribee one day a week. I also enjoy my regular game of golf.

I have two sisters, both of whom are older than me. They both went into dressmaking and worked in Flinders Lane in Melbourne, which was the dressmaking centre of town. Joan, the middle child, ended up working with children who had a disability, teaching them skills and helping them get into employment. She went with them on the bus or train several times to make sure they knew how to get there.

They're both retired now. One lives at Barmah in Northern Victoria, the other is at Echuca. I'm 61, Joan is 69, and Dorothy is 73.

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Bob Boorer, 2005.

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