

**A recollection of John Bear's father Jack Wilson (1928?-2004),
late of Benalla, Victoria, Australia.**



**Shifting to Wandin
by Jack Wilson - The Reliable Removalist**

[about 1948:]

When Arthur and Kath went to Wandin to live they had the small problem of shifting their furniture to the new house. As I had an old '26 model Chev truck, I volunteered to do the job. The furniture was very high quality, hand made robes and drawers which Arthur prized, not without some pride. Considering the quality of the furniture and my youthfulness and inexperience in these matters, Arthur gamely agreed to my proposition, though probably with some not unfounded misgivings.

So the big day arrived. With my mate Frank and my dog Skeeter, we set off confidently to East Malvern to pick up the precious cargo. Unfortunately we had only travelled some few hundred yards when on attempting to round the first corner, the steering rod fell off the truck. So with one wheel endeavouring to go south and the other going forward we shuddered to a stop. Now this was an unforeseen predicament. After much discussion and head scratching our ingenuity came to the rescue. With the aid of a Penny to pack the rod end and the judicious use of the inevitable piece of wire holding it in place, we set off again. Frank and I agreed not to tell Arthur as we didn't want to worry him about trivial matters.

Eventually after a trouble free trip we arrived at East Malvern and with much juggling of wardrobes etc everything was loaded on board, all safely packed with blankets and padding and tightly secured with plenty of ropes. We were ready to start for Wandin which was considered a fairly long distance in those days.

The trip was surprisingly uneventful considering our patched up repairs to the steering (a great tribute to the strength of cyclone fencing wire) until we reached the top of the big hill leading into Lilydale. We settled down for a long down hill run and with the confidence of youth, to save petrol, slipped into neutral and just allowed the truck to roll. Unfortunately the brake system proved to be quite inadequate for the job. Very quickly we gathered speed never previously reached in the truck's long life. Faster and faster we sped on, every nut and bolt shaking and jarring till the whole body of the truck threatened to fall apart. As I held grimly to the violently shaking steering, trying to hold it in some semblance of direction, I noticed Frank hanging tightly to the door with one hand, presumably in readiness for a quick exit.

Despite my best efforts on the foot brake and Frank's assistance with the hand brake, our speed kept on increasing. Up until this time the dog Skeeter had been enjoying his usual position, half in and half out the window, tail wagging in ecstasy. I had often heard of dogs in China being used to predict earthquakes. As the vibrations increased to an unbelievable pitch, Skeeter slowly reversed back onto the seat then slid stealthily to the floor, curling himself up he lay still, whimpering and making terrible odours. At least I think it was the dog. The vibrations by this time would have reached about 9 on the Richter scale and I have since then had the greatest respect for Chinese dogs.

Eventually the hill began to level out a bit and our speed reduced slightly so we started to breathe a little easier. That is, until we saw the hand operated railway gates just ahead of us begin to shut. Regardless of our frantic horn blowing and waving, the operator was not deterred from his duty. Our only hope from total disaster was to take a right hand turn onto a dirt road so with the furniture leaning on a perilous angle we swerved onto the dirt road which led to a viaduct under the railway line. Unluckily though we failed to notice the "10' height limit" sign. As we careered under the bridge we heard the terrible noise of timber cracking and splintering. Too late we realised our load must have been about 10'6" high. The only thing to do was carry on into Wandin and face the music. So we finally arrived at Arthur's place. Two very subdued, would be furniture removalists and one very disgraced dog.

Happily on inspecting our load we found to our enormous relief that one piece of three ply which had been used to pack between two wardrobes was about 1' higher than the furniture. It was the three ply that made the awful tearing noise. There was no other damage. We decided then and there that we would need a lot more experience before we would make a take over bid for Lindsay Fox Pty. Ltd.

One good thing that came out of the trip was that Frank always declared after then he was never worried about travelling with me. He believed if we survived that we would survive anything. He later vowed he was never at any time frightened. I have to believe him. I sometimes think I might have unjustly blamed the dog.

Finally after unloading the furniture, Auntie Kath gave us a slap up feed and in all the excitement we forgot to charge Arthur for services rendered. Still, considering the circumstances and we had only spent one Penny on repairs, we didn't want to push our luck too far. Anyway we reckoned it was a good day out and no harm done. So we didn't bother as we both agreed "Ah well! Arthur was a pretty good bloke and Auntie Kath was our favourite Auntie."

[about 1932:]

PS. One of my first memories of Kath and Arthur was when they came to Warragul one Christmas. They were highly amused and kept giggling at my efforts to demolish a slice of bread and golden syrup. At the time it didn't seem to me to be a laughing matter as it was no mean feat to perform this delicate operation with two front teeth missing. But then I had had a lot of practice.
