

Tawa Historical Project: How I remember Tawa now

This record is a contribution to a THS project for gathering recollections from Tawa people.

Carole Brown, nee Camish, Growing Up In Tawa Mid 20th Century

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Newtown 1950

I was born in Newtown on 2nd April, 1949. My parents, Ruth and Maurie, had bought a quarter acre section in Handyside Street, Linden. My father, as an ex-POW, was entitled to preference in a ballot for a piece of land. He had been a prisoner of war. In 1945 as the Russians advanced from the east the German Army marched many military and civilians westwards in what became death marches for many. One morning Carole's father hid in hay in a barn rather than march another day. That day the guards did not do the usual practice of bayoneting hiding places and so he lived. He retrained as a builder post World War II and intended to build his own house. My mother was a homemaker. She would never tolerate the title 'housewife'. My earliest memories are vague, a flat in Newtown belonging to Mum's parents. I do remember every weekend our family piled into our big black Dodge truck, the tray filled with building materials, and headed out to Linden. The journey out was an adventure in itself. Ngauranga Gorge in those days was two lanes, one up, one down and there were few, if any, sealed roads in the Tawa valley. I do recall hollering for attention from a cot in a shed on the section while my parents built the house. For three years my parents worked on their modest house, moving in

with bare essentials: wooden floors, windows, walls, water, fire place, electricity, and a few furnishings. I do remember moving out to Tawa in the Dodge, loaded up for the permanent shift. There were four of us on the one bench seat. By this time I had a six month old baby sister born 1952, Margaret, held by my mother, and I, three years old, held the bird cage on my knee.

When I look back I feel life was a lot simpler. There was a single rail track out from Wellington. Very few people had cars and there were only a few houses in the whole valley. My Dad must have caught the train to work in construction in Wellington as, although his mechanical skills kept the truck going, it became less reliable until one day it died on our clay drive and was left in peace. Years later a farmer bought it for peanuts and towed it away to be used as a farm vehicle. There was no phone, we couldn't afford one, and no vehicle. I don't know how my parents communicated with their parents in Island Bay and Newtown. Seeing them was a rare treat! Later a red phone box appeared in Mexted Terrace. Mum used to go to it and take a handful of coins to pay for ringing her parents. As for recreation or leisure I don't remember my parents having much of either. Their time was spent finishing the house, building retaining walls and fences and establishing a large vegetable garden which fed our family until well after I left home. If we didn't grow it, we didn't eat it. We used to go to town on Friday evenings, shops were prohibited from opening on other evenings and the weekend. We went to the markets and came home on the train in the dark. We'd crunch our way up the gravelled roads to home, my Dad with my little sister on one shoulder and a 20kg case of fruit on the other. The next day we had to help Mum bottle the fruit. We did have heaps of fruit trees which were mostly productive, including grapes and berries. There were no shops in the early days but a truck came around regularly with groceries. The fruit was awful as mostly it was bumped around in the hot truck, bananas in particular were pretty black and consequently my sister to this day won't eat bananas. Gradually shops appeared, first a butcher, grocer and fruit shop. Milk was delivered daily to the gate. Tokens pre-purchased were left in the bottles. Milk deliveries only ceased in the 1980s, in the 1970s boys from Tawa College, no girls employed, would be collected after school by the contractors to distribute milk from the trucks to houses and return the empties to the milk truck. Water came from rainwater collected from the roof into two 600 gallon tanks. Dad did do a fair bit of fishing and shooting, rabbit, duck and pheasant, and crayfish were cheap and plentiful. I remember joining the family plucking pheasant or duck, depending on the season, on the wooden lounge floor in front of the fire. The last person went over the birds with a blowtorch to burn off the feather stumps. What a stink! I think the crayfish came by the sack full from Grandpop's friends in the Island Bay fishing community. They were cooked in an old copper in my Grandparents' flat. We took some home but not much because we didn't have a fridge, they did.

I was not really aware of how little money we were raised on. We were fed. We were loved. We had friends and freedom to play. What more could we want? The house and yard inched to completion each year but there was no insulation or double glazing, whoever heard of that? The sewage was collected in a tank under the front lawn and sometimes the system blocked up, we knew this because the grass on top grew

prolifically and was bright green. Sometimes we didn't get enough rain and we had to buy water in. As the tank level went down we had to boil drinking and cooking water. One year my parents were stressed about buying water but finally they had to. The next day it rained. The heating was a two bar heater used for frosty mornings and an open fire. We all helped collect firewood, pine cones and twigs for kindling and driftwood from the beach. Most years Dad had to reline the fire box as the molten sea salt pitted the fire bricks. But the firewood was free. To this day we still light a fire in winter and I think it is heavenly! When I was four I 'rescued' a tiny kitten from its family in a gorse thicket outside our place. No questions asked, it was adopted.

I went to Linden School and loved it. Bullrush on the field and hopscotch on the concrete plus the jungle gym were all part of the joy. I was left handed and as was often done in those times I had some conflict with the new entrant teacher over this. My sister was even more left handed than I was and was made to stand in the bin for refusing to put the chalk in her right hand. We started to write with chalk, moved to pencil and much later to ink pens with sharp nibs dipped in ink wells. This was a disaster for left handers because you write into your wet ink. How much easier it was for later generations when the biro was finally invented.

We played a lot in play areas, at neighbours and after hours at school. We were allowed a lot of freedom to play in our neighbourhood with the local kids. We even walked a couple of kilometres to the site Greenacres is now where the attraction was the boggy ground and frog/tadpole ponds. We used to take jars of them home. No-one asked where we were going or where we'd been. I loved the tennis and netball competitions, especially against Tawa School. Board games and cards were for the winter days when outdoor play was curtailed. There was no TV, not even black and white, but radio was popular but rationed for us. It was a treat to such programmes such as "Life With Dexter" Mondays 7.30pm, anyone remember it?

When I was seven my parents bought an elderly car, a 1938 Morris 8. Wow! Our lives took off in another dimension. There were trips to grandparents and aunts and faraway places like Palmerston North and Greytown that we now consider day trips. We did camping trips as far as Taupo, and regular drives to places like Paraparaumu and Eastbourne. Best of all was spending lots of time at beaches. My mother was determined to get her licence and was one of the first women I knew to get one. She was not going to be dependent on Dad to drive her anywhere. About this time baby number three arrived so Mum learned to drive with Dad as teacher on Tawa roads. I still remember her last lessons were hill starts. Dad didn't explain it logically, I know this because he did the same thing when I was learning at fifteen, so Mum stalled a lot. She got upset, Dad got impatient. Baby Maurice, born 1956, was bawling, and my sister and I were jumping up and down on the back seat, no seat belts until decades later, cheering every success or failure. She got her licence and a new freedom. Inevitably, given the mechanical unreliability of cars then, the car spent a lot of time in repair mode. If my father couldn't have fixed it I'm sure we wouldn't have had a car. I particularly remember a wheel coming off while we were driving around Paremata and

taking off in front of us. What the....! The car, not designed to be a three wheeler, crunched down onto the axle. Then there was the ten hour wait on the Desert Road where the Morrie broke down when returning from a camping holiday. We three kids played in the dirt by the roadside while Dad hitched back to Taupo for a new carburettor. It controls the mix of air and petrol in an internal combustion engine, yes, cars used to have those. When he finally made it back he found he'd been given the wrong model so off he went again. We, the younger generation, just took this as normal. I could write a book on our cars.....



1938 Morris 8

With three kids it was time to add a third bedroom to our house. Dad built it, of course. The corrugated aluminium roof corroded and Dad replaced it with iron. We achieved full water reticulation and centralised sewage; all of the Tawa district was finally connected in 1959. The fields of the valley were filling with houses, shops and churches. We still went to Wellington, especially on Friday nights, for our special shopping. Groceries were still delivered although more families had cars. It was a rare family to have two. Residential housing increased in leaps and bounds: State housing in Linden's north end and private houses in Redwood in Tawa. Redwood was seen as posh housing, not because the houses were architecturally wonderful, just big. My neighbour's son called them state houses with shutters. Until then, I would say there was more equality in society, and Tawa typified this. Now, we're much more aware of wealth and poverty, and I'm not sure we're any better off for it.



Tawa

1957

1958

When I was 12 my parents bought our first fridge. This made a huge difference to our lives, we could make ice cream and iceblocks, although my parents would not have listed these attributes as important. Up till then cooling was a concrete cupboard with a door, and a dip in the top that you kept full of water which soaked down the concrete walls and 'cooled' the cupboard contents. One had to shop more regularly.

In 1961 Tawa College opened. I started the next year in 1962, aged 12. There were only Third and Fourth forms and a roll of around 200. Everyone knew the other pupils. I loved college and its challenges. It was a very secure place with new sports and opportunities. We had no computers, TV or mobile phones so I guess our entertainment relied on interacting with friends. Some of those friends are still valued contacts today. I met my future husband, Ian, in the Third Form, now known as Year 9. He wasn't very interesting, or neither of us were interested in each other, until we got to the Sixth Form. We've been married for over 55 years and have four children, all of whom went to Tawa College.



Tawa College 1963

I went on to Victoria Uni and then Training College, followed by stints at various Primary and Secondary schools. Tawa was, and still is, an easy place to have access to tertiary education. Ian and I took off for Europe after three years of marriage to do our OE, which was always our plan.

After five years away we returned to Aotearoa and settled in Porirua. We had four daughters so life was always busy. We were involved in community activities too: primary school PTA, pre-school work, kindergarten establishment in Ranui Heights, from the ground up with fundraising. Many of my generation remember bottle drives?? They were rather lucrative. When our last child went to school I was teaching at a local primary school and then at Tawa College where I stayed for about 25 years as I loved it. As a family we were involved in the establishment of the Badminton Hall at Redwood. This was quite a challenge. This Tawa project was the biggest voluntary project seen in Aotearoa and could not happen now. Our whole family was involved in this sport which made for more hectic activities, especially at weekends. Sometime in the middle of all the child raising we packed our bags and went to live in Sweden for a year. The children were aged four, six, eight and ten. We had always planned to do this, especially to a country where English was not the primary language. We wanted the children to become more resilient individuals and they are. Tawa was a cocoon and we felt they needed to live broader. Subsequently, in early adulthood they all fledged and travelled away for up to ten years.