



Humour and satire about the life and times of a Baby Boomer

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Latchkey Kids

I struggle now to imagine a world with no personal computers, no computer games, no internet, no e-mail, no mobile phones, no SMS, no portable music players, no tablets, no smart phones, no apps, no Facebook, no Twitter, no Instagram. Scary huh?

Well that's the world in which I, and my best friend Arty, lived in the 1950s. And we were 'latchkey kids'. We didn't know that at the time because we hadn't met the term. Wikipedia tells us that a **latchkey kid** or **latchkey child** is a child who returns from school to an empty home because his or her parent or parents are away at work or a child who is often left at home with little or no parental supervision.

Yep, that qualifies Arty and I as latchkey kids. Both sets of our parents worked. And did we mind? Only when they came home early. We usually knocked off from school at around 3.00 pm. Our hard-working parents usually knocked off work at around 5.00 pm. So we had this wonderful, two-hour window of freedom from teachers and parents.

And did we go berserk. We burglarised, vandalised (graffiti was still a fair way down the road, but they mean the same thing mostly), bashed old people, stole their purses and wallets, roamed the neighbourhood looking for people smaller than us to fight (very short kids) and created terror and mayhem as much as we could. And that was just in the first five minutes before we really got serious.

Just joshing. What we did to amuse ourselves without harming property or people (except some minor damage to ourselves) staggers me when I look back on it. Particularly in today's climate of duty of care, threat of litigation, political correctness and molly-coddling of our children.

My home was near a very large swamp. Arty's home was near hectares of sandy bush. So we had two, giant, natural playgrounds to amuse ourselves. And we did. We were never bored. We imagined, we invented, we created, and we improvised. We were around 10 years old.

The swamp was expansive, dry in summer, flooded in winter, so we invented stuff to suit the conditions. In the winter months, we would build canoes out of old, rusty, corrugated iron that had been dumped in the swamp. They never floated too well, were difficult to paddle using old, discarded wooden picket fence and were prone to capsizing. Our challenge then was to try to dry our clothes in the cold air before we had to report for muster at 5.00 pm. We seldom damaged ourselves during our adventures.



I can't speak for Arty, but I used to suffer more damage after the muster as sometimes school clothes were not in quite the same condition as they were at the start of that school day. And explaining why they were still a little damp from an unintended capsizing or sinking tested my vivid imagination.

In the summer months, when the swamp was dry, we would dig elaborate tunnels and build cubby-houses. There were snakes, goannas and all sorts of spiders in the bush including the dreaded red-back spider. But they didn't bother us and we returned the courtesy. We would play war games fighting the Japanese and the Germans, our foes during World War 2.

During the 'cracker season' leading up to Guy Fawkes Night, we would load up with penny bangers (fireworks) and use these as hand-grenades to lob at imaginary foes (and once or twice at each other).

If we didn't have any toy guns, we would make rifles and machine-guns from bits of wood. One of us would be the 'goodies', the other the 'baddies'. The sounds of gun fire and explosions came out of our mouths. If you were shot or blown up, you had to stay dead for a count of ten before you were allowed to re-join the battle. The counts to ten created a few mini wars between Arty and me. We played cowboys and indians, pirates and cops and robbers. We played Robin Hood and his merry men, making bows and arrows from tree branches and string.

If a tree needed climbing, we climbed it. We made parachutes out of old sheets and parachuted from the lower branches. They never worked, but we didn't break any limbs. We used purloined matches to light dry, clumps of weeds and then sat on the weeds to extinguish the fire. Well, we only did this a couple of times because it was too difficult to explain our singed shorts.

We hunted for tadpoles, frogs and gilgies in creeks. We built sand dams and changed the course of little creeks. We made gings (slingshots) and used these with empty bottles as targets. We threw boondies (flat stones) skimming across the water and had contests to see who could throw the farthest.

Our dads would help us make go-carts out of wooden planks, packing crates, rope and pram wheels. We spent many hours carting down the hill in our street. They didn't steer too well, were prone to tipping over and not good at stopping quickly when cars or stray pedestrians or keen dogs got in our way as the carts had no brakes.



The Fear of God

Schools in the 1950s and 1960s were very different to schools of today. All of my schooling except for a short stint in a state kindergarten when I was 4 years old, was in the Catholic school system. From kindergarten at age 5 to my final year of high school at age 17. (In the final year, you sat examinations for what was called the Leaving Certificate - this certified that you were leaving).

Coupled with my strict, practicing Catholic parents, I was well indoctrinated in the teachings and dogma of the Catholic Church.

Kindergarten in 1955 was a lot different to the pre-school of today. I remember one time it was our afternoon nap after lunch. We 5 year-olds were lying on our mats on the floor for our afternoon nap. I was awake lying on my back and I could see the nun walking around and stepping over our prostrate bodies checking that eyes were closed. I closed my eyes as she came closer. She stepped over me and as she did so, for the blink of a second, I opened my eyes and looked straight up her black habit (dress).

I didn't see anything because it was too dark and I closed my eyes quickly as she moved away. But now a terrible fear came over me because, even though I was only 5 years old, I already knew about sins, hell and God's wrath for sinners. Our parish priest was fairly docile and wasn't into giving fire and brimstone sermons. But every now and then we would have a visiting priest, from head office I guess, who thundered from the pulpit and left us in no uncertain terms as to the hellish fate awaiting us sinners. Which we all seemed to be in his opinion. The congregation looked pale and visibly shaken when they filed out of the church.

I was scratching my five year-old head though because, up to that point, I didn't think I'd done anything to warrant burning in hell for eternity. And I was even more miffed to discover that I was a sinner from the moment that I was born courtesy of a tricky little piece of doctrine called original sin. Seems we were all stained with original sin from the moment Adam ate that apple.

I knew it was a 'no no' to look up the nun's habit. I thought I was a goner and the gates of hell would open up and that would be me, done and dusted at five years.

I learned more about the fear of God during my first three years at school at St Peter's Primary School which catered for grades 1 to 7. (I started in Grade 1. I thought that the 12 year-old girls in grade 7 were fully matured women).

Our teachers were nuns from the Irish Dominican Order. Many of them were young Irish girls – probably in their early to mid-twenties. And they were dedicated to their religion and to teaching. And they were mostly wonderful.

There was one older nun who terrified us all through grades one, two and three. She told us that she and God could tell if we were lying by placing a glass object on our tongue. If we were lying, our tongue would turn black. We didn't know it at the time, but it was just a clear, glass paper-weight. But she certainly got our attention and we believed her. At ages



six, seven and eight, you are pretty impressionable. Give me the boy until he is seven and I'll give you the man for life?



Bless me Father for I have sinned

I was brought up as a Catholic and I have to admit that I found the act of confession a bit of a struggle. Confession for Catholics was your ticket to heaven apparently. You confessed your sins and received a penance usually in the form of the prayer, Hail Mary. You recited your penance after you left the confessional booth.

For example, when I was 11, we students went to confession at the Catholic Church near our school every Thursday. Then I had to saddle up again the coming Saturday as my parents insisted that we go to confession every Saturday afternoon. This was to make sure we were fit to receive Holy Communion at mass on the Sunday.

Now remember, I'm only 11 years old and I wasn't really doing any bad stuff. I wasn't doing drugs (didn't even know what drugs were), or stealing cars or breaking into peoples' houses and stealing stuff or bashing people or vandalising property. So I really struggled to give the priest something on Saturday after clearing the slate on the Thursday. To make it worse, it was often the same priest. And as I also served as an altar boy, the priest knew who I was by the sound of my voice. So I couldn't hide behind anonymity which just added to my embarrassment.

However, I didn't want to let the whole scheme down by not doing my part and confessing my sins. I found a way out of my dilemma that seemed to keep everybody happy. I hit on impure thoughts as a sin that was credible and broad enough to allow only vague details in case the priest wanted to find out what my impure thoughts were about. Which they often did. I guess this was to assess the level of penance required to absolve me of my sins and clear the slate.

Now at the age of 11, you are starting to have some impure thoughts. No doubt. And 11-year olds are probably starting earlier these days. But in 1961, my 11-year old mind was not a cesspit of impure thoughts. So in the time between Thursday's confession and Saturday's confession, I just hadn't had the time to get around to any impure thoughts.

The confession ritual went like this:

"Bless me Father for I have sinned. It has been two days since my last confession and these are my sins."

"Yes, my son."

"I have had impure thoughts, Father."

"And what were they, my son?"

And then I would employ my vivid imagination to come up with an example. I think thinking about the images of semi-naked women on display on the magazine covers at a news-agent usually got me through.

My usual penance for impure thoughts was to say three 'Hail Mary's' and all would be sweet. This ploy worked well and even when I didn't actually have any impure thoughts, I would use it as my default sin. Some days I actually did have bona fide impure thoughts to



fess up, but on the days that I didn't I then had the added stress of guilt because I was telling porky pies to the priest.

So on the whole, as I said, I did struggle with confession and, to be honest, it was not something I enjoyed. Although, I did like the idea that once you had sincerely recited your penance you were good to go and, if you were struck down in that moment, you pretty much had a ticket to heaven. Although you might have had a stop-over in purgatory on the way.



Running around like a headless chook

We, and many Australians in the 1950s, used to keep chooks (chickens) in a wire mesh coop in the backyard. Today, most local governments do not permit the keeping of backyard chooks. We had about half a dozen chooks and a rooster.

The sound of a rooster crowing in the early morning was quite common throughout Australian suburbs. No one seemed to mind. There was a lot of upside and not much downside to keeping back-yard chooks. We had free-range eggs, fluffy chickens which would mysteriously appear every now and then (I thought I noticed the rooster grinning every now and then), and free-range chooks for the dinner table on special occasions. These chooks helped get rid of kitchen and food waste at one end and produced admirable garden fertiliser at the other. During the day they roamed freely and helped control insect pests and bugs. They seemed particularly keen on grasshoppers and it was a good contest to watch. The chooks' heads pecking up and down at the grasshoppers and the grasshoppers doing what they do – hop on the grass.

Cleaning the chook pen was the main downside and you had to watch your step for any deposits on the grass outside (we didn't have lawn back then we had grass - buffalo grass with a bit of couch). Another downside was the despatching of the chooks for events such as birthdays, Christmas and Easter. My dad had a large, wooden block, a smaller version of the butcher's blocks which are still used today. The unlucky chook who had been selected for other duties was placed on its side on the block. My dad held the chook down and removed the head by chopping it off with an axe.

That was the plan anyway, but it was never quite that simple. The chooks must have known something was up because they did not go gentle into that good night. They were neither quiet nor willing participants. They squawked noisily and flapped their wings, feathers flying everywhere.

Once the head had been removed from the body, they were not done yet. Headless, and noiseless, they would rush around our back yard, flapping their wings, until they succumbed to loss of blood or air and expired. It was our job then to pluck the feathers and then we would gut the chook.

This whole exercise was more stressful for the chooks than for us, but it was not something we took a lot of pleasure from. It wasn't that we had grown fond of the chooks. We didn't find them that affectionate. If anything, they were a bit standoffish. I think it was the violence of the final act. We consoled ourselves with the thought that their death was instant and they would have been registering no pain as the brain had been separated from the body. And the running, headless chooks were a great treat for us and the neighbours' kids.

The local butcher was often dispensing chooks using the same technique and we kids were keen spectators looking over the fence into the back yard behind the butcher's shop. He was more adept at it than my dad and often there would be three or four headless chooks running and flapping around his yard at the same time. The weird thing was that they always seemed to run around in the same direction.



Sometimes busy, but ineffectual people are described even today as ‘running around like a headless chook’.



Deckchairs and wooden planks

One of our favourite family outings on summer nights in the late 1950s was to walk down to the Civic Theatre on Beaufort Street in Inglewood. In those days, the Civic had both an indoor and outdoor picture cinema. The building, with the clock tower, is still there today and has been converted into apartments. The outdoor area disappeared long ago.

This outdoor area was divided into three sections, each separated by a wire fence about a metre high. The middle section comprised deckchairs made of wood and canvas. The two outer sections comprised wooden planks for seating. Naturally, the comfortable deckchair seating was more expensive than the wooden seating – about double the cost. We were not on the fun side of the money gap, so we always sat on the hard wooden planks.

There must have been many others struggling because the wooden seating was always full while the deckchairs were only half full. (Not that the deckchairs were in fabulous condition. Many a night's viewing would be interrupted by the sound of canvas tearing quickly followed by a curse or scream as a bottom hit the hard paving beneath the deckchair).

When the movie started and the lights went off, you could hear the sound of kids and some adults climbing over the fence separating the comfortable deckchairs from the hard wooden seats. At intermission, the lights would come on to reveal that the deckchair area was now fuller.

The cinema staff would come down the rows of deckchairs demanding to see tickets. Those who couldn't furnish the correct ticket were kicked back over the fence into the wooden seating area. And while the cinema staff was somewhat frustrated, the removal of the wooden seaters from the deckchairs was done in a relatively amicable way. The wooden seaters went willingly back over the fence. If you didn't, you were turfed out of the theatre.

So at the start of the next movie after the intermission, order had pretty much been restored and the deckchairs were half full again. Once the movie started (back in those days there were always two movies shown – the main movie and a B grade movie, shown first) and the lights went off you, could hear the sound of kids and some adults climbing over the fence separating the comfortable deckchairs from the hard wooden seats.

When the night's entertainment finished and the lights came back on, the deckchairs were fuller again.



Horse and cart service

Back in the 1950s, there were eight people coming every week to our house to provide a range of products and services. Not just our house. All of our neighbours were in on this scheme. There was the milko, the baker, the greengrocer, the bottle-o, the postie, the dunny-cart man, the rubbish man and the ice-man. And more intermittently, the knife and scissor sharpening man and the dry-cleaning man. (There were no women. Don't forget this was a time when women were expected to be bare foot and pregnant and stay in the kitchen).

How did we get our bread, milk and vegies and our empty bottles removed in the 1950s? By horse and cart. Sounds crazy now, but back then it worked beautifully.

Bread and buns were delivered in a baker's horse and cart. If the wind was blowing from the right direction, you could smell the freshly baked bread (and sometimes the horse if it had made a recent deposit on the road) just before you heard the clip clop of the horse. When we were small kids around 4 and 5 years old, we always rushed out to the baker who, sometimes, would give us a free, iced bun.

Milk was delivered by the milko (Wikipedia tells us milko is a pejorative term for milkman, but not in Australia where older people miss the daily visit from 'the milko'). The horse and cart was loaded up with bottles of milk, no cartons back then. And there was just one choice – full cream milk with the cream forming a thick layer on top. Every now and then, the milko would leave a special treat in the form of one or two small bottles of choc milk.

Fruit and vegies came courtesy of the greengrocer's horse and cart.

None of these vendors needed to announce themselves as the clip clop of the horseshoes on the road did the announcing for them. And, as mentioned, when the wind was from the right quarter, our nose alarms went off.

The horses used were often the magnificent and gentle giants of the horse world, Clydesdale draft horses. They would leave decent sized deposits along the road as they trotted around. The smell of horseshit wafted around the suburbs. Kids could earn some pennies from grateful citizens by collecting the deposits to be used as manure for the gardens.

Our empty beer and soft-drink bottles were collected by a chap (there were no chapettes) called the bottle-o. He was a dealer in empty bottles who came around and collected our empties and left a small amount of money for the bottles. It wasn't much, one-halfpenny for each bottle.

Some people's 'fridge was a 'Coolgardie Safe' made of wire mesh, hessian, a wooden frame with a galvanized iron tray on top. The galvanized iron tray was filled with water. The hessian bag was hung over the side with one of the ends in the tray to soak up the water.

How did it work? Gradually the hessian bag would get wet. When a breeze came it would go through the wet bag and evaporate the water. This would cool the air inside the safe, and in turn cool the food stored in the safe. This cooling is due to the water in the hessian needing



energy to change state and evaporate. This energy is taken from the interior of the safe (metal mesh), thus making the interior cooler. There is a metal tray below the safe to catch excess water from the hessian bag (Wikipedia).

We were a little more up market. We had an ice box. The horse-drawn ice wagon and the daily occupation of the iceman, who made regular door-to-door deliveries of block ice, was as much a social institution as the milk man. Once a week, the iceman would leave a large block of ice. It had always melted before his next delivery, but it worked very well for around 5 days.

We didn't put our rubbish in wheelie bins out the front on the verge for collection. Our rubbish bins were usually tin containers with a tin lid that we kept at the back of the house. The rubbish man would come around to the back of the house, pick up our rubbish bin, walk out to the truck waiting on the road outside the front of our house, tip the contents into the truck and then return the bin to the back of our house. Now THAT'S what I call service. At Christmas and Easter, my dad would leave a couple of bottles of beer for the rubbish man, as did many people.

The postal service too was very different from today. There were two mail drops morning and afternoon each day, and one on Saturday. The postie blew a whistle to let you know you had mail. The postie didn't use a horse and cart, instead he (again no she's) rode a bicycle with a large bag attached to the handlebars over the front wheel.

The dunny cart man was mainly a nocturnal visitor. We seldom saw him, but often heard him in the dead of night, as he collected the canister from outside toilets which backed on to the lane beside our house and replaced it with an empty one. Some of you will know the expression, 'Flat as a shit carter's hat'.



Black and white television

Do you remember when there was no television? Black and white television arrived in Australia in 1956. I arrived in Australia in 1950, courtesy of my mum and dad. We were on the wrong side of the money gap, so it was a couple of years later before television arrived in our house in Inglewood.

Inglewood in 1956 was very different to the Beaufort Street Inglewood of today. There was a lane separating our house from our neighbour which was used by the dunny cart man to collect the canister from outside toilets which backed on to the lane. They came late at night, once a week. This was a long time before OH&S came along. Ergonomics was also in the distant future. The preferred method of carrying these cans was to balance them on your head. You might have heard the term, 'flat as a shit carter's hat'.

There were few restaurants and no cafes in Inglewood. If you drank coffee it would be from a jar and you were considered slightly exotic as a 'cuppa tea' was the popular refreshment.

Back to television. In 1956, we couldn't afford a TV so the whole family, six of us, with my baby sister in the pram, would walk about a half a mile (kilometres hadn't arrived in Australia either) from our home to Beaufort Street. We would then join many others and stand outside the shop window of a store which had the foresight to showcase this marvellous invention by leaving a TV turned on at night inside its store front.

We stood there mesmerised by the grainy black and white images.

One of our next-door neighbours had purchased a TV so sometimes we were invited in to watch their TV. We generally had a good relationship with them, but when there was a bit of tension between the adults, disappointingly our invitations to watch TV stopped until tensions were eased.

One day, we got our first black and white television. It was rented and came with a device attached in which you had to insert a two-shilling coin (decimal currency was still a long way off). Two-shillings (equal to 20 cents when decimal currency was introduced into Australia in 1966) would give you one hour of viewing time. When the hour passed, the TV turned off unless you inserted another two-shilling coin.

One of our favourite nights was Sunday night to watch Disneyland and the Sunday night movie which came on at 8 o'clock. Often we would be gathered around the TV in our pyjamas and dressing-gowns watching the movie when the screen would go blank. And there were no more two-shilling coins.

When I was 11, we moved away from Inglewood to Mt Yokine. In Inglewood, we lived very close to a large swamp bordered by Wood Street (Inglewood) and Grand Promenade (Bedford) which the doctor thought contributed to my mother's asthma. He suggested we should move to higher ground.

In 1961, Mt Yokine was on the fringe of the northern metropolitan area. The mount part got my attention. I was pretty disappointed to find that mount was being used a bit loosely.



Somebody obviously thought Mount Yokine would work better than Hill Yokine. Many years ago, the Mt was dropped and it is now just Yokine.

And if you have never driven down Grand Promenade in Bedford, have a drive. Not quite the same as the Champs-Élysées, but quite grand.

During the hot summer nights in Hill Yokine, we would place the TV on our front porch and spread a couple of blankets on the grass. Propped up on pillows in our pyjamas, we would watch television as the traffic whizzed up and down on busy Flinders St. Well, one car every five minutes was busy back then.

Sitting outside and watching television on summer nights was quite a common practice in the far more peaceful and less violent Australia of the 1960's.



Forget red-back spiders, think black frogs

Like many Australians in the 1950s and '60s, we had an outdoor 'brick dunny' situated outside the back of our house. When it was cold in winter, visits were kept to as short a time as possible. If it was raining and you had to answer the call of nature, you got wet.

The loo, as it was known, featured a cistern which held water attached to a bracket on the back wall of the toilet high above the toilet bowl. A pipe ran down the wall from the cistern and connected from behind into the top of the toilet bowl. There was a chain hanging down from the side of the cistern. To flush the toilet, you pulled the chain to enable the water to flood down the pipe and flush around the toilet bowl. I rate the self-flushing toilet as one of the greatest inventions of modern civilization.

One winter night when I was around six years old, I flushed the toilet then jumped back startled as something black suddenly appeared body-surfing in the water as it flushed round and round the bowl. It was a good-sized, black frog. I'm not sure what a bad-sized black frog is, but this one impressed me. Unbeknown to us, it had taken up residence underneath the lip of the toilet bowl.

I watched it swirl round and round the bowl and saw it disappear down the gurgler. I thought, good bye frog. Not so. The next times I, and the rest of my family, flushed the toilet, there was the black frog again, body-surfing around the toilet bowl. And each time it disappeared down the gurgler.

So now I knew that this black frog lived somewhere inside our toilet system or else there was a bunch of these black frogs each taking the place of the last frog down the gurgler.

Now I must admit I was not comfortable lowering my nether regions over the bowl. You'd think then that the black frog would speed up visit times.

Not so. I was apprehensive about this black frog. I didn't know what its intentions were in relation to my exposed parts. If it was happy to go body-surfing round and round the toilet bowl and not bother me, no problem. Lacking awareness of the black frog's intentions, I would squat on my haunches with my feet on the toilet seat to put as much distance as I could between me and the frog. Now we all know that when answering the call of nature, it helps to be in a relaxed state of mind. This black frog didn't speed up the process, it slowed it down so my visits to the loo in the cold of winter became longer than I wanted them to be.



Black and white radio

Black and white television started beaming into some of our lounge rooms in 1956. TV gave us an amazing new world of entertainment without leaving our lounge rooms. Before that, we had black and white radio giving us entertainment without leaving our lounge rooms.

In my sixth year on the planet, the radio was a key plank in my entertainment portfolio. When I listened to Clancy of the Overflow or Dad and Dave or Life with Dexter, I'm pretty sure that the images going around in my six-year old mind weren't in technicolour. I'm pretty confident that they were in black and white. Check this out today when you are listening to the radio. Are you listening in colour or black and white? When you focus on the chatter going on in your head, is it in colour or black and white? When you picture in your mind the presenter or DJ or newsreader or shock jock, is that picture in colour or black and white? Tricky isn't it, but I digress.

Here are some radio gems that I recall from the 1950s.

Our favourite program, which we eagerly awaited every week, was 'Life with Dexter', a comedy about Dexter Dutton and his true-blue family. Dexter Dutton. What a cool name. If I had an attack dog, I would call him Dexter.

We laughed our heads off at 'Yes, What?' Remember Dr. Percival Archibald Pym (Percy)? Cuthbert Horace Greenbottle Jr (Greenbottle)? Ronald George Stanforth (Stanforth)? Rupert Bottomly (Bottomly)? Francis Marmaduke Algenon de Pledge (Pickles)?

And its opening and closing, "Good morning, boys" "Good morning, Sir!"

There was 'Clancy of the Overflow' about the adventures of Clancy, a shearer and drover, the 'Overflow' being the name of a sheep station on which he worked. I'm guessing now, but I presume that the radio program was inspired by the Banjo Paterson poem of the same title, here in part:

And the bush hath friends to meet him, and their kindly voices greet him
In the murmur of the breezes and the river on its bars,
And he sees the vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended,
And at night the wond'rous glory of the everlasting stars.

And who can't remember Dad and Dave? Dad and Dave from Snake Gully. This serial, revolving around two Australian families living at the fictional Snake Gully, was another favourite of many Australians.

Sunday night at 8 o'clock was Lux Radio Theatre, more not-to-miss listening. In fact, we kids enjoyed it so much that it was used as part of our parent's discipline strategy. If your behaviour on the weekend had been short of the standards required, listening rights were withdrawn and it was an early bedtime. Lux Radio Theatre radio plays featured Australian artists and were broadcast in front of a live audience. Some of the plays included: 'The Scarlet Pimpernel', 'Pygmalion', 'Wuthering Heights'.



There was also Caltex Theatre – a series of one-hour plays which included: ‘Crime and Punishment’, ‘Lass of Richmond Hill’, ‘Iris’, ‘Good-bye Mr Chips’, ‘The Petrified Forest’.

My dad had flown in over 100 operations in a Beaufort Bomber in WWII, and two of my uncles were shot down over Germany, so we were glued to the radio to listen to ‘The Dambusters’. This series dramatized Paul Brickhill’s best-selling documentary of World War II. It revolved around the famous 617 Dambusting Squadron and featured, among others, a young Charles ‘Bud’ Tingwell and a young Rod Taylor.

Remember the unmistakeable, opening theme music to ‘Dragnet’? We listened mesmerized as we travelled step-by-step on the side of the law through actual crimes from the files of the Los Angeles Police Department.

Among my favourite books at the time were the ‘Biggles’ series of books by Captain W.E Johns. Squadron Leader James Bigglesworth was a figment of the author’s imagination, but he was a larger than life character who thrilled us with his daring adventures. I was over the moon when the radio series based on the same books came over the air as ‘The Air Adventures of Biggles’.

Some of you may remember ‘The Atlantic Show’ hosted by Bob Dyer – a music and quiz variety show, including ‘Secret Sounds’. And later ‘Pick a Box’ hosted by Bob and Dolly Dyer, a weekly radio quiz program which later became a popular television program.

I never listened to this, but millions of Australians did from 1949 to 1976. ‘Blue Hills’ was a radio serial set in rural Australia in the sleepy town of Tanimbla. ‘Blue Hills’ was the town’s doctor’s residence occupied by Dr. Neil Gordon and his family.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, possibly the most popular programs were those of a frantically adventurous nature aimed at a younger audience – ‘The Air Adventures of Biggles’, ‘Superman’, ‘Tarzan’ and ‘Hop Harrigan’.

There were many people who cut their teeth in radio and successfully made the transition from radio into film and/or television. Some names that spring to mind are: Bob and Dolly Dyer, Leonard Teale, Charles ‘Bud’ Tingwell, Rod Taylor, Graham Kennedy, Bert Newton, Roger Climpson, John Meillon, June Salter, Gwen Plumb, Ruth Cracknell, Judi Farr, Peter Finch, Gordon Chater.

And many others. Jack Davey whose radio programs were hugely popular heads a list of radio ‘superstars’ who didn’t make the transition.



IN and OUT

The click I use most with my little mouse on any day is a click with my right index finger (I'm right-handed) on Send/Receive in my personal information manager. My personal information manager (I hope no one else has one, hardly be personal otherwise) allows me to send and receive electronic mail.

The click I use next most still with my right index finger is Delete.

Our computers, tablets and smart phones allow us to create folders and files to store and retrieve data in many formats today. In the 1970s we did the same with folders and files. The only difference was that we didn't have computers, tablets and smart phones and the data and formats were a little different.

But we did have an Inbox and an Outbox and a Delete (we called it a rubbish bin), as we do today.

Here's a little glimpse into how the system worked way back then when I was a very unmotivated servant of the public with Australia Post who worked very hard to make sure that you got your mail.

All the desks, at which I worked in my various positions, had two important features - an IN tray and an OUT tray. These two trays had a major impact on my work and my wellbeing. Every hour of every day, a Clerical Assistant would come by wheeling a trolley loaded with cardboard folders or files. If one of these folders or files contained paperwork that required you to do something, it would be deposited in your IN tray.

You were required to open the file and read the top page which would indicate what action was required. Sometimes you would also need to read the pages underneath to get an understanding of what actions had been taken by other public servants in relation to the subject of this file.

I happily spent many an hour going backwards in time tracing the paper trail right back to when this file originated. The paper trail could go back months and in some cases years. It was a history of the life of this file and the public servants whose desks it had crossed.

Once you had taken the required action you usually added another piece of paper indicating the action that you had taken. On the front of the file, you would initial a column alongside your position title and note the date. You would then write the position of the next public servant who was required to undertake the next action. You then placed the file in your OUT tray. When the trolley came around, the clerical assistant would remove any files in the OUT tray.

While today, this system would be considered out-dated, it was amazingly effective. I was very impressed with the way these files would appear and disappear and marvelled at the paperwork involved in making sure that you got your mail. And we didn't need a spam filter.



In fact this system did play a major role in motivation and job satisfaction for many public servants. People could and did get a sense of accomplishment by keeping the number of files in their IN tray as few as possible by actioning them quickly and placing them in the OUT tray.

A bad sign was when the stack in your IN tray was consistently significantly higher than the stack in your OUT tray. A situation to be avoided and one which I struggled to avoid. I was one of the few public servants whose sense of accomplishment was diminished as usually the stack in my IN tray seemed to grow faster than stacks in the IN trays of others. It could be quite depressing when the dreaded trolley came along and several more files were deposited in my IN tray and there were no files to collect from my OUT tray.

One particularly bad day for both of us (my employer and me), I decided to check out what would happen if I placed all the files as they were deposited into my IN tray straight into my OUT tray without performing whatever action was required from me. So each time the clerical assistant had disappeared and checking that my boss was occupied pretending to be occupied, I moved the files straight from IN to OUT.

Guess what happened. Yes. You're right. Nothing. I thought at least I would get a few phone calls from other distressed public servants who were waiting on my actions. About a week later, all the files came back to me. The consequence for me of this prank was nothing. If the mail wasn't delivered that week, then the newspapers certainly kept it quiet. As far as I know there were no riots or other examples of public disquiet with the postal service.