

Tabourie Memories: Helen Tilby

My family has had a long association with Tabourie, at least 70 years. My mother's sister Nancy was married to Laurie James the younger brother of Fred James. Both sides of my parents families had been visiting for years even before Fred James settled there. I am not sure how they found it but I can remember my Nana telling me stories of how they used to come down from Sydney on the train to Bomaderry and the bus from there. They had to bring nearly everything they needed for the holiday with them as there was no shop established in the area (this is before Julie's Corner or Fred James shop). My parents and Nana described how their holidays were filled with walks, swimming and fishing. At nights it was some fishing or when wet and wild a few drinks and cards until the morning. When I was young I would go up fishing with her beside the lake where the new boardwalk is now, there used to be a house built on the hill that looked a little bit Swiss. I can remember seeing turtles along the bank.

My parents introduced me to Tabourie the 1st Easter after I was born over 60 years ago. By this stage Fred James had an established a shop in Centre St which catered for almost everything. It sold groceries, fishing gear, ice-creams, stamps, petrol, buckets, bait and so much more. You could ask for almost anything and it would be dragged out from behind something in the shop. The shop was also the local telephone exchange with the old cords that you pulled out and plugged into the wall to connect the call. My cousin Ivan remembers helping out on the exchange and connecting the calls for the 40 or so local residents when he was a teenager. The tourists used the public telephone up outside Julie's Corner, we had to line up on Christmas morning for hours and have plenty of change handy to make those Christmas calls. Fred was also the local Real Estate agent and reported the local fishing catch to the papers. As Fred got older he gave up the shop and you had to go to Julie's Corner, which had caravans out the back for rent or the Tucker Box for supplies.

My father was fortunate enough to have a job with a car, and we would make the journey down from the inner city of Sydney at least twice a year, 4 weeks at Christmas and the Easter break. It wasn't a trip without stopping at the Marlin Pub in Ulladulla for a drink before continuing onto Tabourie. In those days we had to sit on the fence, we weren't allowed in. I have many memories of staying in different houses along the lake and further up towards the beach that are no longer there. They were small and basics were provided. I can remember that we always had to save water as the only supply was the tank on stilts out the back of every house. Once Fred's flats were completed, we stayed there. Each time we arrived we would notice new houses or ones that had disappeared like the A house that stood beside the creek that burnt down.

My memories of the Lake as a child are very different to what the Lake is today. The Lake was open almost every year and had a sandbank on the north beach that stopped you going out to sea after riding the rapids on your white foam surfboard as the Lake emptied at low tide. The Lake was a lot deeper and crystal clear on the village side, you could see the bottom the whole way as you walked along the bush track. There were no motorboats ever allowed on the Lake, it was just row boats and canoes. At the end of the track you would come out on 2 sand dunes, you could climb to the top and ride a piece cardboard down the slope and into the lake. One year we arrived to see that the dunes were no longer there they had been blown flat into the lake after a storm.

In my teenage years you were still able to drive to the lookout at the top of the hill and people used to camp in the clearings that once had houses. It was around then they had just started to open up the development on River Road, the old bridge stood derelict. Prior to the development opening up. In those days no-one had a mobile phone, they weren't heard of, or the devices that kids have today. It was the Brownie box camera, the foam esky and surfboard and the beach umbrella. If it was fine you were never bored, there was so much to do and explore. It was a wonderful place to spend the holiday as a child.

When I was little we tended to spend most of our time in Tabourie except for the odd trip to Bateman's Bay or into Ulladulla. As I got older my parents would go into to play lawn bowls a couple of times a week weather permitting. I can remember dreading it if it was wet and cold as there was nothing to do. Fred's

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flats had a TV but as it was summertime my parents watched Tennis or Cricket, as a child I didn't get a say. There were very few children who used to stay at the flats and I wasn't allowed to go wandering except to Fred and Joan's shop. If I was lucky at least once every holiday I got to go into the Burrill Lake open air picture theatre. That was an adventure and always fun. The crowds would pile into the canvas that was slung between 2 poles as a seat. Everyone would have pillows and blankets to make it more comfortable. If it rained ½ way through the show the people at the front would squeeze up the back. Everyone would just shuffle along; you didn't want to be too skinny as you fall between the canvas slits and onto the dirt floor. It made the night more enjoyable.



On fine days you were kept busy getting the row boat and the pump out and going across the lake to get nippers or up the beach depending on the tide to get worms. A paddle in the lake in the canoe or up the beach for a swim and look at the water preparing for the nights fishing. Sometimes you would see the people from the caravan park come back from the sea fishing and clean the catch over near the island and the rocks. This would always attract a crowd of people, string-rays and other creatures. On a fine night with no moon you would see the lake light up with the reflections from the many Tilley lamps that were being guided along the lake with their hopeful owners in search of a prawn feed. Mostly men would head across to the island to fish the rocks till the early hours of the morning. When you stood where the lookout is now you could see many a lonely figure with their fishing rod along the beach hoping for a feed to take home.

In January and Easter Church groups used to stay over in the caravan park, they would have activities on the beach and all were welcome to join in. Everyone seemed happy and cared for one another. There were many walks that we went on one being up the back track through to Dermeil Lake (we called it

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Termeil). We would set off in the morning with the foam esky, sandwiches, water, swimmers and of course the fishing gear. You could drive there from the highway but the road was dirt and you could easily get bogged or have the path blocked by a fallen tree. We sometimes went prawning there at night. Another walk was up through the bush where there was a crypt with an Italian man in it, I don't recall his name, but the crypt was moved when the new development took place. Every few years we would follow the path to the top of Mt Pidgeon loft.



In the early 90's my husband and I bought a place at Tabourie, we had all intentions of moving down permanently but circumstances prevented us. We used to be regular, coming down at least every fortnight. Over the years we have met some very interesting people who loved Tabourie like we do but many of them have also passed or moved away. People like Peter the Greek, his sister Connie, Jack Murray, and Helen Hiscock to name a few.

Even since the 90's we have seen changes to the village, like changing from the toilet pit to the expensive septic system. The empty blocks are slowly being built on and a new generation of Lake lovers are moving in. We still don't have gutters or a regular bus service but it's nice to know it's still a place where the kids can play cricket on the street and you can catch up with the neighbours for a drink and a bite to eat. Hopefully it will remain that way for years to come.

Photos provided by Helen Tilby.