

Change inevitable, but so is yearning for past

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■ Marion Fulker

The series in *The West Australian* this week on 1965 — what Perth was like 50 years ago — put me in a reflective mood. I wasn't here in 1965, many of us weren't.

There are a growing number of people who have come from overseas or interstate and chosen Perth as their home rather than being "born and bred" here. That doesn't mean we love it any less, we just have different views on it.

I grew up in Sydney. Not just any part of Sydney but its most treasured jewel, the eastern suburbs, famous for surf nooks, including Bondi, and the glorious Sydney Harbour with its many coves that are home to some of the most expensive real estate in the country.

In the 1960s, the eastern suburbs were a place for the rich as well as the poor. A place with tolerance for the Jew and the non-believer alike. A place for the sunburnt Aussie and the year-round tanned migrant. A place where gay had two meanings. A place I still long for and a place that is so far from where I am now.

In my mind's eye, there were milk bottles delivered to the front door before sun up, with a thick layer of cream stuck firm in their necks. There were bright sunny days, which resulted in sore shoulders kissed too long by the sun, hair dried stiff from the salt water and toes gritty with sand.

Hot afternoons were spent watching cartoons on TV with the fan blowing directly into my face. After a dinner of cold meat and salad there was a quick dash to the local milk bar to get a chocolate bar for myself and packets of ciggies for the family.



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I recall being excited at being up late into the evening with a long twilight before the sun set. And when I was totally spent from the day's activities, sleep came quickly to start tomorrow anew. Back then there was a clear delineation between work or school and home. A solid day's effort rewarded by idle times of rest and relaxation.

My mind often wanders back to those seemingly simple years, relishing the comfort and familiarity they bring. Contributing to my sense of who I was in my early years as a cherished and precocious grandchild. Of my teenage years as a Bondi chick.

Those years when I was a Sydney girl before I defected across the Nullarbor.

I get nostalgic and yearn for the simplicity of my youth and the Sydney that was in the same whimsical way that Perth "born and bred" of my age and older reminisce about the Perth of their past.

Sandgroppers talk of never locking their houses or cars. Of how safe and carefree the city was, with children playing cricket in the street and evenings crabbing or prawning in the river. They tell of how the sun always shone, the surf always crashed and everyone knew everyone.

They recall with pride how that astronaut flew over and upon seeing the twinkling below dubbed it the City of Lights.

They describe a place I do not know,

a place I have never seen. What I found in Perth in the mid-1980s was, to me, a place on the edge of life itself.

It was old-fashioned, slightly prim in its conservative ways. It was a frontier. A place of hot baking summers and cold, crisp winters. A place that was yet to feel the consequences of waste, with drinking water spewing twice daily on lawns and gardens.

A place where dubious characters were celebrated entrepreneurs. A place which revelled in its isolation and big country town status — yet carried a big chip on its shoulder and had an aching neck from looking east for attention and validation.

Like my Sydney, that Perth no longer exists. The Perth of today is fresh and sassy. Full of life and fun. Brimming with a new-found confidence. Stemming the tyranny of distance through its people, flight and technology.

Delivering opportunity that rivals any "over east".

Yet its underbelly of issues is gorging. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The ruling classes are the educated, their servants the disengaged.

Yes, the sun does shine hot and often. It rises on the early morning energetics — the swimmers, walkers, cyclists and rowers.

It also shines on the industrious — the cogs that make the wheels turn. It sets on endless suburbia — single family houses as far as the eye can see.

No doubt in 30 or 40 years from now our children and grandchildren will look back on their youth in Perth today with the same filtered nostalgia that colours our views of the past. They, too, will find Perth changed.

As Perth grows to a region of 3.5 million people, let's make sure the change is mostly for the better.

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