



Will Scholz, Kurt Pressley and Peter Kelly

Our local Firies

I meet Kurt Pressley down at the fire station near the Scout Hall. He is one of 15 volunteers who protect us, not only from fires, but in all sorts of accidental situations. I didn't realise that the Firies are called out with ambulances and, in the case of the recent burst water mains, helped residents move furniture.

"Right now we're well-equipped with a brand-new truck with all the bells and whistles," says Kurt. "For example, there are fire-resistant curtains in the cab which drop down if the truck is surrounded by flames and outside, a water spray which can cover the cab and the wheels as well. "

Some people get confused between the NSW Rural Fire Service (which is all volunteers) and the government run, Fire and Rescue NSW - "the blokes who are paid," says Kurt. He feels it adds something special to his life being a volunteer. In his other life, he's a train driver - a rather routine job, but as a Fiery, one never knows what will happen next. "Everything is an exciting challenge."

He's been volunteering for 16 years and loves it. He just hopes more locals will join. They now have 15 active members at the station, some 12 men and three women, all locals, plus reserves and social members. They would like to get the active members up to 20. What's involved? Each day via an app, members record their availability.

If they are available, a pager alerts them and they hop down to the station.

Training is on Wednesdays, taking about three months for a new volunteer to get up to speed. Fitness? You have to be reasonably fit but not a gym junkie. They have retired people. One guy is in his 70s. "It's not that onerous," says Kurt. One woman volunteer is currently in Europe and has been away for six months. She has put volunteering on hold. If circumstances change, you can leave.

They have various functions during the year and in September, there's an open day for the public, a 'get ready day.' Kurt says the main thing is to keep your gutters free of leaves. Most houses are lost through burning embers falling into gutters. I asked him if some houses - like mine, which has bush all around - might be indefensible. "There are houses you could classify as indefensible. "On catastrophic fire days, you should leave such homes even if there is no fire around. They can't order a homeowner not to defend his or her home, but they strongly advise not playing the hero.

If fire is around, goggles are important because it's the eyes that are impacted first. Breathing masks against dust are also good protection. Wear cotton clothing, a long sleeve shirt, jeans and gloves. This should be all planned ahead of time and pinned to the wall in the kitchen.

"We can't defend every house, but we do our best. We only have the one truck. But it's fully equipped. We can spray a house with foam, for example, in a couple of minutes if necessary. Foam is like wetting a house down but is better because it stays around for a while.

Firies contd.

Apart from such preventive strategies, what should one do in an emergency? The best thing, Kurt says, is go to the sea. The roads might be blocked and so you're always safer at the beach .

What about aerial water support. Can you get that? "That's called in by state operatives at a higher level", Kurt says. He tells a funny story of a farmer up at Mangrove Mountain who got furious with a helicopter for sucking water out of his dam and took pot-shots at the chopper. Not good! What about planes? Do they use those? Planes are for dropping fire retardant and creating firebreaks.

With bush fires we've been lucky so far, says Kurt and although there is a lot of bush around, it's broken up into pockets which makes it easier to fight fires.

But people should take being prepared very seriously. They have kits at the station you can pick up and also you might think about becoming a volunteer " It's tremendously satisfying. Come join us," Says Kurt. Anyone needing more info about joining can phone Crew Captain, Dave Hawton on 0412 800 412.

Mike Rubbo

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INVITATION TO CONTRIBUTE

We would love you to contribute to our newsletter. If you have a story idea but feel you can't write it, we can help. If you do a draft, we can edit and polish. We're interested in all sorts of stories with a special love of character profiles. If you're thinking of proposing an interesting character, interview the person on tape, then transcribe it to make sure you've got all the facts right. Work from that. We like business stories but don't accept those written by people connected with the business in question.

Editorial credits: Mike Rubbo: Editor | Julie Pickett: Advertising, Proof reading

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Also if you'd like to contribute to the newsletter, get in touch.**

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ABCA President's Report November 2018

Winter is well and truly behind us now and the summer season about to get into full swing. A big shout out and thank you to all those volunteers who keep us safe, particularly in the hottest months. The Avoca Beach Rural Fire Service and Surf Club do an amazing job and we extend our appreciation to all members. It's not too late to join and do your bit!

It's a pleasure to say a big congratulations to Central Coast Council on the fine job they did with Stage One of the Southern Foreshore Master plan. The walk out to the southern point is a beautiful addition to the beachfront, the rock wall looks solid and capable of withstanding the biggest storms, the sandstone blocks provide extra seating, and the rock pool looks far more user friendly with the bottom cleared and water levels a little deeper.

Not only that, council has shown they are aware of the critical parking problems on the beachfront and have retained as many car spaces as possible on the eastern side of the surf club. A high bar has been set now and it will be interesting to see if Stage Two can be equally pleasing. This second stage extends from the front of the surf club across to the fish shop. Work will be carried out between April and October in 2019.

At our last general meeting we were pleased to have the company of Mayor Jane Smith, Councillor Rebecca Gale Collins and Councillor Jeff Sunstrom. Regarding Stage 2 of the beachfront works, several concerns were put to the Councillors. The wisdom of a single ramp only to the beach was raised as was the visual appearance of the seating. Also raised, the current dedicated seating, the flag poles, the position of a light pole and access to the beach during construction, especially for rescue vehicles. The Mayor promised to see these issues looked at and to set up a meeting with relevant Council officials for further discussions.

The good news is that we have been told that, for now, the works will not involve taking the front row of parking at the beachfront as was originally planned.

To all those who have suffered damage and destruction due to burst water mains it is heartening to see a belated, but positive response from Council to the ABCA and resident's concerns. Significant works are to take place to renew the mains on The Round Drive and Cape Three Points. Hopefully things will quieten down. I thank Ian Carruthers from our committee for his prodigious efforts in this regard.

The proposal by Bob Pickett to donate several acres of land for community use continues to feature prominently at our meetings, and deservedly so. It is a generous and tantalising proposition, but it relies on Mr Pickett and Council agreeing on the use of adjacent Council land. We hope there is a way forward and will be meeting with Council to discuss possibilities very soon. Hopefully there will be a solution. Full marks to Bob for his perseverance.

A wonderful development has occurred recently in our community. A collection of 'like-minded' people has come together with the express desire of finding land to create a community garden and eventually a community hall. This movement encompasses people from all walks of life and brings a new dimension to Avoca. Special mention to Mel from the Like Minds café for being the driving force behind what hopefully will be something special. The ABCA is working with Council to explore possibilities.

We wait with interest for a Council decision on two matters. The amended DA for the old Bowtell's caravan site and Stage 2 of the Winney Bay walkway. The ABCA has been happy to support public opposition to the Bowtell's proposal, but has deliberately not taken a stance on Winney Bay because Avoca has passionate supporters both for and against it. It is our view that we should represent the community where possible, but in this case, we cannot do so fairly. The opinion piece elsewhere in this issue does not represent the views of the ABCA. Happy summer everyone! Hope the water warms up soon.

Steve Fortey

The Blue Tide Line



The tide line reveals some amazing diversity at times. Just recently (12/10/18), it was alive with creatures, crazy blue sea-life creatures. It looked like everything had been stained blue – the crabs, shells, barnacles, even the fish were iridescent blue. There were blue bottles, which we are all familiar with, along with a range of other species that aren't so common.

But let's start with bluebottles, as most of us have had the misfortune to have meet one already. While bluebottles appear to be single animals, they're actually colonial organisms known as siphonophores. Within the colony, specialised polyps make up the float, tentacles, digestive system and reproductive system. These specialised polyps are attached to one another and cannot survive independently. The float leans either to the left or right – a design believed to be the bluebottle's way of ensuring that only part of a population is blown into shore and stranded during certain wind conditions.

A group of bluebottles is aptly named an 'armada', which is the Spanish word for a naval fleet. Surfers will often doggedly stay out in the ocean when the shark alarm goes, but at the sight of a blue armada, few are brave enough to take them on. I often get asked by angry victims "what is the point of a bluebottle?" and the answer is the same as it is for all species – to simply exist and pass on DNA to the next generation.

Also along the blue tide line this week were the closely related "by-the-wind-sailors" or Velella. Velella's body is a flat oval disk about 4 cm in diameter containing a series of air-filled chambers that provide buoyancy. Below hangs a central mouth surrounded by specialised reproductive bodies that produce tiny medusae and stinging tentacles – which are harmless to humans. Projecting vertically up is a stiff sail made of chitin. The

sail runs diagonally across the top of the float, so that the individual sails at a 45 degree angle to the prevailing wind, just like a sailing boat. They are bright blue in colour but when they wash up on the beach and dry up, they become clear within a day or two.

By far the most abundant creature along the tide line on this occasion however, was the less commonly seen, buoy barnacle. The larvae of buoy barnacles attach to velella (among other things) and metamorphose into blue barnacles on a blue stalk, later creating their own white, spongy float. They then drift through the ocean upside down attached to their purpose-built float. These were washed up in huge numbers rarely seen at Avoca Beach.

Beautiful floating blue molluscs called Janthina's also dotted the beach. These snails secrete a bubble filled raft made of mucus to stay afloat, living at the sea-air interface where they feed on jellyfish. The shells range in colour from blue to violet to purple.



From left to right: Buoy Barnacle, Janthina, Velella and Bluebottle.

That was this month's tide line, but next month we could see a plethora of different squishy creatures washed up on our beach, such as Salps, *Glaucus atlanticus*, Purple Meanies or a myriad of jetty blubbers (hopefully not too many 'blueys').

Kristy McQueen.

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Environmental News



314 Avoca Drive recently sold.

These last few months have seen a big push by the Avoca community to realise a long-held dream. That is to establish community gardens where locals could have plots and grow organic vegetables. An opportunity seemed to be on offer when 5 acres came on sale at the bottom of Hillside Road, 314 Avoca Drive. A Facebook page called Community land Avoca Beach, was quickly formed by the people at Like Minds Café, led by Melissa Morgan with the aim of somehow getting this land for the dream.

The owner was contacted and we found out that the asking price was \$2 million which seemed reasonable. Moreover, he liked our idea if we could raise the money. Calls for funds went out over the Facebook page. A handful of people pledged \$10,000 each whilst from Warren Avenue, came some amazing pledges, one for \$500,000, another for \$50,000 and a third for \$10,000. Still, being far below what was needed, hopes developed that an angel investor might buy the whole 5 acres and then on-sell the two front acres to a community group, specially formed. Real Estate Agent, Kyle Brand, was very helpful in advising us and he felt this might be possible.

Unfortunately, the land sold for \$2 million before such a buyer could be found. Kyle, who made the sale, has told us that the new owners are developers based on the coast. Their intentions? He reports they said that the land, being level, cleared and two minutes from the beach, was “an exceptional opportunity and couldn’t be passed up.” Sounds a fair assessment.

Kyle told them of our hopes. Significantly perhaps they further asked him, “Have you ever seen The Farm at Byron Bay?” This is a hope-inspiring answer, the Farm’s business motto being; Grow. Feed. Educate. Give back.

The Farm (<https://thefarm.com.au/>) is a very successful commercial operation which practices organic farming, a place where families can see how the vegetables they eat in the superb café and restaurant, are grown. Kyle, who’s visited the farm, reports it’s financially successful and the concept could perhaps work here. But he

warned us not to get our hopes up. The new owners mentioned other options, much less appealing. MR

Bob Pickett’s land.

As everyone knows, Bob Pickett has generously offered some acres across the road from 314 Avoca Drive. The sticking point has been that he says he needs to include COSS land adjacent to his, to complete his vision for passive recreation and sporting fields. In response, Council has made it very clear that COSS land can’t be used for sporting fields. But as COSS land can be used for passive recreation, we need to find out, as a matter of urgency, what that actually means. It may be the information which breaks the impasse. MR

Winney Bay An Opinion Piece.

On Oct. 4th Council held a further information session at Copacabana Surf Club, with Council officers on hand as promised to elaborate on the plans for the \$4.6 million clifftop development.

It turns out the main reason for the \$4.6m spend is to provide better disabled access to the area. The bridge, which has so puzzled critics, reduces the gradient so that wheelchairs may be more easily pushed to the new whale-watching platform at the top of the new stairs.



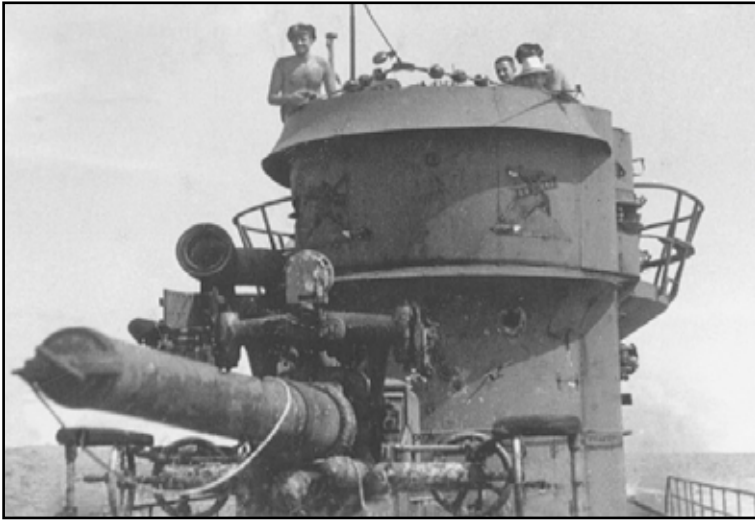
This artist’s impression (Screenshot from Council Video) shows the proposed bridge crossing a crevasse. While that looks useful, it’s actually not necessary since the existing path currently goes round the crevasse. So it seems that this bridge ‘feature’ is mainly necessary for wheelchairs. Moreover, why is a third lookout with disabled access needed anyway when the existing Captain Cook Lookout has never had disabled access?

A proposed 3 meter ‘service’ road ends at the new lookout. We might ask why can’t wheelchairs use this road? It’s too steep for them apparently. It’s also not clear why this service road is needed at all except perhaps to service functions like weddings which could be held at the lookout, or market stalls, apparently now dropped as an option, but referred to in the funding application.

The road, bridge, and pathway will all involve extensive vegetation clearing. Whilst providing disabled access is admirable, one wonders why this last remnant of bush has to be destroyed even as the current lookout platform remains inaccessible for the disabled.

Mike Rubbo

Uboat 862



I have found out the names of the captain and the large crew of 862. It occurs to me that possibly one or two might still be alive, and perhaps could confirm the landing. But I've been unable as yet to make contact with survivors. The photograph shows the crew of 862.

The landing for water would have been very surreptitious because, after the sinking in the morning of the John Walker, a massive hunt was on for the lone submarine. From the weather bureau historians, I've found out that there was a sandstorm that day, Xmas day 1944. If you remember back to the blinding sandstorm we had some years ago, this might have reduced visibility in a way very conducive to the German Landing.

How does the story about a German U-boat sneaking into Winney Bay, surface? if one can put it that way?

Well, Denis Whitnall, a very keen local fisherman all his life, tells the tale. Not so long ago, Avoca was a village full of passionate fisherman, men and women like Denis, who lived to fish and tell their tales.

He remembers swapping fishing yarns with another local, Reg Broadbridge, when the submarine slipped into the conversation, as it were. Reg had the farm and farmhouse down on the flat land at Winney Bay. During the Second World War the coast guard took it over and Reg moved out.

In the 1960s, he was telling Denis that the two young coastguards who were stationed there had had a nice war since the fishing was so good. Reg then reported an amazing story. The two coastguards told him that late in the war, they saw a German submarine surface in Winney Bay. They watched as rubber dinghies, manned by men with jerry cans, landed and then proceeded up the rocky beach to the waterfall which was there at that time. They went backwards and forwards to the sub.

What is very strange, and casts doubt on the story, is there are no records we can find of the coast guards sounding the alarm. On the other hand, we know for certain that U-boat, number 862, was active on the NSW coast and on Christmas morning, 1944 it had sunk a Liberty ship off Moruya, south of Sydney, with the loss of two lives.

At some time during that day or the next, the sub set off for New Zealand to seek prey there, with the crew going ashore on the New Zealand coast for water. All of this is reported in a book by a naval Australian historian, David Stevens, called, Uboat far from Home. The book explains how Germany, suffering defeats in the Atlantic, decided to try the southern oceans. Uboat 862, the centre of the story, was the only German sub to be an effective menace along our coast.

Some have pointed out that Maitland Bay would have been an easier landing. But did the captain, Henrich



Timm, have local knowledge? It turns out that he had been a second officer on a coal boat sailing from Wollongong to Newcastle for seven years before the war and thus might have known where to land.

Winney Bay has recently become well known for the contentious stairway that's been built down the cliff. How fascinating it might be if we could confirm, in time for next year's 5 lands walkers, that U-boat 862 actually did stop in the bay which they pass by. Though the waterfall is gone and the farmhouse too, it would be intriguing to picture the young Germans in the photograph coming ashore with their jerry cans, and then moving backwards and forwards to the thirsty U-boat, probably over many hours.

If we do find a crew member alive and the story is confirmed, then the bigger mystery remains. Was the landing reported? Thanks, Denis.

Mike Rubbo

The Thais that bind



Everyone knows the little Thai restaurant at the corner of Avoca Drive and Cape Three Points. Most also know the smiling face of Pranee though perhaps not her name. Pranee started the restaurant in 2000, having come to Australia five years before to work as a chef in another Thai restaurant at Sylvania Waters. After a while, she thought she could branch out on her own and found this place for rent at Avoca Beach.

It's gone very well these 18 years, though it's always a matter of just making ends meet. No fortunes to be made in Thai food, apparently. Pranee loves to chat and so she and customers share stories of what is happening in their families as the latter wait for meals. "I ask about their children and I tell about mine," says Pranee. "It's like a big family here in Avoca." She did try expanding to Terrigal in 2007 but found it was much less intimate there, more tourist traffic, and soon she decided not to compete with the other Thai restaurants in that busy town.

In asking about people's favourite dishes, I remarked that I've always loved their fishcakes which feel bouncy in the mouth and are quite delicious. Pad Thai of course is a favourite, says Pranee, Chicken Satay and Pad Siew

are also loved. Almost 70% of their orders are takeaway and the smiling young man in the photograph, EK, will deliver to your home for just three dollars extra.

Pranee is on the right in the photo, her daughter Emely, on the left and EK in the middle. They did try some years ago doubling the size of the restaurant taking over the Mexican eatery next door, knocking a hole in the wall between the two properties. But they found that the extra business didn't cover the extra rent and now they've gone back to the cozy one room situation and their busy takeaway counter.

I was particularly charmed by Pranee's teenage daughter, Emely. She's in Year 10 at Kincumber High. What a work ethic that girl has! She works in her Mum's restaurant five

days a week and when she's not there or at school, she is at Fresco Fruit at Kincumber next to Coles. Fresco Fruit is her mum's vegetable supplier. It was lovely to see mother and daughter together. Emely obviously loves her mum very much, is proud of what Mum's achieved, and wants to help her all she can. One feels Emely might take over one day.

Did they have any funny stories to tell? One night when they had the bigger room, a couple with their kids came in, spending hours over the food, but leaving quite a lot as well to take home. Pranee and Emely laugh as they report what happened next. The parents came to the counter but apparently had no intention of paying the \$90 owing. They disputed almost every dish and walked out with their leftovers, leaving only \$20.

Seems like this story is remembered fondly perhaps because it's so rare that there are any complaints about their food. If there are, if someone changes their mind and wants chicken with their Pad Siew noodles and not beef, it's changed with a smile.

Mike Rubbo

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The Master Baker



The Master Baker and Pamela, 1961.

You could say Arthur Tidyman's career as a master baker started with a bang. When very young, he was apprenticed to a baker in Watsons Bay who supplied a canteen for naval people on South Head. The navy used to conduct artillery practice, shooting out to sea. A little plane would fly by, trailing a long streamer with the words , Hit Me, on it. Young Arthur was delivering pies one day when the big gun went off and the blast was so great that it knocked over, not only him and his pie tray , but toppled his little van as well. If that sounds improbable, so much about the lives of Pam and Arthur Tidyman of Hillside Rd. is really quite extraordinary.

They met at a Top Ryde school after the war but since Arthur was Catholic and Pam Protestant, no friendship ensued. Says Arthur. "I used to ride to school on my horse and she threw stones at me." Pam adds, "He was a tyke (a catholic) and I was protestant and never the twain shall meet." But eventually the twain became one.

Both of them worked incredibly hard in their early years. Arthur worked 5 ½ days a week at Watsons Bay. Friday night, for example, he'd start baking at 11pm and go through till 4 am . Then, he'd change clothes do the bread deliveries, come back change again, and crack 40 dozen eggs into a tub for the two ladies who came in to make the Saturday cakes. Then, it was home to Top Ryde for what was left of the weekend with just two and six left in his pocket.

After school, having come to love and marry Arthur, Pam became an apprentice draper at a shop in Top Ryde run

by an employer, Mr. Hoare, who was especially kind. Her mother died very young, leaving four children who she, as the eldest, had to bring up. Mr Hoare helped a lot.

Arthur was now a master baker when Pam left drapery to be head of security at one of the first Woolworth supermarkets. Soon, she had two children of her own and remembers getting up at 4 am, pushing the children from Dundas 3 miles in a stroller to Arthur's mother's place, and then taking a series of buses, to be at work at Castle Hill by 9.

The 1961 photo (above) shows the moment Arthur reveals that he's found an ad for a bakery at Avoca Beach and thinks they should give it a try. Pam agrees and they're off to a place they know nothing about. The bakery, which is now Ludos, had just been built by the Hunters who gave the couple a good deal on the lease but not on their accommodation. Those first weeks, they lived in a ramshackle blue building called, 'Sea Spray', on what is now Hunter Park and Pam remembers waking up every morning with rats having shared the bed with her and the children.

But, with the business thriving, they moved to a comfy flat in the village. Soon, they were supplying 18 general stores around the coast, Pam taking the orders each day by phone. Like Watson's Bay, Arthur would bake through the night. At 8 am, their 2 Morris Minor vans would set off to deliver to the 18 stores and the households they supplied. They baked a huge variety of breads, cakes,

and pies including high-top loaves and so-called 'husband beaters' which were long breadsticks. It was absolutely exhausting work for both of them, especially for Pam with 2 young ones and her brother, Gary, 12 years her junior, who they were bringing up as well.

But they loved Avoca, the friendship and the fun. Paul George, who had the fish and chip place on the beachfront, would go down on his knees in front of Arthur, saying, "Master, Master." That came from Arthur's nickname, The Master Baker.

At the bakery things went pretty well for about 3 years until the big boys - a much larger flour mill- moved in and were soon driving them out of business. A key crippler was that the big competitor got the law changed so that now it was legal for bread to be returned if not sold. Sometimes 100 loaves a day came back from the 18 shops, great for the fish but not the Tidymans. Then, their new Holden delivery van was stolen and found burnt out. The police could prove nothing. Came Christmas, and the fuel for their oven was laced with sugar.

They got out, barely surviving financially. Many of the small bakeries were bankrupted. It was the Coles and Woollies phenomenon. Arthur next became the production manager for Cobbity Farm, supervising baking for the whole Central Coast - master baker big time! Meanwhile Pam went back to drapery, managing that section in a big Terrigal store and becoming a champion seller of Jansen swimwear.

During those years, in the 70s, they built their new house across the road on Hillside Rd, ready for the arrival of a new baby, Damian. But Damian died after seven days, devastating the exhausted Pam.

She also had serious eye problems and so she quit Terrigal, and with her kids in high school and her eyesight restricted, she took over the little general store opposite the fire station, now Like Minds.

Despite not being able to drive anymore, she built up the business and Arthur, having at last got out of baking, was supplying her with vegetables from the Sydney markets.

Tragedy struck again. Their beloved son, Dallas, coordinator of mobile policing at Goulburn, was killed on duty and given a state funeral. Pam came very close to cracking up, crying out to God in despair.

But at last in this terrible time she had what she calls her "road to Damascus moment." She felt entered by the Holy Spirit, was speaking in tongues, voices she didn't understand, but which surely came from God. They joined a local Pentecostal church, Central Coast Christian Church. Their faith cradled them and eased the pain.

Both their daughter, Darlene and Gary, Pam's brother, who they had brought up, were married in the tiny Anglican Church, St Pauls, next to the Kincumber roundabout. It's a beautiful little church and the famous Frost family, local pioneers, are buried in the shady church grounds. At the time, Pam had no idea that she's a direct descendant from Lizzie Frost, that Lizzie was her great-great-grandmother. Lizzie Frost, who was married to the Kincumber shipbuilder, George Frost, bore 18 children and ran a general store, much as Pam did so many years later. Lizzie's store, still preserved, is very near the same St Paul's Church. Her husband, George, built wonderful ships on Kincumber Creek. But all that is gone.

What an amazing coincidence is this connection with the famous Frost family. But Pam believes there is no such thing as coincidence. Only, "God-in-cidence".

Mike Rubbo



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Sippers and Nippers at Sunsets Bistro



Paul and Jane at the Hodo Hotel back in Fargo

We talk in the surf club. “Locals love sitting up here”, says Paul, “ watching their kids in the surf or the nippers on Sundays. After all, it is the best view on the coast.” You’ve surely noticed that Paul Ouradnik who runs Sunsets Bistro, is an American. But did you know that he comes from Fargo, North Dakota, the only state in the US with a state-owned bank? “It was a wonderful place to grow up,” says Paul. “You headed off on your bike after breakfast and came back when the street lights went on. Nobody worried about you. Avoca is a bit like that which is why we like bringing up our three kids here”.

He met his wife, Jane MacBean, when she was studying filmmaking at Humboldt Univ. in Northern California. Paul had gone there to work with wild salmon, keeping them running healthy in the rivers. Then, in 2000, Jane bought him back to Australia to show him her country. They left her grandmother’s house in Mosman and set off on an epic Kombi camper trip to the top of Australia, making a documentary about Woofing along the way. I’m not going to explain what Woofing is. Look it up. Don’t look for their doco, though. Sadly, it never got released. Life took over.

Paul switched from environmental work to hospitality which led to him bopping from one funky business to another with an MBA in business in between. There was the Jewish Mexican who had four shops called ‘Los Bagels’ and took his staff on rafting trips. And then there was the hotel Donelson in Fargo itself. The owner, Karen, pulled the guts out of a former flophouse and now offers 17 art laden rooms, her hotel having revitalised downtown Fargo.

The Hodo, that it’s nickname, typifies what Paul loves in the business world, people doing things with passion

and for the community, not primarily for profit. None of these businesses, we noted, were beholden to shareholders. “The loyalty was to the customer not to a shareholder, and the customer paid you back,” says Paul. Maybe that’s a discovery.

The Hodo was a community hub. Jeff Bridges, the actor, turned up once for the funeral of his mother-in-law and Paul looked after him during his stay. The Bridges family had a great sing-a-long, he recalls. Paul eavesdropped on one number, heard endless verses made up on the spot about the dear departed, but with the chorus always the same : “Granny’s got her thong on wrong.” How could you forget that line?

We don’t hear enough about such unusual businesses like the Hodo, I said, as Paul rattled off others that he’s worked for there and here, all strange and mostly successful. It must be so different in Avoca, compared with Fargo, climate-wise, I suggest, which we know from the TV series, gets a bit bleak. “Yeah, they say people in the Midwest live longer because they’re naturally frozen for half the year. DIY cryogenics!”

Paul’s been running Sunsets Bistro for 18 months now. What’s the vibe you’re after? “ I love it that people celebrate big events in their lives here; weddings, birthdays, and even wakes. I love being part of such important moments and I want to see us do more, broaden the events we host. Be a real community hub for everyone.”

And the food? “Australiana with a few unusual offerings like Osso Bucco and a great seafood platter. There’s also more opportunity to eat now time-wise. We’ve expanded from what was a kitchen operated occasionally by the Ladies Auxiliary, and are now open seven days a week from 4 PM.”

If I was to step into your shoes tomorrow, what are the skills I’d need to have ? I ask. “You’d have to anticipate all sorts of problems, be a bit of a plumber or electrician and a bartender. Recently a washbasin in the men’s toilet decided to turn into a fountain and I had to do some hasty plumbing. Then you have to be a juggler, juggling the ingredients you need, the staff, always having backup, anticipating what can go wrong, always thinking on your feet.”

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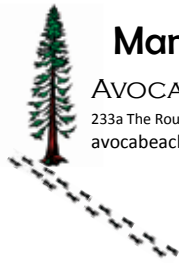
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