



City of Port Phillip Living Heritage Project
Edited transcript – Roger Backway
Interviewee: Roger Backway [RB]
Interviewer: Sarah Rood, Way Back When Consulting Historians [SR]
20 August 2018

Backway family background

0.28

SR: As discussed, Roger, we will just move through and basically traverse the distance of your life together if that's okay. So, if we could start with where and when you were born?

RB: I was born in Melbourne ... 1938, to parents Lily and Reg Backway.

SR: What was your mother's maiden name?

RB: Baldock. They originated in recent times from Bendigo and Eaglehawk.

SR: Were you born in hospital or at home?

RB: In a hospital.

SR: Do you know which one?

RB: Was it called the Women's Hospital at the time? Yes. Right in the CBD of Melbourne.

SR: Are you an only child?

RB: No, I have a brother Gary who I think is seven years younger.

SR: Tell me a little bit about what your parents were doing around about the time of your birth; were they working, where were they living, stuff like that.

RB: They were both working people. Father lived in Footscray, Mother lived in Preston. Never, ever been discussed as how they came together, never knew any of that. And it wasn't until my mother's passing some years ago that we got all the personal papers of wedding dates and everything; we found out then as to why they married. [Laughs.]

SR: Why would that be, Roger?

RB: I'll leave that for you to guess. [Laughs.] And we have a photo somewhere here, over there, that I can show you later, which we think is their wedding day. It was a fairly low-key thing I think.

SR: What were their family backgrounds? Were they working class?

RB: Very much so. My father, his father was also Reg, Reginald, and his occupation was stable hand, and his last job was looking after the horses at a big hardware store out in Geelong Road, Footscray, and he lived not far away. Retired and then moved back to Maryborough to his family farm.

SR: **I want to go back to the beach in a minute but I just want to get a little bit more about your dad's background. First of all, where was his family from?**

RB: Well let's go back another step. The Backway name originated in Australia through a convict being sent out for stealing a pair of trousers in 1830-something, and I think he was transported to Tasmania 1847. He did his time, with a few problems, and was given his ticket of leave in Hobart where he met a young lady, a free lady, and they married in the church at Newtown in Hobart. She was my later great-great-grandmother, and she signed the wedding certificate with a cross so she was totally illiterate. Somehow, and I don't know how, they got to Victoria, and probably walked to Maryborough. As we've just recently found out they were very successful gold miners. They ended up having their own mine which apparently paid very well, which one of their boys was killed in actually; it was an underground mine, it was not just surface diggings. Through that they were either to purchase and/or given a grant of a big block of land in Maryborough which became the family home.

SR: **Which you mentioned later in life as well, going back –**

RB: Yes. His name was Daniel and he went on to have 13 children. Some of them didn't get to be very old, they died young. But they maintained that farm through the family and it became a dairy farm which supplied some of Maryborough's milk.

18:36

SR: **Was it always a dairy farm from the beginning?**

RB: We don't know, don't know when the dairy farm came in. But my grandfather, my Pop, was part of that family. He had about six brothers and one of the brothers then went on to own the farm. He had four - he had three brothers and two daughters and they all worked on the farm.

SR: **The owner of the farm?**

RB: Yes. In those years is when I used to go up there on occasions supposedly to have a holiday but I was expected to earn my keep as they would say.

SR: **And it's also indirectly responsible for your meeting Maxine so we'll come back to that later.**

RB: Okay.

SR: **So, Reginald senior, Pop, he grew up on the farm?**

RB: Yes.

SR: **And then at some point - ?**

RB: At some point he left the farm and he went to St Arnaud where my father Reginald was born. There was a separation in the family, my grandmother separated from Reginald, under what circumstances we don't know, and Pop and his son Reg came

to Melbourne and lived in Footscray. My grandmother also ended up in Melbourne, and lived in South Melbourne, and my father Reg used to see them both quite separate, they never ever got back together, but they were both friends of the family.

SR: Did you see your grandmother much?

RB: Yes. My grandmother in the late 1940s/early '50s owned a Morris Minor - how she got that I really don't know - and she used to lend it to my father. We'd all climb aboard and go to the country, or drive to there and drive to there, sometimes with my grandmother, sometimes without her. We were friendly with both components of that marriage.

21:31

SR: Your father had some brothers, is that right?

RB: Yes, my father had one brother, Lindsay, who was a deal younger, I don't know exactly how much younger. He's just recently passed on unfortunately.

SR: So, the uncles that you mentioned last time that went to war, were they on your mother's side? Went to the Second World War?

RB: Yes.

SR: Well that's a good time for us to talk about it.

RB: Let's go back a step too. We visit Maryborough every year because we go up there for an antique bottle show. We re-visit parts of Maryborough that I can remember and we go out to the family farm. A lot of it has been developed now into housing estates. But we recently drove past Princes Park which is their main footy ground and everything and there was a pair of stone gates there, commemorative gates put up for the First World War. We went over there and found two Backways on there that we had no idea, that were killed in the First World War that were from Maryborough, but I've never bothered to research that part of it.

SR: So clearly the Backways made a major contribution.

RB: Exactly right, yes. I mentioned earlier that I went to the Show with my dad and my pop, and there would be people stopping my pop at the showgrounds saying, "I can remember you as a footballer in your early days." I think Maryborough had their own league, and I've got pictures somewhere of the Maryborough Daisies, and the Primroses, and all these sorts of strange names. Well we think they're strange names now, in their time they were okay.

SR: I'm going to ask you one more question about your dad and then we'll move over to Lily. He was a heliographer?

RB: Yes.

23:48

SR: Tell me what that is.

RB: I believe it has something to do with the printing of plans and blueprints which he used in the building industry. It's a not a word that's in use today. He gained a

position when he came --- when he lived in Footscray the position was in Melbourne proper, and I've just forgotten the name of the people that employed him. But according to his brother, later on he got sacked or was relieved under duress for some reason. Uncle Lindsay seemed to think that he was treated very unfairly. From that position he then got a job with the old SEC which was the State Electricity Commission and worked in a seven or eight storey building in William Street. On occasions I'd go and visit him. He had the same job of printing plans and what have you there on huge big machines that used a lot of ammonia. You'd walk into these rooms and it'd sting your eyes. It was a horrible place to work as far as I'm concerned.

SR: Would that have had an impact on your dad's health?

RB: I've never really considered that, I really don't know. It may well have. But he then went on through the SEC. He and Bill Owens were a little bit competitive with cameras. Cameras in those days were fairly simple arrangements and taking funny little pictures that were only two inches square. Through that interest he got to meet people in the photography department within the SEC and learnt a lot more about photography, then got a job in that department. I can still remember him coming home very, very happy with himself; it was a major jump both in skills and in wages no doubt. He enjoyed that job no end. It involved occasions in helicopters flying around the mountains like at Falls Creek taking pictures of the electrical works up there. He enjoyed that very much. Unfortunately the SEC all closed down. All our photographs from the weekends used to come home in 10 x 8 glossy prints - let's not go down that.

SR: Tell me a little bit about Lily now.

RB: There are a few things we don't understand about Lily. She was a pretty good mother, fairly strict, some Victorian beliefs in dress and conduct. At the dining table we were never allowed to leave until she said so, we had to ask permission to leave the table insomuch as, "Mum I've had sufficient, can I leave?" She had a few religious beliefs. That family, I think they all grew up as Methodists, and I think my mother's father, my grandfather, may have been - he belonged to some sort of lodge in Eaglehawk, Orange Lodge, which has got some connotations back to the Irish I think. She was obviously very well educated. Not really sure of her work when she left school, I don't have any records of that and there's nobody left to ask. We have photographs of her in early days, in her late teens, and she's always very well presented I would say, always well dressed with a good hair-do. I could show you some photos and you'll understand. But how she came to meet Reg I really don't know, we don't have any information.

29:25

SR: She was living in Preston?

RB: She was living in Preston, yes.

SR: With whom?

RB: With her parents, my grandparents, and one sister and two brothers, my uncles and aunts.

SR: Do you know much about her parents?

RB: I know that they came from Eaglehawk, the marriage certificates and death certificates that we have all say Eaglehawk. He was a builder, he built houses, and I believe he built the house that they lived in in northern Hay Street, Preston. He was a builder of some reputation. One of his sons, my uncle, went on to be a builder also.

SR: **They are the uncles that went off to the Second World War?**

RB: Yes, and came back. Alex Baldock was I think the eldest, he was older than my mum, and he went away in the navy, he was never married. Isla, Mother's sister, married a man called Alan Cahill [?] and he went away, and he was in the navy and came back. The other brother, Jack, was in the air force. In their photos they all seem to be wearing officers' uniforms but I don't know what degree they got to, but the three of them all came back.

SR: **That's quite unusual.**

RB: Yes.

SR: **And your father didn't have to go?**

RB: No. My father never went to war because of his profession. There was a term for them. I think he copped a bit of stick over it too from the people that went away and came back. I just seem to recall a couple of discussions over the dinner table that apparently weren't too nice.