



TOWN OF  
VICTORIA PARK

# 2021 LOCAL HISTORY AWARDS



Equal First Place

## **Dolls in Dark Dunnies**

by Carole Rutter

**Category:** Personal Memoirs

I was born in 1957 at St Ives Maternity Hospital in Hubert Street, East Victoria Park. The first home that I remember is 5 Moorgate Street, also in East Victoria Park. The house dates back to 1925, according to REIWA. My great-uncle Harold purchased it in the post-war period after he was discharged from the Air Force and sold it to my parents in 1959. We moved in shortly before my 2nd birthday. At the time of writing this account (May 2021), the house still stands, literally a stone's throw from the Victoria Park Library. Typical of the period, it is a weatherboard house with a tin/iron roof.

*(I have enclosed a photo of the front of the house at 5 Moorgate Street as it looked when I lived there, from 1959 to 1966. This picture was taken in the mid-1960's, probably about 1963. Mum liked yellow and I always thought that our little house looked quite cheery among the more sombre colours of the other houses in our street).*

When we lived in the house, it had a number of outbuildings. It had a driveway which led to a large garage/workshop, big enough for at least two cars, at the rear of the property. This was an unusual feature as most of the houses in the area lacked a driveway and many people did not own a car. Owning two cars was practically unheard of, unless you were very wealthy and, if you could afford two cars, you probably didn't live in a working class suburb like East Victoria Park. We were fortunate to have one car, so half of the building was used as a garage and the other half was divided into Dad's workshop and my "cubby".

We also had a mechanic's pit with a 3-walled shed built around it. You could drive a car over the pit and stand underneath it to work on the car. The pit only occupied about one-third of the space, so there was plenty of room alongside to store items such as the wheelbarrow, the lawnmower and other gardening implements. Adjoined to that shed was an L-shaped aviary with the outdoor toilet (commonly referred to as "the dunny") housed between the two. The aviary served to hide the view of the toilet from the house, as well as housing our birds and our rabbits. Unfortunately, in the early 1960's, stricter enforcement of the Vermin Act meant that my parents had to get rid of our rabbits. This did not go down well with me!

*(I have attached a photo of myself (Carole Rutter, nee Goossens) with our rabbits in our backyard. This photo was taken on my 3rd birthday (September 1960).*

Today, these outbuildings no longer exist as the block has been subdivided and another house now stands in their place. However, they provided many places for me to play as a child.

The dunny features prominently in many of my early memories. We were never scared to use it during daylight hours as my Mum kept it pristine clean and insect-free. Never a "redback on the toilet seat" at Number 5! Having to use the outdoor facilities at night, however, was another story. When I was little, I did not have to worry about that as I had a potty under the bed. My parents, however, had to be brave and venture out into the dark. Eventually I had to do likewise when I started school and was considered too old for the potty.

In those days, everybody had outdoor toilets except for our elderly neighbour, Mrs Mack. She decided to have an indoor toilet installed on her back verandah, the first indoor toilet in the neighbourhood. It was quite a sensation. Nobody but Mrs Mack was allowed to use it - kids and visitors still had to use the outdoor dunny!

One of my earliest memories is of returning home after dark from a day's outing with my parents. My mother ran a bath for me and told my father to keep an eye on me while she went to the toilet. Moments later, Mum came running back to the house, screaming to my father, "Peter, Peter, there's something in the toilet and it attacked me". Dad grabbed his rifle and charged up the backyard to deal with the intruder. He came back laughing his head off and clutching a large cardboard box.

During our absence, the postman had delivered a package - a large box containing a talking doll, sent to me for my birthday by my grandmother, who lived overseas. Finding no-one at home, he was loath to leave it on the front door step where it could be stolen, so he got the bright idea to leave it in the toilet, reasoning that sooner or later, we would have to go there and would find it. He left it propped up on the toilet seat. However, when Mum opened the toilet door, the box fell forward, the doll said "Mama" and Mum fled back to the house in fright, imagination running riot!

Almost sixty years later, I still have that doll and she is in pristine condition (I take after my mum in looking after things).

*(I have attached a photo of myself on my 5th birthday (September 1962) with the doll and my dog in our front yard at 5 Moorgate Street. I named the doll Jennifer Lynette. Although it was Mum's dog, she allowed me to name her Lassie after the canine television personality, despite being a Labrador and not a Collie).*

Mum finally realised her dream of an indoor toilet when we moved to Lathlain Park in 1966. No more random attacks by dolls in dark dunnies!



**5 Moorgate Street, East Victoria Park, circa 1963**



**Carole with her rabbits, September 1960**



**Carole, 'Lassie' and Doll, September 1962**