



# COMMUNITY

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Monday: 8.30am - 4pm

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### Booking Deadlines

#### Tuesday's Edition

Display: 5pm Thursday

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Deaths: 11am Monday

#### Friday's Edition

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# 'Give and take' over 72 years

JENNY DENTON

A FEW days before his 72nd wedding anniversary Harold Chalmers looked out his window and saw two white ibis performing to an audience of other birds.

"They were dancing round and round together like brolgas in what looked like a mating dance. They had their wings spread right out. You could see every feather. It was incredible, just magic! I'll remember that for the rest of my time," the 95-year-old said.

"Ral" and his wife Jean Chalmers (née Whinfield), 94, will celebrate their seven decades together over afternoon tea today at Murray Haven, Barham, where they have resided for the last two years.

When they married in Pyramid Hill on May 24 1947, it was Empire Day.

Petrol rationing introduced during the war was still in force and travel was difficult.

Still, 50 or 60 friends and family members came from as far away as Melbourne for the afternoon wedding, which was officiated by Rev. Frederick Plumb for a fee of 3 pounds.

The best man was Arthur Kerr and the bridesmaid was Valerie Whinfield.

Ral's mother, a talented singer who had once been advised by Dame Nellie Melba to pursue a musical career in London, sang 'Oh Promise Me', and a meal was served.

"As soon as the wedding was over Joan's brother, Steve Whinfield, took us down to Bendigo to the Shamrock," Ral says. "We had the honeymoon suite there. I tell you what!"

The next day the newlyweds travelled by bus to Hepburn Springs for their honeymoon.

"It was a hot May, like this one. We never got a drop of rain. Joan played tennis every day, and we had a famous cook at the Tangenong guest house. By jove, he served us up meals that were fit for a king!"

"It was so different from where we lived at Loddon Vale, which was just flat plain, not a hill anywhere except Pyramid Hill. To get down there amongst the mountains was really something for us."

The 23 and 24-year-old bride and groom, aged 23 and 24, had first met 10 years earlier at the railway station in Bendigo, when they were both going to school

there.

They were introduced by Joan's first cousin, Harvey Bawden, who would later marry Ral's twin sister Nancy, get shot down over Germany in a Lancaster bomber and spend a year as a prisoner of war.

"He said 'Come on, meet me cousin,'" Ral says. "He took me over and I shook hands with Joan, and I put a little note in me black book that perhaps, some day, you never know!"

Years later Ral and Jean met again at the Macorna dances.

"Joan lived 8 miles from where I lived at Canary Island and because of petrol rationing I had to ride a horse the 8 mile over of a Sunday to see her and ride home in the dark.

"Sometimes she would drive us to Macorna for the dances, and I had to hang on to the seat. She was a fairly speedy driver in those days."

It was war time and Joan was working as a member of the Land Army on her father's farm, amongst other jobs, tossing sheaves of hay around and driving sheep, single-handed, across country, while her brother was away at the war.

"One of her jobs was to drive 90 cross-bred lambs from Hawkingston to Macorna railway station to be trucked down to Newmarket," Ral says. "She would've been 17 or 18, and she took them to the Macorna trucking yards with a horse. I don't think she even had a dog. I reckon she should've been given a VC for that."

In Ral's view, Jean deserves a few medals - another for feeding the shearing gangs who would suddenly "walk in the door for dinner" and come back every night for two weeks on the Merino stud they ran for more than 50 years.

Joan herself understated about her achievements.

"It was all hard work but we all got through," she says.

"My medals were my kids. They were good kids - mostly!"

The first of them, Susan, arrived in 1949.

She was about 12 months old and the young family were living in a pre-fabricated Triton cottage when a tornado "went through the district and blew houses away from Appin to Pyramid Hill."

Ral had already started making cement bricks for a new house, and they sheltered behind a stack of them as it ripped through the



Harold and Joan Chalmers with their daughter, Susan.

area, upending machinery and blowing the chimney off the cottage.

"It was terrifying. The noise - you wouldn't credit the noise of it! We thought we were done for," Ral says.

But everyone survived, even the sheep, which had been "lifted and rolled around like golf balls."

The new house was built at Canary Island and Susan was followed by Rodney in 1951, Helen in 1955, Neil in 1956, Barry in 1960 and David in 1963.

While Jean was an excellent cook, a devoted mother and a good pianist, who played the organ at the Canary Island church for many years, Ral played football for Macorna, winning several premierships, and cricket for the Loddon Vale Cricket Club, which he captained for seven years.

Politics ran in the family - his niece, Sharman Stone, Nancy and Harvey's daughter, would become the Liberal member for Murray and hold the seat for 20 years.

Ral himself was the secretary of the Pyramid Hill Country Party, later the Nationals, and "travelled all over the countryside" for political meetings.

Meanwhile he worked hard on the 5000-acre Canary Island property which he shared with his father and brother, John.

"It was an irrigation farm - it's a night and day job, I can tell you!" Ral says.

They exhibited sheep and wool at all the agricultural shows, and a highlight for Ral from those times was winning the Riverina Merino wether trials in the early 1980s, knocking off the prestig-

ious local breeders to take home a huge trophy.

They also did some cropping on the property, and in some years delivered more grain than anyone else into Pyramid Hill.

The family had always enjoyed caravan holidays, and after Ral and Joan left the farm they continued to travel.

On one memorable trip they "caravanned off around half of Australia", from Alice Springs up to Darwin, and around the coast to Perth, stopping for a week in Kununurra and two weeks in Broome.

At Broome they rode in a hovercraft and stood in the dinosaur footprints on the rocks along the beach.

"It was fantastic," Ral says, "the memories! The big brown circles of the dinosaurs feet carved in on the rocks."

They spent 25 years in Kerang before moving to Murray Haven.

They have 31 grandchildren and 32 great grandchildren by Ral's count.

While Ral says learning "to do as you are told" is important advice for husbands, the suggestion makes Jean laugh.

"That never happened!" she says.

Their daughter Susan once overheard her mum discussing the secrets of marriage with her sister-in-law.

"They said that the way to get your ideas across is that you've got to convince your husband that it was their idea," Susan says.

Jean still thinks that is good advice, although overall the key to a long relationship, she says, is "give and take."

## Weather

### Temperatures

Monday: minimum 12.9 degrees, maximum 12.9 degrees.

Tuesday: 7.7, 20.1.

Wednesday: 5.1, 22.0.

Thursday: 6.0.

May minimums: lowest 3.7 degrees [17th], highest 14.6 degrees [1st] average 7.8 degrees [long-term average 7.2 degrees]. Lowest on record: -1.1 degrees [26th, 1967]. Highest on record: 18.0 degrees [5th, 1988].

May maximums: lowest 12.7 degrees [10th], highest 23.5 degrees [18th], average 19.1 degrees [long-term average 18.2 degrees]. Highest on record: 28.7 degrees [5th, 1978]. Lowest on record: 8.9 degrees [27th, 2000].

### Rainfall

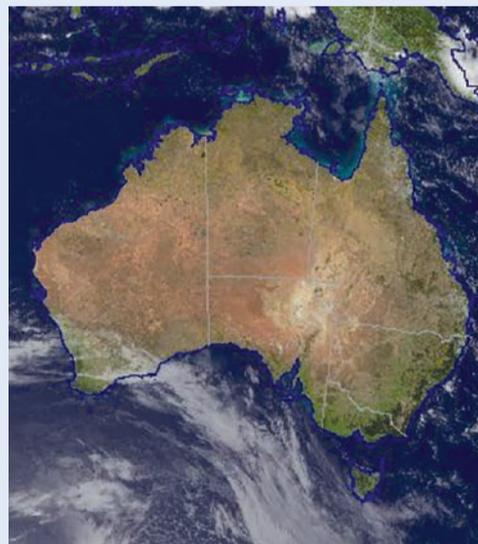
Monday: 2.0mm. Month to date: 34.6mm [long-term average 35.6mm]. Year to date: 49.4mm. [long-term January-May average: 134.7mm]. Last year to May 23: 51.0mm. Highest on record: 138.0mm [1956]. Lowest on record: 0.0mm [1895, 1912, 1934].

### Stream salinity

Loddon River at Kerang from Friday, May 17: 120us/cm,

124, 128, 129, 129, 84, 87.

Barr Creek at Capels Flume: Not available due to low water level.



Source: Bureau of Meteorology.

### Forecast

Today: Partly cloudy, 12-22

Saturday: Showers, 12-20

Sunday: Showers, 9-15

Monday: Partly cloudy, 7-17

Tuesday: Showers, 10-15

Wednesday: Partly cloudy, 4-13

### Daylight

Today sunrise 7.20am

sunset 5.23pm

Saturday 7.20am, 5.22pm

Sunday 7.21am, 5.22pm

Monday 7.22am, 5.21pm

Tuesday 7.22am, 5.21pm

### Ultra-violet index

Sun protection not recommended. UV Index predicted to reach 2 [low].

### Fire danger

Mallee: Low-moderate. The Shire of Gannawarra is within the Mallee fire district for fire bans and restrictions.

Northern Country: Low-moderate. The Shire of Loddon is within the Northern Country fire district.

• Fire danger ratings and restrictions information is available from www.cfa.vic.gov.au