

Telling family stories part of local heritage

EVERYONE used to roll their eyes or giggle when Grandpa Parker started talking about our Viking ancestry.

But I would pull my stool up closer to his armchair and beg Grandpa for more details.

From where I'm standing, you can understand the appeal of that particular grandfather story.

For a small girl who grew up into a short, dark-haired adult, the idea of tall, blond, fearsome Viking ancestors was wonderfully romantic.

And the story had to come from somewhere. Grandpa wouldn't have made it all up, would he?

Bob Pitt wouldn't mind me sharing a story from his childhood when he and a group of mates decided to take a detour home one night.

The boys decided to ride home via the apple orchard of a large farm on the edge of Longford, where Pitts have lived for several generations.

Bob and his friends were on their bikes riding back into town, their pockets full of apples, still excited about their adventure, wondering aloud about the whereabouts of the orchard owner, when a voice boomed out of the darkness: "I'm right behind you!"

Bob's stories as we reminisced at a weekend gathering about growing up in our particular country town reminded my brother Jeff of another



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local identity from our childhood, Artie Gray.

Mr Gray, one of the brothers who ran a butcher's shop at Longford for years, had his own ghost story to tell Jeff one day among the many others of an earlier generation of kids in our town — a story that must have been almost completely true.

As a boy, Mr Gray often took a short cut home in the dark at night through the paddock where a country-style abattoir stood waiting for its gruesome daytime business.

Two nights running as he walked through the paddock, he was alarmed by the feeling of a ghostly presence behind him and the breath of something sinister on his neck.

The third night he walked home armed with a block of wood, ready to deal with the ghost.

Sure enough, as he walked through the paddock, he felt the ghostly presence and its ghostly breath again on his neck.

He swung around with his piece of

wood and lashed out at whatever was behind him before running home. Next morning, so Mr Gray's story goes, a bull was found lying dead in the paddock.

A national radio program at the weekend set me thinking about these stories and others that often emerge over a cup of tea, prompted by a few old photographs and a gathering of people who have lived together in the same town since childhood.

The program talked of this generation's exodus of adults from big cities to Australia's country towns, seaside places and the bush seeking a less expensive, less stressful life.

These people are different from many others of previous times — they are in their 50s and 60s, moving after their children have grown up and done the same.

I wondered about them as I settled comfortably back among the people who carry the best stories of my particular childhood place in their heads.

Governments and other big organisations can hire heritage consultants to write the official history of a region.

But the stories that give a place life and colour are often only told at family gatherings or when old community friends get together.

So if my generation is moving on, who will tell our stories?

BRIEFLY . . .

No doctor

I refer to Danielle Blewett's report "Busy doctors in call for patience" (The Examiner, May 9) in Launceston at the start of the winter flu season. "The forgotten people" of Branxholm, Derby, Winnaleah, Ringarooma, Herrick, Pioneer, Gladstone and the far North-East of Cape Portland and Rusby Lagoon were without a doctor at Derby for more than six weeks, despite Health Minister Lara Giddings giving an assurance in Parliament that the area is covered (Hansard, April 29).

Ms Blewett provided an excellent coverage of the problems facing their suspended doctor, Paul McGinly, and is to be commended for keeping the community informed. Ms Giddings has the power to suspend committees under her authority who are holding up due process, but while she procrastinated the people of the far North-East and the most important asset, the children of the area, suffered.

— BRIAN P. KHAM, former chairman, Northern Regional Health Board.