

PHILIP SPIVEY: ELECTRICAL AND MECHANICAL ENGINEER



Introduction

My family together with lots of other families from the United Kingdom arrived at Port Melbourne, Victoria, Australia in January 1955. I was a seven-year-old Pom from Hull. John my elder brother, my baby sister Sue, and I had just spent a long but exciting nine weeks at sea on the last voyage of the MV Georgic, a troop carrier from World War Two.

We had travelled from the freezing cold of Southampton UK via the Canary Islands, Cape Town, and Fremantle, and yes, suddenly the blue skies and warmth seemed to make that long journey all worth while.

Our family had come to Australia to start a new life after the bad times of the Second World War. Mum was Sylvia Mead from London and Dad was Harold Spivey from a farm in Yorkshire where his father had Clydesdale horses.

Dad's philosophy in life was to always try to benefit from experience. He would say: "Try and learn something every day, because you never know when you'll be able to use that knowledge to help somebody else." My father gave me a hard time at times but that saying has been an important guide to my way of fitting in with people, because we all need to get on with each other on this planet.

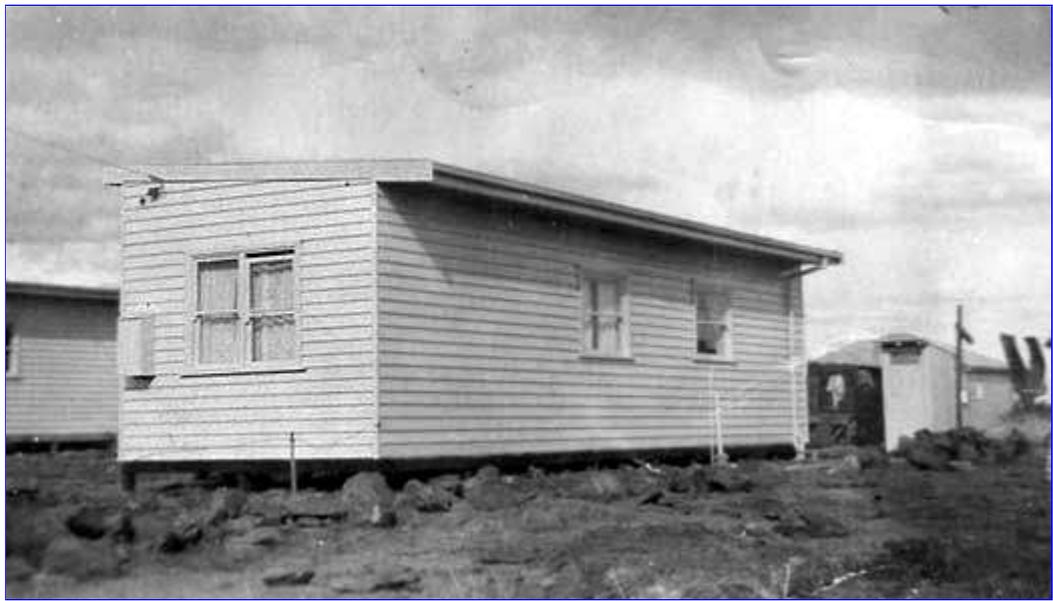


Mr Harold and Mrs Sylvia Spivey with (L-R) Philip, Sue and John, 1954.

Coming to Melbourne

Dad and Mum's friends, the Dickinsons, had migrated three years earlier and had settled in Newport. They nominated us for a fifty pound government Assisted Passage. So for that first year in a strange land of heat and flies we lived with them in a small detached garage. Dad and Mum eventually found the deposit on a block of land at 13 Shirley Street, St Albans, as that was the only suburb in Melbourne they could afford.

Dad got a job at Taubman Paints in Sunshine and we moved to our new home, which was only half a house, in St. Albans in April 1956. Mum also worked, and she had a position as a typist with HBA in Melbourne.



The Spivey family's home in Shirley Street, St Albans, 1958.

Back then in St Albans there were unmade roads, no buses, no sewerage, no street lights, no TV, and we couldn't afford bikes. The nearest railway station and shops were two kilometers away. Walk everywhere was the buzz term.

Primary School

In those early years I attended St Albans Primary School, which is located alongside the Bendigo railway line. Sometimes I would sit and watch the trains and wonder where they were going, and later when I learnt the names I used to dream of far away exotic country places like Wycheproof, Echuca, Warracknabeal, and Mildura.



Philip Spivey's class, St Albans Primary School, 1959.
Philip is in the middle row, fifth from the left.

As well as primary school I also remember attending Sunday school classes that were run by Mr Lake in the old Baptist centre.

All us kids hated St Albans because there was nothing to do, and with both parents working you had to discover ways of entertaining yourself. We weren't allowed to stay in the school ground after the school was closed for the day but of course we still wanted to play. One day I sneaked back and was swinging on the monkey bars when I fell and broke my collarbone. Some teachers were still at school and had to take me to hospital to have it set, and for many weeks I was wearing a brace while it healed.

Another day the headmaster caught some school kids smoking behind the shelter shed after school. He locked them in the shelter shed and got their parents to come and collect them.

However, some primary teachers did inspire me. A lovely man, Mr Cove from Camperdown, encouraged a love of the Australian bush, its history, and the early pioneers, and I still retain that love of the countryside. The Headmaster, Mr Magnusson from Bendigo, invited our family up on the train for the weekend. He took us to some old gold mines and also to Echuca. That was the start of my discovery adventures that have continued to this day.

My music teacher, who was la-de-da type, tried to get us to sing “Ash Grove” and other proper songs. I wanted to sing Aussie ballads like the “Wild Rover” and “The Wild Colonial Boy”, so I used to sing out of tune deliberately and was often expelled from the class accompanied by the occasional whack on the hand. Now I sing and write country music - strange. Hey, I also wanted to become a meteorologist but the thought of Uni was just too much though I still love to study the weather.

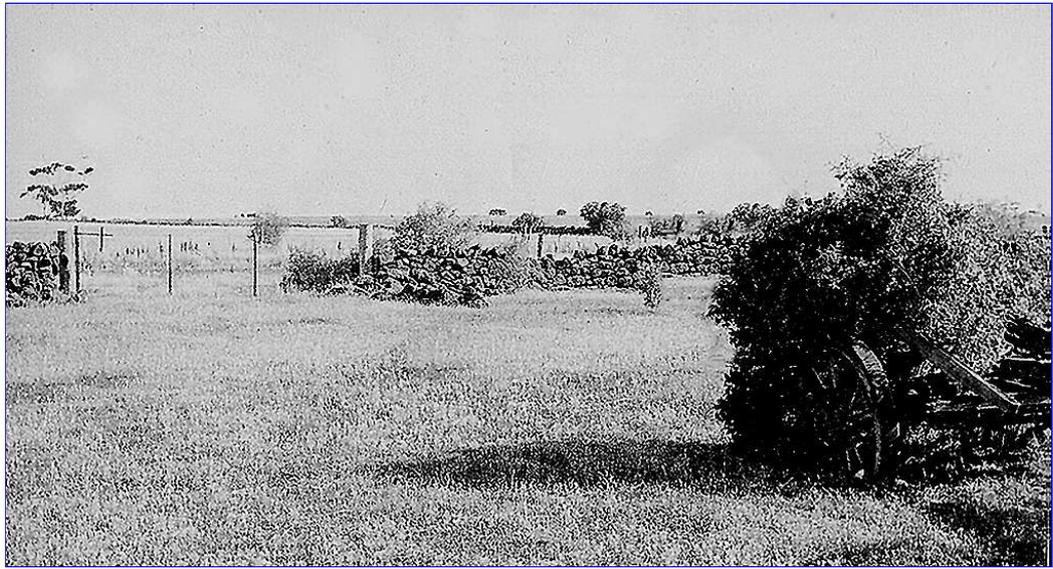
The McAuley Farm

My brother and I occupied ourselves by going exploring, and often my sister would come along. A favorite spot was around the McAuley farm in Taylors Road. His farm had lots of delights for young lads to experience and he was a very nice guy and good humoured enough to put up with us. I liked his pet galah called Charlie. Mr McAuley had sheep on his property and he had three stud Merino rams in a small paddock near the house so he could keep an eye on them and guard against them being stolen. One day we'd come up when McAuley was not about and my brother challenged me to ride one of the rams. I would have been about 9 or 10 and daring enough or gullible enough to accept any challenge. So I got on the back of the ram and was trying to ride when Mr McAuley came out with a shotgun full of saltpetre and fired it in the air because he thought someone was trying to steal his prize stock.

There was another incident with a firearm that was much more serious. Between Shirley Street and Taylors Road there were open fields, a couple of small quarry sites, and stone fences. People would come rabbiting here. One day John and I were riding our bikes around one of the quarry sites when a rabbit hunter tried to scare us away by shooting his 22 rifle at us. Unfortunately the bullet hit my brother in the foot just below the ankle. I heard later that the guy got seven years jail for shooting John.

Another day we were checking out the old square water tanks that were near the McAuley's house. My brother dared me to get into the tank, which had a small opening on top. Well, I got into it alright, but once in I couldn't get out. My sister went up to the house for help and Mr McAuley came out with a stick and beat the tank a few times telling me to get out of his water tank. I guess he was trying to scare me a bit because what I had done was quite dangerous. He helped me out in the end.

In one of the paddocks on the south side of Taylors Road was an old dray wagon with large wheels just sitting out in the weather slowly deteriorating. We would often play on that and I always wanted to take it home because I thought it would look good in our yard. Mr McAuley said his father had brought that wagon with him when he came to St Albans many years ago so he wanted to keep it.



The McAuley paddock near Shirley Street, complete with fieldstone fences, Boxthorn bushes, and old dray wheels.

Snakes

We were always told to be wary of snakes because they sometimes came close to the houses and would be seen sunning themselves in neighbouring paddocks. There were stone fences near the McAuley property and along adjoining streets which harboured these vipers. One day I got a packet of fags and went there to have a puff and it nearly made me sick. When I was clambering over the rocks I disturbed a big tiger snake, so I was lucky not to have been bitten. Dad could smell the smoke on me when got back and he was not happy with me at all whatever the story of coming across the snake. He was a nonsmoker ever since he gave up smoking during the war.

The snakes were not only around in the paddocks and rocks but they would come into people's yards looking for mice and rats that were attracted by the chook feed. There was a woodshed at home because we had a wood fire and dad would get old packing cases that he'd chop up for firewood. In that woodshed dad had a loop of thick fencing wire hanging on the wall and that was what he used for killing snakes.

When I was at primary school and mum was working my chores were to feed the chooks, get the carrots, and peel the vegies before dad came home from work. One day my five-year-old sister called out because there was a snake between her and the house and she couldn't get past. I finally was able to get around her and the snake and got that length of wire and killed the snake. That was difficult because it couldn't get past me and as I tried to get it, it tried to get me. I finally killed it without getting hurt and proudly presented it to dad when he got home. The snake was taller than I was, even when I was holding it up as high as I could by its tail.

Presents

We never had many presents as children though I remember a couple of special occasions.

My grandmother on my mother's side was still in England plus I had three aunties still over there who were working in the McVitties biscuit factory. One Christmas they sent a large box that contained a McVitties Jaffa Cake. That would have been in 1959 and was the highlight of our year. Another year grandmother sent me the most beautiful plastic windup model of the Britannia. I took it when we went to Williamstown beach on many occasions. It was very special to me because it came from my grandmother.

Dad was very anti firearms and discouraged us from playing with toy pistols, even though like most boys we loved to play cowboys and Indians. Dad had been in the British Cavalry in India and had killed a couple of people in some battles but he never talked about it much, and he never liked us having any guns. He had kept his spurs and some other items as mementos of his

cavalry days hidden away. One day I got his spurs and was wearing them on my gumboots as I walked around imagining I was a cowboy. Dad caught me doing this and gave me a thrashing.

He must have eventually seen our disappointment about this ban on cowboy toys. Taubmans, where he worked, would always put on a Christmas function and give presents for the kids. One year he brought me a beautiful holster with a couple of toy pistols and I was so thrilled. I thought I was Roy Rogers, Hopalong Cassidy and Rin Tin Tin all in one. I was so attached to that holster and pistols that you couldn't get them off me even when I was in bed.

Making Friends

Through primary school I made friends with people like Ahmed Ajayoglu and Peter Barbopoulos. I was pleased to get an invitation to the wedding of Peter's cousin, which to me was quite exotic as the wedding ceremony and celebrations followed the Greek cultural traditions. Living in St Albans introduced you to people from around the world. Our neighbours were Italian and I spent a lot of time there with their two sons. That family gave me another understanding of what it was like coming from the other side of the world and looking for a better place to live. I remember them making their own tomato sauce and bottling it in beer bottles.

Starting High School

In 1961, I eventually started the daily long, long walk to St Albans High School from Shirley Street. What a drag! Yes, still no buses and no cars, but it did give me time to think and dream. I mixed with larrikin Aussie David Dusting who I thought was sometimes crude in his vernacular but interesting to my pommie way of looking at things. My quietly-spoken mate Detlef Beyer from Germany sat next to me at school. We talked about lots of things and he helped me with my German studies; I liked his accent. Detlef's father was a textile engineer and I think Detlef is like his father in attention to detail. I would often walk home part of the way with David Dusting and Lesley Peterson as they were heading in the same direction.



Form 2F with Mr Youd. Philip Spivey and Detlef Beyer are in second row from the back, third and fourth from the right.

I tried my hand at sport a couple of times: footy for example. Mum bought me my first pair of footy boots and I was so proud wearing these I felt like Ron Barassi. I was going up for the big mark and you wouldn't believe it - I almost broke my finger.

So I had a new idea: the javelin. Pretty harmless, I thought. Wrong! A new timber fence had just been erected along the east boundary of the high school which separated the new homes from the schoolyard. I thought I would use it just to focus on as a distant target but I under-estimated my strength and that large javelin soared over the fence top, just missing the house occupant. I had a lot of explaining to do!

Then I tried the discus, thinking I would be good at it, even a potential Olympian! Unfortunately I kept spinning when I should have let go. Over the fence it went again so I was told you're not the right sporty type for this event so find something else! I recall having a crush on Lynette Cox who suggested I keep trying. Finally, Mr Pavlov suggested volleyball and, yes, I found I was okay at some sport. Eventually I did find something else that I was suited for and that was when I ended up playing competition tennis as a teenager.



First car owned by the Spivey family, 1958.

Inspirational Teachers

I was not very good academically, but I liked geography, especially Miss Goodwin, the teacher with the miniskirt who loved Raba-ul (as she pronounced it) in New Guinea.

Mrs Sturasteps had her idiosyncrasies but helped me become passionate about history. Mr Ziemelis had a passion for photography that he tried to pass on to students. He taught me to love photography by letting me practise with his beloved old Leica Camera. My current passion for photography came from him, for which I am grateful. So, even though I didn't pick up on the academic side from the teachers I did get inspired. Some teachers have the knack of doing that.

Mr McLeish thought I was a struggling Italian migrant who couldn't grasp English. However, he liked my poetry about waterfalls and the bush, and that appreciation from a teacher was very encouraging. I still write poems about lots of things, usually in fifteen minutes or so when I get going.

I liked woodwork and metalwork but didn't do enough of it. My best project in woodwork was in Mr Burchell's class when we had to design and make a platter. My design was in the style of a Maple leaf and I spent a lot of time carving the design correctly and getting it properly finished. That was my super duper model in woodwork and mum really loved it. I remembered Burchell's discussion about design, and later Mr Youd also introduced us to thinking about design when he was teaching us about the Bauhaus movement. These introductions influenced my thinking and even now my approach to photography and garden design is shaped by those early ideas.

My mum was very sick with cancer when I was in year 9 and that devastated me; I found it hard to focus on school studies because of that. A maths teacher I recall is Mr Scarff, who promised



my dad to help me with my studies after school, but he never did. I think Mr Alcorn may have been a lay preacher or a minister with one of the churches and he was always respectful of people; he was understanding and was a great support after mum died.

Mr Youd encouraged me in art. He thought I had some creative potential that could be developed further but unfortunately he also said he did not have the time to give me individual tuition. He liked a painting I did in

the Impressionist style of a couple of Dutch windmills I had seen on a calendar. Many years later when I visited Amsterdam I saw the very same windmills in their original setting, which was a wonderful experience. I think Youd's belief and encouragement of my creative abilities finally came through in my photography.

I recall with sadness Mr Hill telling me on my last day at high school: *"Spivey! You'll never do any good at much. You're no good at maths and science."* He probably would not remember saying it, but I do. This only inspired me to prove him wrong and the following year I topped the night class with a result of 99% for maths.

Apprenticeship Training

I left at the end of 1964 to start a five-year apprenticeship in Fitting and Machining at ICI in Deer Park, achieving recognition as the second-best apprentice at their training school. My story gets better from here on, so it proves that you should never give up. Yes, I did go to Footscray Tech, RMIT, and Newcastle TAFE to achieve the certificate of Mechanical Engineering, Toolmaker and Production Technician.



When I started my apprenticeship with ICI I was working with a Scottish feller called Jock who really taught me a lot. He was extremely well organized and very neat with all his tools and work. Nothing ever phased him. One of his favourite sayings was: "Anybody can do a bad job, but only a good tradesman can make a bad job good." I was 16 and he was 60 and he taught me very well about thinking and planning a job before you start.

I will always remember one unfortunate event in my early working life when I was working at ICI in Yarraville. I was working on the top of storage tanks and saw the Westgate Bridge collapse with the cars toppling off.

In 1970, my lovely mother died of cancer at the age 49 and my father was heartbroken. So was I. My sister was only 14 and my eldest brother was married and living in W.A.

Marriage

In 1972 I transferred for one year to Dulux ICI in New Zealand. I went over without getting a passport as they were not needed then. Then the Australian Government brought a law in overnight requiring all people coming to Australia to have passports, so I was not able to return to Australia. It was there in New Zealand that I met Kiwi Carol, the love of my life for the last 33 years. I eventually got NZ citizenship because I married a Kiwi.

In 1985 we came back to Australia. Carol (the nurse) and my two daughters and son. Jonathan is now 25 and a computer buff married to Elise; they live in Berwick. Susan is a hairdresser instructor and expecting very soon and married to Trent. Karen is a nurse married to Mark and living up in Bowral near Sydney. They have two dear children, who are our first grandchildren.



My son and oldest daughter.

Current Activities

Unfortunately in 1999 I broke my back at work and have had two major operations and can no longer work at engineering.

Last year I went back to school and have almost completed a Certificate 4 in Horticulture Landscape design. I am just finishing the last two subject this year and hope to design gardens.

My hobbies are writing poetry and country songs, exploring the outback, photography, and gardens.

I have a special interest in the Indian people and have been there twice in the last five years. My wife and I have set up an organization Good Oil Good News, which has constructed a rural primary school and now working on establishing an agricultural high school. We also provide sewing machines with training and pedal rickshaws so people can run their own business and get out of poverty forever.

Travel is in my blood. Since my accident I have been to the UK, USA, India, Sri Lanka, Europe, and Malaysia, seeing things like the Taj Mahal, Loch Ness, Grand Canyon, New Orleans, Tower of Pisa, Yosemite National Park, Paris, Vienna, Amsterdam, and Venice.

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Views of the foreshore at Clifton Springs near the Spivey home.

Today I live with my wife in Clifton Springs right near the golf club and the beach on the Bellarine Peninsular, 18 kilometers from Geelong.



Philip Spivey, 2006.

Photographs courtesy of Philip Spivey.
Sidebar decoration is based on the photography of Philip Spivey.