

**KALAMUNDA & DISTRICTS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ORAL HISTORIES**

**a Memoir of
James Findlay**



Jim aged 14 out the back of the tearooms on Haynes Street, Kalamunda. Circa 1948

Kalamunda Kash & Karry

Mum use to dress us in Grey Melange shorts and we wore shoes but others were running around without shoes.

We had some indigenous kids there, they were good kids. We never had any problems at school.

They were good sport players, they ran fast but they didn't have shoes.



Jim describes what the children wore when he was at school in the 1930s

An interview of Mr James Findlay was conducted by Jeanette Achurch, August 2016 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



The Findlay family. L-R: Alexander, Jim, Sandy and Peg. Circa 194



Jim (front) and brother Alexander ('Sandy'). Circa 1935

James (Jim) Findlay was born in Piesse Brook, Western Australia on 14 April 1934.

His parents, Alexander and Peg, were migrants from Aberdeen, Scotland who arrived in WA in the late 1920s. Whilst they were engaged in Scotland they married in a registry office in Perth in 1928.

Jim's dad was a draughtsman but changed career path when he leased his own orchard in Lesmurdie and became an orchardist.

Jim recalls living at the Glyde Road's Orchard in a brick and tile home. Whilst they had electricity they drew water from the wells on the property. His older brother, Sandy would swim in the dam that was also frequented by a variety of birds.

Jim remembers Tognella's Saw Mill at the top of Canning Road. It wasn't far from the orchard and his dad would travel through the bush to get there.

When Jim was around four years old he went with his dad on the horse and cart to get a load of wood blocks. They drove up the walking track, through the bush. On their return trip the cart went over a broken stump tipping it onto its side. Fortunately no one was hurt, including the horse.

Jim's dad died during WWII and his mum could no longer manage the orchard on her own. She tried but couldn't find help with the fruit picking so she had to let the lease go. She moved the family into a small cottage on Haynes Street and worked part time at Kash & Karry until the end of the war.





Alexander, 3rd from the left, marching from Northam with his unit. Circa 1940



Soldiers from the 2/4th on a troop train

Alexander (Sandy) Findlay

Jim's dad goes to war

Jim's dad, Alexander (Sandy), served with the Gordon Highland Regiment in Scotland during the First World War. He was one of many young men who lied about their age so they could join the forces at the age of 17.

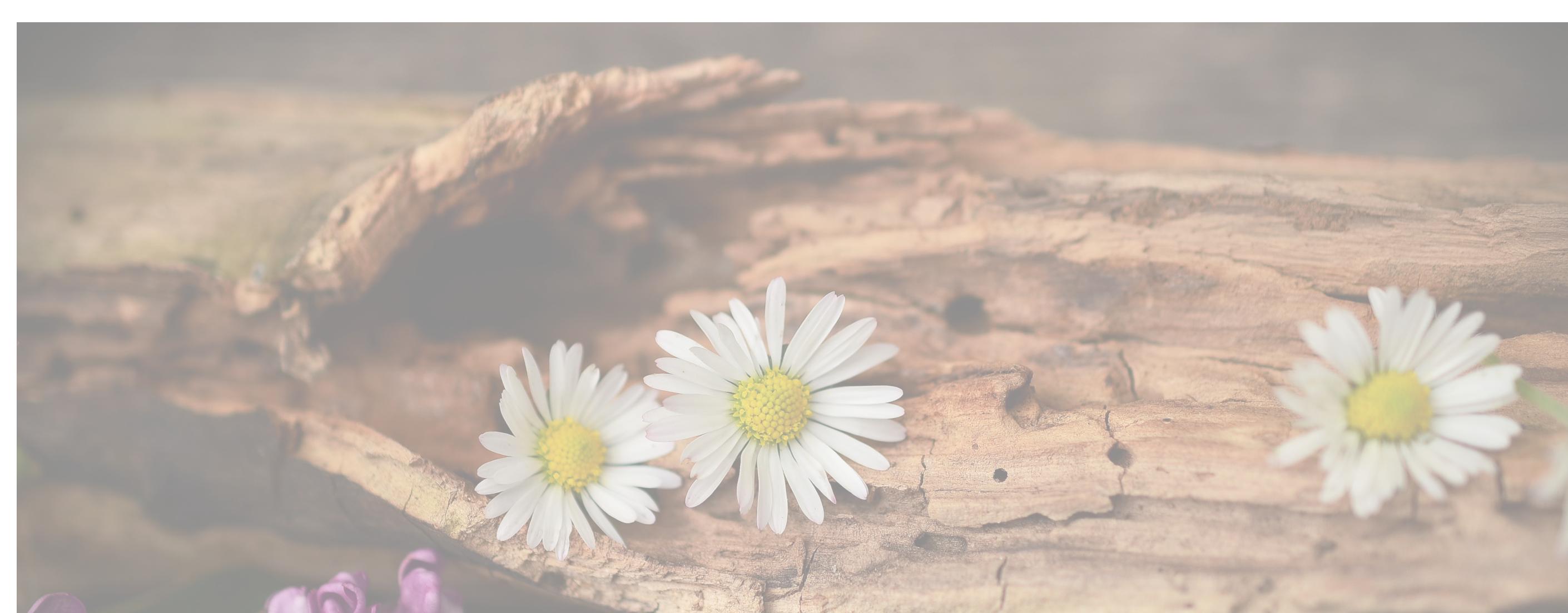
He never talked about the war from which he returned with shrapnel wounds. He was held prisoner in a Prisoner Of War (POW) camp until his release at the conclusion of the war.

When the Second World War broke out he once again joined the effort. He felt that if he couldn't help in Scotland or Europe he could do something in Australia. He told Jim's Mum that he was going to join the Home Guard, a volunteer defence group of older men who were unable to go away to war. They were provided training for the defence of their local area should Australia be attacked.

Instead he joined the Australian Imperial Force. At the age of 43 he understated his age to ensure acceptance. The shrapnel scarring on his side was noted but as he was fit he was allowed to re-enlist.

In 1941 he went to the Northam Training Camp and was placed with the 2nd/4th Machine Gun battalion. Whilst at war he was once again captured and placed in a POW camp on the Burma railway.

In 1945 Jim recalls sitting by the wireless (radio) with his family to listen to the roll call of released prisoners but his dad's name wasn't read out. They later received word from Melbourne that he had died of malaria 18 months before the end of the war but as everything was censored they didn't get the information through at that time.





Haynes Street, Kalamunda. On the left: Findlay's tea rooms then Drapers and Outfitters.
On the right: Steere's newsagency with car parked and Kostera's garage C.1948



Peg Findlay. Circa 1940

Jim's younger years

Jim started school when he was 5 years old and remembers riding his bike to Kalamunda Primary School with his dad and older brother, Sandy. Sometimes in the winter one of Mac Beard's uncles would stop in Glyde Road and put their bikes in the back of his bakery delivery van and take them into Kalamunda.

Jim wasn't very fond of school as he found it a bit of a challenge. He remembers that there were two big classrooms and the old shed outside which only had three sides. They later put a classroom out there even though at the time there were no walls.

After leaving primary school Jim attended the Forrest High School in Lord Street, Perth. This was a semi technical school where he learned wood and metal work.

Jim was much happier at this school where sport was prominent. Polly Farmer, Ted Kilmurray and Wally Langdon were three exceptional sportsmen associated with that school.

Jim remembered the two Aboriginal families who lived in Boonooloo Road. The children went to school with Jim. One of the fathers, Ted Ronan, served in the same battalion as Jim's Dad in Singapore and was also a POW.

After the war Ted was often asked to leave Perth hotels so his white mates would walk out with him. Although Indigenous Australians were considered good enough to serve their country they weren't good enough to have a drink with in those days. Jim recalls this attitude continuing through to the early 1970s where segregated bars continued to be operated in Alice Springs.





Kostera's Kalamunda Garage. Haynes Street, Kalamunda

Kostera's Garage and Bus Service

In 1946 Mr Kostera Senior, who owned the local garage, offered Jim's Mum the opportunity of leasing the tea rooms in Haynes Street. The family moved into a couple of old rooms at the back of the shop where they stayed for around 12 years.

Just before Jim finished high school Mr Kostera offered him an apprenticeship as a mechanic. Jim felt very lucky for the offer especially as the workshop was just across the road in Haynes Street.

In the first 6 months as an apprentice he earned around 17 shillings and 6 pence which wasn't a lot of money then. Buses were the main business at the workshop so he spent his time greasing buses, changing oil and sweeping the floors. He recalls spending a lot of time climbing underneath the buses and lying on the ground. There was a double ramp hoist available but it took half a day to pull the big buses up so they wouldn't use it.

He worked with a good crew which was just like a family. They received a bonus every year on top of their weekly wage but this stopped with the down turn of the bus service.

The service controlled the bottom of the hills with a terminus in Kalamunda. The buses travelled to Perth, Welshpool and Maida Vale. Once they reached the Great Eastern Highway the main bus service took over so they couldn't pick up passengers past Victoria Park.

Whilst a bus service was still required around the Forrestfield area the route ran at a loss because of the lack of housing and patronage at the time.

The Metropolitan Transport Trust (MTT) bought Kostera's bus service in the late 1950s. Jim remained with them long enough to accumulate his long service leave before moving on to the Midland Brick works.





Jim and Joy Findlay. Circa 2000



Bradley Findlay and Tricia Forgnau (nee Findlay), Maida Vale, Circa 2006

Team Jim and Joy

Jim took work for a season with John Arnold Cross Country Safaris to experience something different. He took six to eight people on overland camping tours to Alice Springs in a four wheel drive. Pulling a trailer he would transport the food and camping gear for the three night camping in the desert on the way. They passed through Warburton, Cosmo, Newbury and Laverton and then on to Ayer's Rock. Jim was not only the driver but the tour guide, cook and he set up and established the camps.

Jim met Kathleen (Joy) on one of the trips and they married 18 months later in 1974. They lived in Joy's parents home in Como, a house which was vacant at the time.

Joy worked in the typing pool at the Port Authority in Fremantle and Jim worked at Major Motors in Belmont. But Jim couldn't keep away from the hills so they moved up to Lesmurdie where their children Bradley and Tricia were born.

From 1976-1980 Jim and Joy operated their own mechanic's business in Godfrey Street, Walliston. They leased part of a panel beating shop owned by old friends Jim knew from Kostera's. The business was considered a bit remote for many customers so Joy would drop people off or pick up their car and then return it. She did a lot of running around with the children in the back of the car, picking up parts and getting radiators redone. Joy also did all of the bookkeeping.

Jims' brother-in-law, Trevor, was looking for an investment. He bought the panel shop and went into partnership with Jim and Joy who ran the business for 26 years, selling it in 2005.

While the panel shop was paying for itself Jim started a garden bag run but after a series of heart attacks he was forced to retire.



Cover image: Jim on his way home from technical school, Perth GPO. Circa 1951

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