

## PLOD ESSAY:

### THE FORESHORE KIOSK AT CAPE PATERSON

The Foreshore Kiosk at Cape Paterson served bathers and campers and Cape residents from the mid 1950s until shortly before it was demolished by the Council of the day late in 1966. It was built by Bruno Storti to replace the first kiosk which had also been a popular spot but, sadly, had burnt down several years earlier. Bruno with his wife, Mary, ran the kiosk until the late 1950s when Attilio and Irma Storti, together with Irma's brother Livio (Wazza) Coldebella took over the business.

It was about then that a beautiful young woman, Janice, one of the Milkins sisters, returned to Wonthaggi after four years of travelling adventures in Europe. She was only 21 years old. She had grown up in Wonthaggi, was an intelligent and precocious student at Wonthaggi Primary School and then the Tech; she was an avid reader, as well as a forward thinker and impatient for life and adventure. She insisted on leaving school after Form 2 [year 8], determined to find a way out of Wonthaggi to travel the world. Through her local doctor, she landed a job in Malvern as an *au pair* or nanny for the two children – twins – of a University Professor on Sabbatical from England.

Her parents worried but she was adamant.

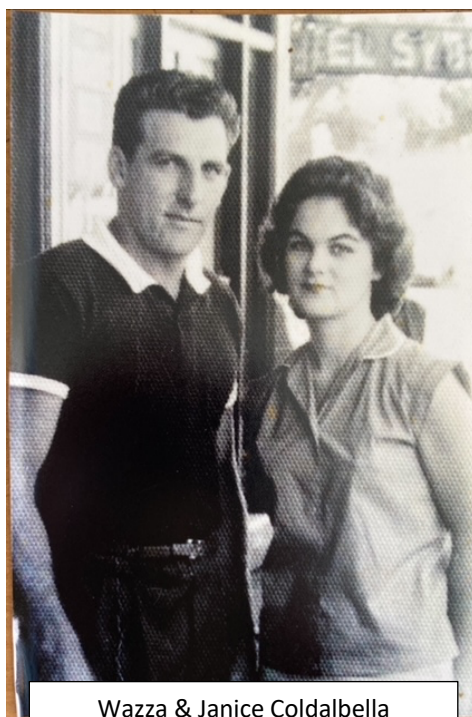
The professor was well-to-do and when he and his family returned to England, they took Janice with them. Again, her parents worried, but she was strong-willed and ripe for adventure and they trusted the family their daughter worked for. Once in England, when she had earned enough money to begin travelling, she started to live her dream. "I would find a tour and go on it. I went everywhere, all through Italy, and everywhere." She loved Italy.

Finally, it was time to return home and, perhaps, continue with her education so she could support herself working in some sort of office or in a bank, but those plans went out the window when she met Wazza, an out-going, vibrant and gorgeous Italian boy – well, more a man than a boy; he was twenty-six.

Once again, Janice's parents were worried.

In Wonthaggi, the Italian Community and the Anglo Community took separate paths, although they were never segregated from one another,

rather often living side-by-side on the same streets, and not necessarily as a result of prejudice. After all, the men who worked in the mine had to learn to trust each other and they became mates through work. But cultural difference outside of work separated the groups somewhat. It most likely started with language difficulties but became apparent in school where, in the state school, it was very rare to have an Italian classmate since almost all the Italian kids went to the Catholic School, dragged there by the Priests of the day. Also, there existed an Australian cultural habit where State School kids and



Wazza & Janice Coldalbella

Catholic School kids spent a lot of time baiting each other on their way to and from school. This happened throughout Australian Society and Wonthaggi was no different.

When Janice met Wazza, none of those prejudices existed between them. Wazza was an energetic, open-hearted fellow, who made friends quickly and liked everyone. Janice was open-minded and culturally educated due to her adventures in Italy. It was a beautiful match.

When they were married in 1961, they bought the Foreshore Kiosk from Wazza's sister, Irma and her husband Attilio, moved into the dwelling behind the kiosk, which consisted of two large bedrooms, and a bathroom-cum storeroom.

“It was basic accommodation,” Janice explains, “but it was a large dwelling: the windows looked seaward onto the safe swimming bay, and large solid double front doors with interior fly screen doors gave access to the kiosk. Unfortunately, there was no septic system, and so we had to use the public toilets (with a peg on nose).”

“The Kiosk itself was divided into three rooms: main shop area, the kitchen, and an adjoining room off the kitchen where groceries were sold. A kerosine refrigerator provided some cold storage for butter, milk and eggs.”

In her imagination, Janice can see the kiosk with the rear dwelling, and place it on the foreshore in relation to the public toilets and the beach, but in reality, even with a Google map focused on the area where the kiosk was – or must have been – it is very hard to pinpoint the site nowadays. She went for a walk not long ago with the map in hand. She drove down the gravel track to the sandy carpark from which it is an easy walk down the dune to the Bay Beach. She walked from the car looking for a track that came down from the toilet block near what they used to call the Bullpen where people camped in the 1950s and 60s and which is now a grassy area in the caravan park on the corner where Cape Paterson Road, Surf Beach Road and Wheelers Road intersect. She found what she thought must have been the track made by campers going to and from the kiosk. It was now a bit wider and covered in gravel, but it definitely was the track they used 50 years ago.

She turned to look for what was perhaps a continuation of that path, which would take her to where the kiosk had been. Yes, she found that track on the other side of the carpark, now a shortcut past the old Life Saving Club, still there. It was wide enough for her to walk along and, although it was completely over-grown and fenced off by two wires on fence posts, there was the rocky outcrop below on which original kiosk and the second the kiosk stood. Neither kiosk was there, of course, and it was hard to peer through the dense scrub, but, yes, that was

the spot, on the foreshore that would once have had a clear view out onto the bay.

Then she began remembering details:

“As Cape Paterson was not connected to the power grid, our shop refrigeration system relied on power from the diesel operated generator housed in the small shed adjacent to the kiosk. Refrigerators and generators were a constant worry, especially during days of extreme heat. When they couldn’t cope with being run continuously, the ice-cream would soften, the soft drinks became tepid, and the chocolates would be laid out on the concrete floor to try to save them from melting.

“The kitchen had a large wood-and-coal range which was kept going all day, being constantly filled with pies and pasties by Wazza’s mother, Ginevra, who was in charge of the kitchen. According to Warren Smith, of Smith’s Bakery in Wonthaggi, 40 dozen pies and pasties were delivered for one weekend. Table service was also provided by Wazza’s mother, pots of tea and plates of sandwiches being the only fare on the menu.



“Not needing any extra pressure at this busy time, we were told that ice-cream deliveries would not be made to the kiosk anymore, as the track down was so bad, the duco on the delivery truck was being scratched by the bushes on the sides of the track. So, Wazza organized a group of children to help carry the valuable goods

down the track to the kiosk. Their reward was ice-cream or sweets. These children kept coming back to help with each delivery, so they must have been happy with the deal.”

In the midst of this hard and constant work, Janice became pregnant and it was clear she and Wazza had to find better accommodation than that at the Kiosk. So, with help of family (Wazza’s father built the fence and his brother-in-law, Attilio, built the house) they moved to the new house up on Cassia Street, the only house on the street back then, except for a fibro shack further along. Their house is still there with a good fence surrounding it and a nice garden being well tended. It was eight minutes-walk across a gully, over a creek and through scrub from there to the kiosk.

Before electricity arrived at Cape Paterson, that track was made by Wazza’s footprints as he went to and from the house in order to keep the generator running. While they lived at the kiosk it had been easy to stumble out of bed just before dawn and switch it on so the freezer would be ready for the day’s delivery of ice cream, but it became a difficulty after they moved to their new house.

“Wazza would run down through the bush, in the dark, torch in hand, to turn on the generator, all the while being careful not to trip over a wombat or a kangaroo grazing en-route. It wasn’t until 1966 that Cr. Peter McRae, Melbourne businessman Jack Hough, landowner Gordon Fulton and Wazza put forward the capital for the power to be connected to Cape Paterson.

“Before that, gas was the popular cooking and lighting fuel at that time. Campers’ gas bottles were filled from a large cylinder we had at the kiosk. I was always imagining what could go wrong while filling these bottles. Fortunately, nothing ever did!”

There was no telephone either:

“Telephone communication was through a local switchboard operated by Mrs. Fulton, who lived on a large sheep-grazing property on the Cape Paterson Road. This service operated from

10 am to 6 pm daily. Mrs. Fulton knew how much we relied on this communication for our business so she would take many after-hours calls from us. Thankful for this kindness, Wazza would often drop a large white sandwich loaf and fruit bun into her roadside mail delivery box. This was a great luxury for Mrs. Fulton.”

As Janice walked, Google map in hand, over the Cape Paterson foreshore area across from where the kiosk had been located, she saw the Life Savers’ Club Rooms, barbeque shelter and amenities block were still there. Miners, Attilio Storti, Alan Birt and others “obtained” dynamite from the State Coal Mine and blew out a large amount of rock from the flat platform to form the swimming pool so popular with families. It is definitely still there and still being used. During the late 1950’s and 1960’s, Cape Paterson was still almost in its natural state, but was popular as a family holiday area. Many families from Wonthaggi joined Melbourne and Latrobe Valley families booking the same camp site in the Bullring for many years. Access to the foreshore was down a steep track leading off the main road, the same one she had found earlier and another further long which was the one Wazza had made in his pre-dawn visits to turn on the generator.

She remembered Cape Paterson on those summer nights once darkness fell. “Many campers, torches in hand, would make their way to the kiosk to socialize; because of the generator, our shop was the only place with light. It was **THE** place to be after dark for entertainment. We could always coax some brave person to sing or recite a poem or story. If we could find music on the battery radio, people would dance. Business would be brisk: banana splits and double ice-cream sundaes with ‘crushed nuts’ were an after dinner treat for campers. Many of the campers would socialize until closing time at 9pm. Then Wazza and I would start to restock the drinks fridge for the following day.”

By the 1960s several families were living permanently in huts on the foreshore at Shack

Bay, an area around the coast near Eagles Nest. During the season Wazza would make daily deliveries of newspapers and milk; business being conducted at a prearranged time on the cliff top.

By 1966 Janice and Wazza had two small children who were cared for by family during the busy Christmas-New Year period...

“So, we decided to sub-lease the kiosk. The Council of the day took over and leased out the kiosk for several seasons to various families: Les and Joyce Legg; Peter and Norma Baker and John and Win Kelly all worked it for several seasons. We were unable to sell the business, as the kiosk was on Crown Land. Thus, we were faced with a dilemma: either **WE** had to run the kiosk or walk away. We had contemplated another solution which involved matches, fuel or dynamite. However, our conscience got the better of us, as we were concerned that the whole of Cape Paterson could’ve been wiped out. So, we walked away with nothing and the Council of the day decided to demolish the building. This was a great loss to campers and day-trippers as it was a long, hot walk from the bay area to the recently opened Top Shop on Cape Paterson Road.”

After they left the kiosk, Janice and Wazza continued to bring happiness and energy and love wherever they went. Wazza was beloved for his outgoing personality. There wasn’t anyone in Wonthaggi who didn’t appreciate his enthusiasm for life. He would try anything: he ran the Esso Petrol Station, had a tip truck, and a bus run for the school kids at Cape Paterson, who absolutely loved him. After their children grew up, Janice went back to study librarianship and became the head librarian at Wonthaggi Library when it was still at the old post office.

“I was always – I am – a great reader,” she says.

She now volunteers at the Rose Lodge Op Shop. Everyone knows her and she always has a kind word.

Together, Janice and Wazza produced four children, who in turn married and had their own children. And on the last day of December 2021, after 60 years of marriage they were introduced to their first greatgrandchild. This was three days before Wazza died 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2022. He was 88 years old, just a few weeks short of his 89<sup>th</sup> birthday. Janice remembers and loves every moment they were together.



Great Grandparents

Her parents need never have worried about Janice.

- Excerpts from “15-Minute Talk” given At Wonthaggi Historical Society, January 2022, by Janice Caldebella, expanded and edited by C. Landon after interviewing Janice.

