

Kalamunda & Districts  
Historical Society  
Oral Histories

a Memoir of



IGNATIA  
PASKULICH  
(nee Vatroslava Dobric)



Ignatia with her father Peter and sister Bett Dobric, 'Wilgi Hills' farm, Pithara. Circa 1930's

*'My father, Peter was in Australia during the First World War, but only as a workman. He came of his own accord and was welcomed as a worker but not as a migrant at the time.*

*After the war he had to return to the old country (Croatia) because he was an unwanted migrant.*

*Upon his arrival he was called up into the Serbian army for two years, he wasn't bargaining on that.*

*When that was finished he married the nicest little girl he could find, got her pregnant and headed for Australia'.*

Ignatia Paskulich, 2012

An interview of Ignatia Pakulich, (nee Vatroslava Dobric) was conducted by Gigi Hesterman on 1 October 2012, on behalf of the Kalamunda and Districts Historical Society.

This summary of the original interview was prepared on behalf of the Bill Shaw Oral History Group



Katerina and Ignatia Dobric. Circa 1925



Wilgi Hills' farm, Pithara Circa 1930's



Katerina and Ignatia Dobric. Circa 1927

Ignatia Paskulich, nee Vatroslava Dobric, was born on 15 March 1925 in Novi Vinodol, Croatia, now known as Yugoslavia.

Ignatia lived with her mother, Katerina, (Kate) in Croatia whilst her father, Petar, (Peter) travelled ahead to Western Australia to settle down before sending for his family.

Ignatia didn't meet her father until she was 5 years old when she arrived in Fremantle with her mother. She recalls her mother saying, "Look down there, there's your father," and she saw a scruffy looking chap working on the wharf. Her dad walked up the gangplank and hugged her mum, when Ignatius ran off he chased her around the deck and they bonded right away.

She recalls her father proudly carrying her on his shoulders through the show in Perth letting everyone know that he had a daughter.

Ignatia's father worked on a wheat farm in Pithara, Wilgi Hills which was north of Perth just before Dalwallinu. He managed the farm for Jim McConnell for about five years.

They travelled to the country town by train arriving early in the morning. With no-one there to meet them Ignatius remembers how quiet the township was, not even a dog barking. She immediately felt the loneliness and didn't like it.

It was hard on her mother who couldn't speak English but she simply took it in her stride. Ignatia describes her mother as a good, solid, lovely woman who set to work on the farm as a cook and doing any other work that was required. Working in very primitive conditions, Ignatia's mother boiled her sheets in a kerosene tin over a fire. Bett, Ignatia's sister, was born whilst they lived in the Wheatbelt.

They eventually moved to Mundaring Weir where her father worked chopping wood for the engines.

## Wilgi Hills Pithara

James McConnell, with  
Manager Peter Dobric,  
family and friends.

Circa 1930's





Ignatia Dobric going to school in Kalamunda  
Circa 1936—1939



Kate Dobric in Dobric family orchard, Fern Road, Piesse  
Brook, looking towards Paulls Valley. Circa 1936



Ignatia, Kate and Peter Dobric at the orchard  
homestead, in Piesse Brook. Circa 1936

## Piesse Brook in the 1930s

The family moved to Piesse Brook where Ignatia's father bought land. He was conned by a man called Schleicher who said they could make a living by pickling the wheat to use as seed for the next season. The property was simply an orchard with orange, lemon, Alberta peach and plum trees. Peter soon realised that it wasn't a paying concern and they couldn't make enough money to survive so he went to work at the dam cutting wood.

Ignatia started school in the Wheatbelt and from the age of 10 she attended the Piesse Brook Primary School. She remembers following little gravel roads, walking through the animal pads that went down to the creek and walking across a tree trunk in the water to get to school. It was a very small school with one teacher, one classroom and around 20 students.

She then attended Kalamunda Primary School on Heath Road with Mr Tom Millar who was her teacher. There were three rooms, one for infants to juniors, one across the road for those up to 6th standard and the other for the three top grades.

Ignatia rode her horse to school leaving home at eight o'clock and arriving at school at nine. Left in a nearby paddock she would make sure the horse had water and feed at lunch time. Other students would often ask her "Can I ride your horse up the street and you can ride my bike?"

Ignatia fondly remembers Mr Millar as a magnificent teacher, a very gentle man but one who could throw the wooden duster within an inch of someone's ear if they misbehaved or spoke out of turn. Mr Millar had migrated from Scotland and so for sports he taught them the Highland fling.

She remembers her neighbour Mr Paull who had two daughters. He grew giant rhubarbs which were magnificent. On one occasion someone snuck onto his property and pinched a root from the rhubarb. Mr Paull found it and took it back.

She recalls Kalamunda as being very small and quiet then with only a few shops. She remembers Kostera's Garage, Crabb's grocery shop and Portwine's Bakery.

## **Kalamunda School Senior Class**

Standing, back row middle, Ignatia Dobric

Circa 1938





Peter, Bett, Kate and Ignatia (age 15 years) Circa 1940

## The Dobric Family in the 1940s



Ignatia ( age 17 years), Peter, Winsome, Bett and Kate. Circa 1942

## Putting her Maths skills to work

Like most children in those days Ignatia sat her final exams and left school at the age of 14. Her friend who was in the labour bureau business offered her a job working as a comptometer operator. This suited Ignatia well as she excelled at maths.

The comptometer was essentially a calculator that calculated in pounds, shillings and pence. Her first calculation was 346 pounds of wool at 32 and 3/4 pence. She loved it, and thrived.

The machine was operated by using all four fingers on each hand, similar to a typewriter. The answer was displayed on the machine and she would write this down on paper as there was no print out.

Working at Wesfarmers in Wellington Street, Perth she rode her bicycle for five miles from Mundaring Weir to the train station then on the train to Perth and a short walk to Wesfarmers.

She was only there a short while when the boss noticed her efficient work practices and promoted her to special projects. At just seventeen she was responsible for checking and verifying whatever was asked of her.

Working throughout the war years she spent four years at Wesfarmers before moving to Coventry's for a change in job. She transferred to Fremantle when her husband returned home from war but as was the practice at that time she was 'put off' to make room for the ex-army girls.



Wesfarmers, 569 Wellington Street, Central Perth. Circa 1917





# On their engagement

**IGNATIA DOBRIC AND CHARLIE  
PASKULICH**

20-3-1946

## *Ignatia and Charlie carve out a life together*

Ignatia met Charlie Paskulich when she was 15 years old. As they were from the same township in Croatia their families often congregated together in Perth or Fremantle.

At first they were simply friends and they would dance together. He was a very tall man at six foot to Ignatia's five foot two so he would bend down to her height.

They married when he came out of the army. She was 21 and he was 24 years old. They went to live and manage Charlie's fathers' orchard in Eva Street, Maddington where they grew grapes and made their own wine.

After the birth of their first child they bought their own block and built their first home.

They moved to 9 Penn Street, Maddington overlooking Longies Park near where the railway line crosses Albany Highway.

Ignatia and Charlie had five children, John, Irene, Jeffrey, Karen and Grant. For 10 years there were no children then suddenly there were three of them under three and a half years old so she would have one under her wing whilst holding the hand of the other.

During World War II Charlie served in Darwin when the Japanese planes were coming over. He was then stationed in New Guinea and New Britain, an island attached to New Guinea.

Ignatia recalls that he went through some terrible experiences during those years. When he returned home he would have terrible nightmares and told of how the noise of the sirens and seeing mates with malaria was a terrifying experience that seemed to stay with him.

Ignatia recalls a good life with Charlie for more than 45 years. She based this on a common understanding and their similar backgrounds. They would just see something and the same idea would come to them at the same time.

Ignatia remembers a time when they visited a gentle old lady from the old country. She was in a poor state and was doubled up. The people she was staying with had a Major Mitchell parrot. Charlie and Ignatia looked at each other, both thinking that the old lady looked just like the parrot. They couldn't stop laughing so they had to go outside quickly so as not to offend anyone.

Cover image: Peter, Kate and Ignatia Dobric, Wilgi Hills, Pithara circa 1930

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