

Rural Infant Health Clinic

The mobile infant clinic is parked in our gravel driveway. A massive grey Dodge Van, its big tyres smelt hot, the shiny hub cap impressive.

Around the back, the doors opened, and my Mum passed my baby brother up to the uniformed nurse. We could just see her, measure, weigh, and examine him.

While painting the series, and thinking more about that visit, it seemed strange as Hildegard had already had six children and none were followed up this way. My older sister mentioned she had grave fears about the condition of the new baby while Mum was still carrying.

I began to consider that Dr Owen may have requested a check-up to see if everything is ok. If Mum's still wearing black and blue.

Served Dumbstruck

Mr Whippy parked at the Hamilton Hill High School boundary, a few of us, year 8s, 1972, were at the plexiglass sliding window of his van. Trying to be funny, I asked; Do you sell ice creams? Instantly, he reached from his van and slapped my face. No hard feelings, I had some guilt for being cheeky, again, I really think I couldn't not be, at that stage.

It was just like being in the Time Tunnel.

In the 1960s, our neighbours, the Montanari family, purchased a Volkswagen Kombi van for their market garden.

The four brothers, Genaro, Mariano, Ajello and Enzo entered the long sweeping bend on Rockingham Road at a speed that underestimated the curve.

They rolled their van numerous times, flipping out into a market garden. We were in awe of their survival tale, a broken leg, a sling! I asked Genaro, what was it like? He answered, 'It was just like being in the Time Tunnel'

His comparison made a visual impression, trapped in time, free-falling and spiralling into oblivion, just like scientists Tony Newman and Doug Phillips, each weeknight.

Hope Valley Road

an autobiography

1928 Morris Cowley, Bush Block Munster
Rural Infant Health Clinic
Morris J-Type Van
48 Bedford
107E

Cultivation of Cauliflowers and Madness
Detour Hope Valley
Morris Oxford
Ford Pilot
VW

'It was just like being in the Time Tunnel'
Served Dumbstruck
Morris Major
Renault
WAIT

Fiat Giardiniera 500, Moon on Mt Brown
Vintage Datsun 1600
Petrol Destroyer
Fastback
XF

'The Battle for Barcelona begins in Perth'

'The Battle for Barcelona begins in Perth'.

Lance's Dodge was parked in the Pakenham building, 1989. I spotted a newspaper clipping taped to the bottom of the rear-view mirror: *THE BATTLE FOR BARCELONA BEGINS IN PERTH*. He had noticed an article for an Olympics fund-raising campaign in a paper. Lance appropriated this as his art mantra, he was adamant we had to think big.

Lance had owned a Cadillac and a 58 Chevrolet; he understood them as mobile sculptures, celebrations of excesses. More recently, Olga Cironis, an avid Opp-Shopper, visited the studio to gift me her latest find, a scale model of Al Pacino's 'Scarface' Eldorado Cadillac.

Morris Oxford

Dads' car was a column shift; he removed springs from the seat to slump the angle to the clutch and accommodate his stiff left leg. The story was he injured his knee in soccer as a child. As a teenager I was told that he'd been injured by a hand grenade. I only learned a few years ago that he had shot himself in the leg to avoid the Russian Front. He was in hospital, that was where he met Hildegard, a volunteer nurse, and so on. On a weekend, with all that cement and lime dust fading the duco, we would polish the Morris Oxford, extra cut.

Morris Major

In heavy depression, I approach the lights, a Ford sedan, running an orange, we hit, head-on, at the Forest and Stock Road intersection. It was hard, the Morris nearly flipped with the impact, knocked sideways, tipping up on two wheels to roll over on its side, but slowly it came back down, rocking as if dropped.

I parked the wreck at Munster, Mum and Dad looked at selling parts. A guy with a bright red Morris Minor utility came out as the parts are interchangeable. While there, he mentioned he was the head graphic designer at Murdoch University, and there was a position in their Media Services Dept. He urged my parents: tell your depressed, unemployed graphic designer son to give me a call. My first real job, sorted.

48 Bedford

I suppose they were joyriding, it was some kind of Hot Rod, unmuffled, cut down cab, black fenders, turquoise body panels. Maybe I'd wandered out to the road verge drawn by the noise. I probably stared, as a four-year-old might stare, no framework for fear as they swerved toward, furrowing sand and embedding the tyres to the rims.

A young guy stepped out and climbed up to sit on the bonnet. If I was seen standing there, I would have appeared captivated, I guess. Although vivid, the recollection ends on this scene, the screen blank. Days later, Mr Daven used his small Massey Ferguson to tow the abandoned car away, out of sight, across the road and well into the bush reserve, below the Henderson reservoir.

In a clearing, deep in the bush I found a touchstone, paper-thin rusty panels, remnant flecks of black and turquoise enamel, powdery blooms of zinc and copper on the alloy fixtures, charred wooden braces in a framework skewed awkwardly toward earth.

I visited the site over the years considering any significance.

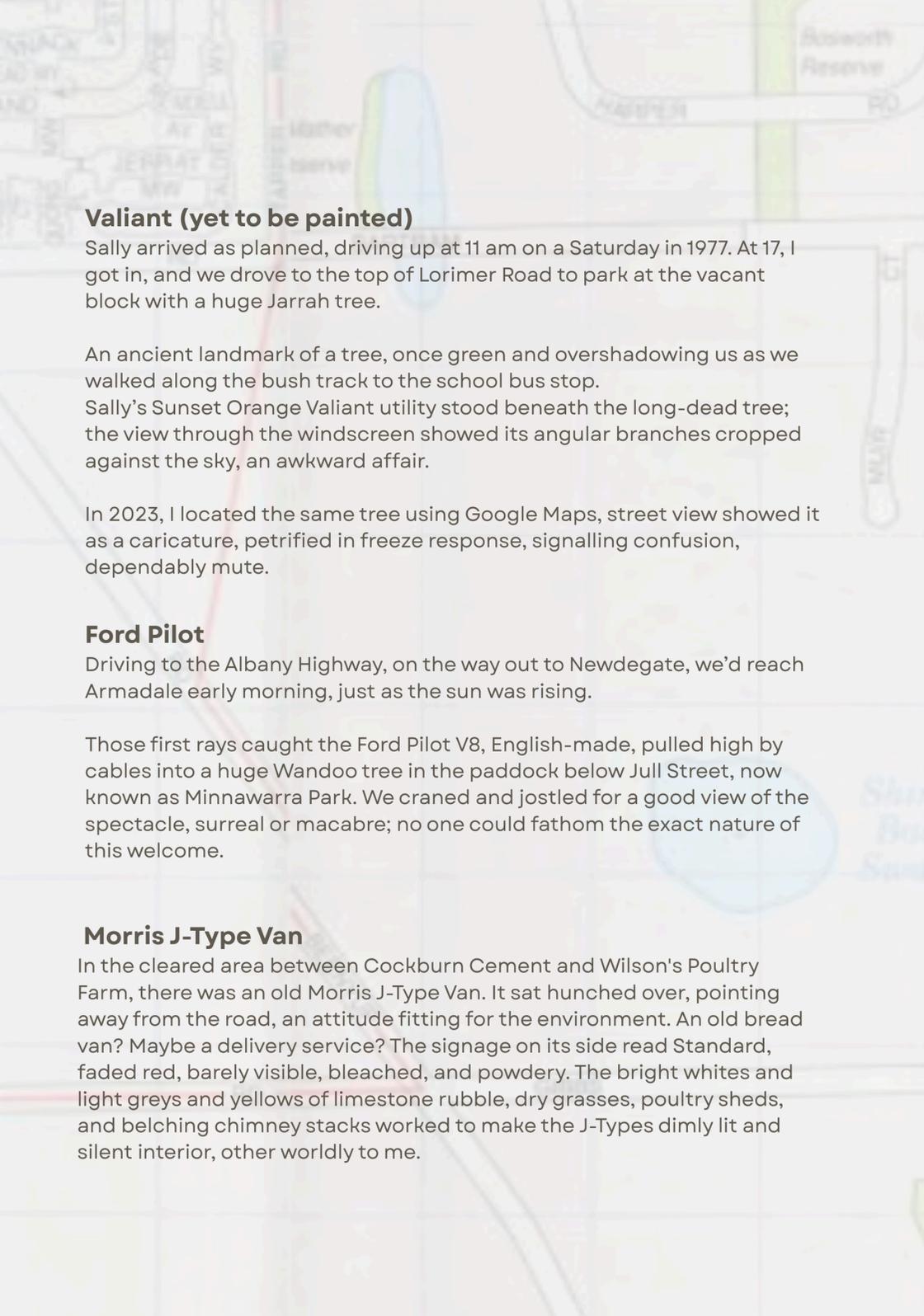
Vintage Datsun 1600

The Bambino ran out of fuel on Stock Road, 1979, leaving it roadside I climbed up and over embankment into a Spearwood cul-de-sac to use of a phone, I noticed an orange Datsun with grass growing underneath, an inviting sign, I asked if it was for sale, it was! \$60.

W.A.I.T

The Bambino would be parked at PE2, the stairwell to design rooms had a heavy fire door, the industrial door closers brought the door to a secure close with a doomsday slam. In the echo chamber of the stairwell, it amplified any anxiety.

I needed to run the stairs and get out of there before that sensory overload and its negative vibe. If I could just make it out before my death knell, the day might be bearable.



Valiant (yet to be painted)

Sally arrived as planned, driving up at 11 am on a Saturday in 1977. At 17, I got in, and we drove to the top of Lorimer Road to park at the vacant block with a huge Jarrah tree.

An ancient landmark of a tree, once green and overshadowing us as we walked along the bush track to the school bus stop.

Sally's Sunset Orange Valiant utility stood beneath the long-dead tree; the view through the windscreen showed its angular branches cropped against the sky, an awkward affair.

In 2023, I located the same tree using Google Maps, street view showed it as a caricature, petrified in freeze response, signalling confusion, dependably mute.

Ford Pilot

Driving to the Albany Highway, on the way out to Newdegate, we'd reach Armadale early morning, just as the sun was rising.

Those first rays caught the Ford Pilot V8, English-made, pulled high by cables into a huge Wandoo tree in the paddock below Jull Street, now known as Minnowarra Park. We craned and jostled for a good view of the spectacle, surreal or macabre; no one could fathom the exact nature of this welcome.

Morris J-Type Van

In the cleared area between Cockburn Cement and Wilson's Poultry Farm, there was an old Morris J-Type Van. It sat hunched over, pointing away from the road, an attitude fitting for the environment. An old bread van? Maybe a delivery service? The signage on its side read Standard, faded red, barely visible, bleached, and powdery. The bright whites and light greys and yellows of limestone rubble, dry grasses, poultry sheds, and belching chimney stacks worked to make the J-Types dimly lit and silent interior, other worldly to me.

Cultivation of Cauliflowers and Madness

Market gardens often had a swamp on or near them, in the fading light, we saw the Drummond's swamp and expansive garden, endless rows of brassica. An old Bedford sat marooned on the sand track and seemed destined for the swamp, unwanted things, junk, found final rest in that shadowy realm, out of sight, half submerged, stagnant tannins, mosquitoes, shrouded by paperbarks.

At the top of the block, the Drummond's blue and white weatherboard was lit up; somehow, I'd tagged along with my older brother to a teenage party. In the crowded kitchen, Terry Drummond sat on a stool crying his eyes out, his face contorted, red and shiny with tears. Everyone seemed oblivious to his distress. I hadn't seen Terry since primary school; it was confronting to see the situation.

I heard someone say: "Yeah, he reckons he's seen more UFOs over the Cauliflower patches at night"

Miss White

The class would sit together on a rolled-out jute rug, I sat close to Miss Whites chair, looking up intently, with a particular perspective accompanying the stories of Dick and Dora. While looking at the factory codes for 1960s Ford Prefects I found the Off-White colour was called Cirrus White.

As adults, Glenn and I learned that we both remembered our first-grade teachers' cars. When I mentioned that I could that remember Miss White drove a white Ford Prefect, he stated his teacher's cars colour, make and model...and their vehicle registration.

Detour Hope Valley

Should've, could've... would've held hands, too bad if other kids saw us, six and nine, we stood close, but not close enough for me to pull you back, my hand went out for the edge of your coat, but no, the thud, the locked wheels dragging tyres across the bitumen. You went high into the sky, flopped back to the road, distanced from me, a rag doll, still, faint groans, bundled in brown corduroy. The HT Kingswood stopped on the other side of Rockingham Road, on the verge of Sauls' market garden. Someone was there, talking to a man, someone in shock.

Somehow...I was sent to the classroom for the rest of the day, vacant and mute. Mr Young looked at my doodling... he quipped, "So, he's signing your work now, is he?" I couldn't answer, just felt shame, to be caught printing your name in the margins like a prayer.

Petrol Destroyer

There was a lot of squealing beyond the quadrangle. It was difficult to ignore, a group of kids chasing another kid. Penno turned and said, oh, that's just a dummy.

I followed that group to an undercroft where a desk became his stage, a woolly red-headed boy, black shorts and a white t-shirt gyrated and belted out Elvis songs, kids threw money. "Sing Elvis Sing!" seemed cruel, but then, the performance was really impressive. 'Elvis' was playing them and enjoying it.

The idea of being marginalised at high school was a horror to me. Elvis seemed to embrace it as a niche, a coping mechanism in subversive behaviour, a puppet master with a plan.

Years later, we met properly at youth group. He ran a Rubbish Bag Round, an old Valiant was his workhorse, he painted *Petrol Destroyer* on its rump, labelling it so, which helped him to subdue the hardship of endlessly filling its massive tank. We became best friends, and we were destined to be together till the end.

Vintage Datsun 1600

I ran out of fuel on Stock Road 1979, leaving the Bambino on the roadside, I climbed up an over embankment into a cul-de-sac and to knock on a door for the use of a phone, I noticed an orange Datsun with grass growing underneath, I asked if it was for sale.

VW

We waved goodbye to Mrs Neild, who had boarded and bound for England. A window display at the passenger terminal showed a display promoting the new film, Peter Pan, he was coming to the Oriana Cinema!

We made our way along Hampton Road. The power lines, buildings and streets streamed behind us, a perspective framed by the small oval window above the VW beetles parcel shelf where my brother and I sat for the outing. Stephanie laboured the fully loaded beetle to the war memorial above Fremantle, a sense of urgency as we all looked for the departing liner, Stephanie had us all there until the ship disappeared, an imaginary speck flickering into the horizon. She would have been teary for sure but I didnt notice, she probably sighed a vow to sail away someday..

Fiat Giardiniera 500, Moon on Mt Brown

Billy borrowed Dave's Bambino wagon to drive on the coastal tracks, winding limestone, and sand trails south of Fremantle. The novelty of the small car set into rough terrain promised adventure. The aimless criss-cross tracks through thick coastal bushes become a labyrinth in fading light, the ride ending with an empty tank, the car left out on the tracks overnight. Maybe it appeared abandoned, it triggered some bored passerby to sport, a late-night trashing, like there was no tomorrow. Billy brought the remains back to David on a trailer.