

# Annual Holidays

*Judith Lewis*

My husband Kevin and I recently returned from our fifth holiday on Norfolk Island. This time we were accompanied by my brother Rob, his wife Pat, our eldest son John, his wife Vicki and their twelve year old son Todd. Todd, when asked what he thought of Norfolk Island replied, "It was really good, but a bit boring." I'm not surprised that Todd found it boring. By the age of ten, he had holidayed in London and Paris and spent most annual holidays either at a Gold Coast beachside apartment or Coffs Harbour resort, where children are entertained from sunrise to sunset.

I wonder how Todd's generation would classify the holidays we so looked forward to as children? "Boring" would have been the last word I would have used for the annual two weeks' holidays we spent, firstly in the Blue Mountains, at Katoomba, then, as we grew older, at North Narrabeen.

The first holiday I can recall at Katoomba was when I was three years old. I remember our Grandfather Reilly accompanied us. He died later that year. The house we rented had verandahs around three sides and my older brother Bill and I had great fun playing chasings through the hall, out the back door and in again through the front (till some adult put a stop to such rowdy behaviour).

The trip to Katoomba was an adventure in itself. Travelling by steam train sometimes you had a box carriage all to yourselves. Being told not to put your head out the window because you would get soot in your eye didn't stop you, till you did get soot in your eye and realised how painful it was! At Valley Heights the train had a second steam locomotive coupled to it for the long haul up the mountains to Katoomba. At Katoomba there was a turntable onto which the second engine would be driven, to be turned round and sent back down the line to Valley Heights to do the trip again.

I don't recall my father staying with us through the week, but he certainly went with us and was there each weekend. One of my aunts, Auntie Vera, or a cousin, Lucy Teale, are two people I recall staying to help my mother on different occasions. Katoomba had some wonderful parks, especially Kingsford Smith Park in a natural hollow near the railway line. It had slippery dips, swings, a type of merry-go-round we called a "razzle dazzle" and an elegant band-stand.

We always visited Echo Point to marvel at the Three Sisters. A photographer, with a model of a "mountain devil" for you to pose with, was always there. I was apprehensive of that mountain devil and quite convinced that there were more real ones like him living in the mist! My mother, in her younger days, had been a keen horsewoman, so we were also treated to pony rides. They weren't a treat for me! Always afraid of the ponies, I pretended to enjoy myself, all the time longing for the final lap of the circuit to appear.

Once we were considered sensible enough to handle ourselves in the water our annual holidays moved to North Narrabeen where we again rented a cottage for two weeks each summer. The cottage we rented for the first two years was in the best location, in Ocean Street, right at the bridge. We could sit up in bed at night and watch the lights from the camping area across the lake and, in the early mornings, we'd watch fish jumping in the lake.

Our favourite activity at North Narrabeen was canoeing. My two brothers, Bill and Rob, and I, plus any adult who could either coax or tip us out of one, would share two hired canoes for an hour at a time. It was the best fun. One year we had a cottage in Lagoon Street closer to Narrabeen township, or terminus as it was then known. The house block backed onto the lake and its owner lived in a flat underneath the holiday house. He owned a rowboat and allowed us to use it. That was also heaps of fun and the three of us fitted in the one boat.

North Narrabeen may have been chosen as our holiday destination because my father had had aunts who once lived there in a two-storey house in Ocean Street backing on to the beach and near the Surf Club. My Auntie Vera pointed the house out to me as one where she had once stayed. The house was referred to as 'The Castle' because of its turret-like structure at one end.

We did get to meet a very elderly family friend who lived in a small weatherboard cottage on the other side of the Surf Club. Ma Mullins lived there with her sons who were North Narrabeen lifesavers. One of their mates was Johnny Bliss, a beach sprint champion and footballer with Manly Warringah Rugby League team. I recall going into the Mullens' backyard, which also backed on to the beach, to be shown a huge wooden surfboard which I believe had been given to them by the Hawaiian surfer Duke Kanahamoku, who introduced surfing to Australia. It was probably about twelve feet long and I couldn't imagine anyone carrying it, let alone surfing on it!

As with the Katoomba holidays, getting to Narrabeen was also an adventure. We usually went across mid year to book our accommodation with one of the letting agents. This meant a steam train ride to Central, electric train to Wynyard and either a bus from there to Narrabeen or a ferry ride to Manly followed by a bus ride to Narrabeen. The bus was usually a double decker or, as Rob, when he was little, called them "Debbil Duckers". Travelling either of these ways laden with holiday luggage was fairly arduous so my father decided to hire a tip truck and driver to take us to Narrabeen each year. He hired the truck from Mr Clem Kelly. My mother told us Mr Kelly used to cart manure with the truck through the week and clean it up to take us on the Saturday.

Travelling à la truck meant we could take much more luggage. My father or mother travelled in the cab with Clem and we three kids sat in the back. We were even allowed to stand up behind the cab if we stayed in the centre and held on tightly. I can still relish the glorious feel of the wind blowing in my hair! We usually took at least one cane chair so we had turns sitting in comfort. At Pennant Hills Hotel the two men stopped for a beer and we were brought out a most welcome lemonade. It was the grandest trip.

Saving money to spend on our holidays became very important. One year I believe I saved as much as twelve pounds. That money was ours to spend as we wanted. Most of mine went on strawberry milkshakes or, the ultimate treat, banana splits, three scoops of ice-cream, half a split banana either side, with chocolate flavouring and crushed nuts to top it all off! Yum! At North Narrabeen, near the Surf Club, there were two milkbars on opposite corners of Ocean Street. One of them had a pinball machine, which fascinated my brothers but I preferred the milkshakes.

My father usually stayed with us at Narrabeen and aunts and uncles would visit for weekends. In those days you hired the house and there was no extra charge if visitors came to stay, not like today where they charge per person! One year our neighbours, the Parkinson family, Frank, Edie and son Peter, also rented a house at Narrabeen. My father and Mr Parkinson used to catch the bus most

afternoons into Narrabeen. My mother told us they were “going to the clinic”. It was much later that I learned the “clinic” was the Narrabeen Hotel!

Another year the Robbins family, Tom and Alice, and children Dorothy, Jim, Tony, Margaret and Carmel, holidayed at Collaroy and we sometimes met on the beach. One year there was a pantomime playing at the picture theatre at Collaroy and Rob and I were allowed to go alone. We caught a bus there, enjoyed the pantomime, then decided to walk home along the beach. It was a very long, hot walk in the middle of summer. I remember thinking we’d never get there. I guess we did it to save the bus fare (maybe it would buy another milkshake?), but probably also because it seemed a fun thing to do. We would have been no more than eight and eleven years old respectively. My mother was not pleased with me when she learned we had walked home and I was sternly lectured on the foolhardiness of my actions.

Our last annual family holiday was in 1950, as my mother died in July that year. When Kevin and I bought our first caravan, in the late 1960s, the first place we went, with our three sons, John, Peter and Paul, was to North Narrabeen. I guess I was trying to recapture some of the great times we had had then. Simple holidays, no added entertainment, just a family being together, swimming, canoeing, taking walks, going to the movies, playing games, enjoying each others’ company. Boring? Never!

Judith’s story of going on holidays on the back of Clem Kelly’s truck may bring back other memories for some of our readers.

How many would remember the outings with the Presbyterian Fellowship group on the back of Norm Powe’s truck in the late 1940s- early 1950s?

- \* Sitting on forms or egg boxes...

- \* Picnics all around the district – Wallacia, Cattai, Bobbin Head, Patonga, Ettalong, Audley, Hollywood Park...

- \* Dances at Wilberforce, Marayla....

- \* Carol Singing at Christmas. Singers on the back of the truck with the pedal organ also hoisted aboard to supply the music.