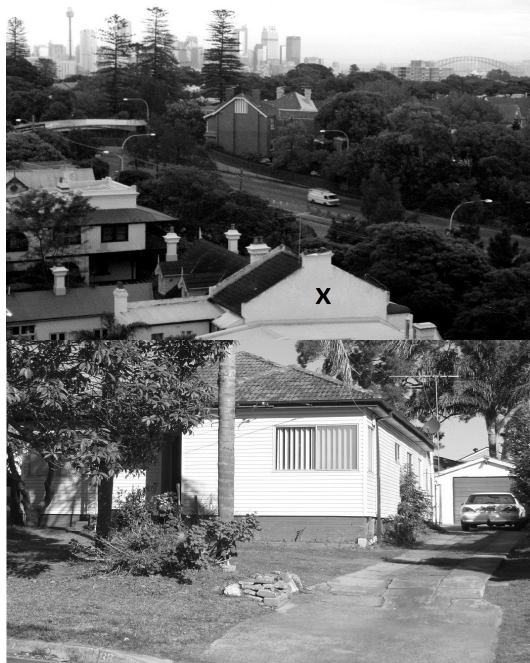


A Nest in the West! Why?

Terry Quinn



East Nest (X) ~ West Nest

With someone like you, a pal good and true
I'd like to leave it all behind and go and find
Some place that's known to God alone
Just a spot to call our own
We'll find perfect peace
Where joys never cease
Out there beneath a kindly sky
We'll build a sweet little nest somewhere in the west
And let the rest of the world go by.

Words & Music by J. Keirn Brennan & Ernest R. Ball, 1919. Recorded by Gene Autry,
Dick Haymes

<http://lyricsplayground.com/alpha/songs//lettherestoftheworldgoby.shtml>

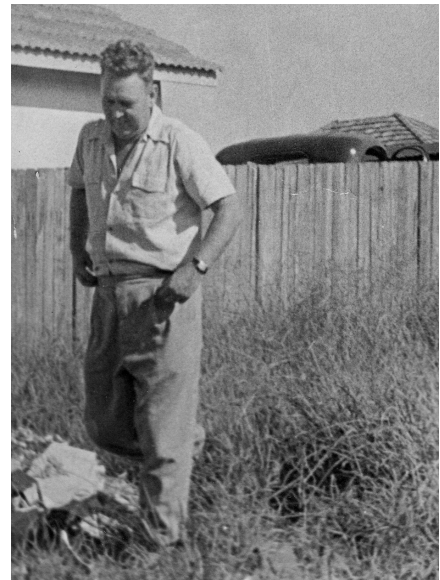
Sung around our home by Dad, Don Quinn

‘Dad! Why are we leaving?’ I found myself wondering, just as any four year old might, trying to make sense of a changing world. I was in the process of getting my mind around moving from the only home I’d ever known. We were headed out West from Sydney’s Eastern Suburbs to acquire our very own railway station labeled in foot high black capitals, MERRYLANDS. We moved from a three story terrace built in the 1850s in Woollahra (meeting place), then a dormitory suburb of Sydney Town. The semi-tropical bush along the Southern cliffs overlooking Port Jackson had, for millennia, provided shelter in caves and good camping for the local Eora clan of Cadigal people of the Dharug nation.

After the Botany Bay bound first fleet abandoned its original site, it sailed north into what Governor Phillip called the finest harbour in the world. The first fleeters first contact with locals was probably the ringing 'Cooee' call of locals. Carrying clearly across the sparkling waters of what came to be known as Sydney Harbour, 'Cooee' called for friends to 'come and see', What merriment the Cadigal would have taken watching the subsequent daily parade of soldiers marching the South Head track atop the cliffs above the harbour, to tend signal fires at South Head lookout station. 'Cooee' come and see.

Every flake of paint in that old terrace held hidden memories for my mother, Gwen Ryan and before her, Maude Peisner, her mother. For they had been born and raised there in the Peisner family home. In her youth the rising arch of Sydney Harbour Bridge was a sign visible from upstairs, of Sydney's growing CBD. Following World War II her large family of eight siblings each benefited from the sale of the family home, financing the building of individual family homes with the proceeds. Some built South across Botany Bay and others North on the Hawkesbury.

We built West and were moving to a new square-ish fibro house with bare wooden floors. Dad's homely singing echoed through the house. Floor coverings and curtains were added later, and insect screens as well, following our first fly-infested summer. Our new house, built on a quarter acre block, was surrounded by grass more than a yard high as measurement went in those days. Long stalks of paspalum forming a dense growth, provided us kids with hours of fun as we crisscrossed the back yard with wombat sized tunnels through the grass. The tunnels lead to a dungeon hideaway among the piers underneath the elevated front of our house. At the back of the house was a step down from an open verandah to a laundry and semi-attached outside dunny.



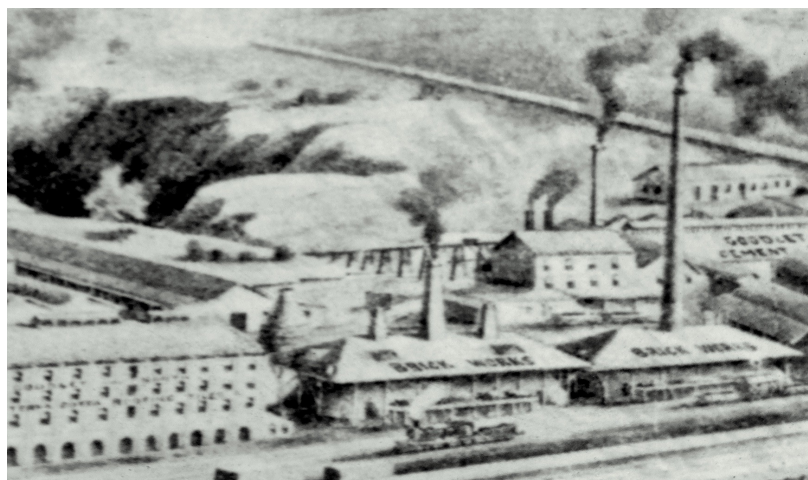
Dad and Paspalum Tunnel

The backdoor was highway to our house and it was hardly ever locked. Our front door was only ever used by salesmen or new visitors on their first visit. Services were home delivered in those halcyon days of the fabulous fifties. Around breakfast time the ice man would invade the very core of our home in boots and bagging apron, lugging an ice block half the size of a fruit crate, swinging from an enormous set of calipers. He also sold fish and to this day I still carry a deep loathing of fishy smells.

Even earlier in the wee hours while we slept a shady rambler visited our darkened neighborhood, the dunny can man. His truck called the dunny cart after the dunny carters, carried cans of 'night soil' securely stashed in clip seal cans. But the stench could still be smelt a mile off. After sunrise our milkman ladled milk from a metre high multi-gallon pail in the back of his horse-drawn wagon. Carrying our full billy he entered by the front gate to hang our billy of cow juice from an enormous nail on the shady side of the fence. Good timing for breakfast. No chance then of birds pecking through silver bottle tops. No bottles, no tops, and never then a sign of a milk carton.

Our Mary Street milko arrived in the early morning before the heat of the day, clip-clopping up the brick cobbled rise outside our house then along towards the railway line half a mile to the east. The baker's bread cart, also horse drawn, was more of a midday feature in our street. Our baker however traveled west down our street bringing a rich aroma of freshly baked bread wafting on the still sunny air. Leaving his horse to mind the cart in the street, he would enter each house in turn with a large basket of bread to provide choice for each householder. His horse would respond to his tongued 'Gee up!' and follow him down the road. One day we kids tried the 'Gee up!' trick on his horse and gee it worked. A grassy patch below a disused tennis court stopped the horse on what was later the curb side, when concrete curbing eventually reached our suburb. We remained well and truly hidden amid the piers in the keep under the front of our house.

Before Holroyd Council curbed Mary Street, rain would turn our street into a morass of ochre mud and claggy red clay. Gutters ran a banker as the runoff headed down a clayey muddy gutter to a culvert at the bottom of the hill. Shortly after rain petered out, or even while it showered, sun and kids came out to play. We dammed gutter run off with magnificent constructions that sometimes reached across the road. Clay was manually molded and smoothed to form walls across the open drain. Elaborate dam constructions of multi-arched spans and sinuous spillways built from our superior sticky gluggy local clay formed ponds at various levels down the hill.



Train passing kiln fires below excavation in gully c1890

Our local clay was probably used for millennia as daub by local indigenous peoples, decorating their bodies for corroboree. We certainly used it as war paint in our childhood reenactment of battles involving aboriginal nations. Dad called our neighborhood gang the BTH but mum explained that to us as 'Plurry Thundering Herd'. Post settlement, clay provided a valuable raw material exploited by enterprising colonials who used it to manufacture bricks and tiles to build the growing colony. From the early

days of the colony this was a pioneering industry in the Western districts of Old Sydney Town.

Merrylands sported one of Sydney's biggest clay pits, an enormous yawning hole left by nearly a century of open cut mining. Excavation to supply local kilns removed nearly half of Pitt Street hill. The cavity stopped at Pitt Street as it climbed away from Merrylands heading north towards the colonies first Government House, built 1799 in Parramatta Park. The kiln flourished after the introduction of rail to the area in the 1880's for it stood on a flat next to the railway station. Behind it loomed a growing gaping hole, all that was left of the southern side of the hill.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1903

Letters to the Editor.

We do not necessarily endorse our Correspondents' remarks.

WHERE IS THE GAIN?

SIR.—Now that an election fight is proceeding for Federal honors, and is to be decided on the fiscal issue, it is well for electors to bear in mind that we have had 60 years of Responsible Government; 50 years we have had unrestricted trade; and now we come out over £80,000,000 in debt. In that period we have sold the cream of our land, amounting to many millions pounds, much of which we are compelled to resume at an enormous increase on the sale price, and thus swell the public debt to unknown bounds. Moreover, we have sold our mineral products—gold, silver, lead, copper, tin, bismuth—and gems of untold worth. We have looted our coal and timber measures; exploited our wool, pastoral, dairying, and agricultural industries; and sold up our mercantile wealth—all have gone. And yet we find ourselves over £80,000,000 in debt. Some people say that our Government has squandered the money; but if it did so, what have we to show for it? We have roads, railways, harbors, and public buildings. But if we pay out of our credit the amount we owe, what will we have left?—an empty Treasury and a prodigious army of unemployed. Well, sir, the very natural question evolved from all this is: Who has the money, or where has it gone? And the only logical answer is that it has gone to pay for Free-trade. Like the simple children of the soil, we took red blankets and seductive hues, a mere chimeras, for our wealth and honor, our progress and peace. And yet Mr. Reid wants us to cling to Free-trade, the evil fetish that has worked our present dishonor and confusion. It may suit money-lenders, merchant Jews, and commission agents, but not the masses of New South Wales.—Yours, &c.

Emmaville, Dec. 7th. **H. QUINN.**

Heat from a row of kiln fires, glowing in the gathering dusk, would warm our imagination as well as firing bricks. We weary train travelers, Westering home, were warmly welcomed on returning from the city or a visit to Nana's and Bronte beach. Slowing to stop at the platform, our train would pass a dozen glowing furnace fires, each greeting us with an inviting blast of warm air.

I think production was cutting back when we moved West, probably because local tiles could not compete with imports from India after WWII. Unglazed imports, like on our roof, eventually lost their terracotta redness to a creeping black haze of lichen. Cheap imports have often sounded the death knell of local industries and fueled national debate around protectionism. A half century earlier, following Federation in 1901, Dad's Grandad, Hugh Quinn, in his local news paper, The Glen Innes Examiner Friday December 11 1903, vehemently decried free trade. But that's another story. Maybe he, the first of our clan born in the colony, was turning in his grave. For Dad supported imports and overseas trade though he disliked our discolored cheap imports.

'Why are we leaving Dad?' my brother Paul cornered Don Quinn with his innocent insistence that few could rarely if ever resist. My brother had an alluring way with words coupled with very expressive eyes that endeared him to all he met. That was until he was killed in New Guinea by a renegade Highlander, someone who did not want to meet, or even know him.

The same Chimbu killed two others that fateful night in 1971 and forever changed our world. My sister, desperate to help him off the floor, felt with her hands how deep he had been cut as she slipped in the dark, in a pool of his still warm blood. The shock to her was not recognised, as post traumatic stress was not diagnosed in those days. With the resilience of her artistic soul, Maryanne treated her PTSD by completing an Art Therapy course decades later. Shock waves shook the crowd of friends of all colours who gathered at Port Moresby airport to send him off on his final journey to Rookwood Cemetery. Those milling multi-racial mourners testified mutely to his openness to all.

Paul's oversized air cargo coffin seemed almost too big to squeeze into the limousine hearse that transported it from Kingsford Smith airport. Why are you gone from our life? And even Dad had no answer to that question. Mum was defiantly angry 'Of course God wants me to be angry! I am his mother!' she agonisingly declared in the lull before the funeral of her first born. Parents just never expect their children to die before they do. I escaped the haze of sorrow by hitching to Darwin and visiting Australia's neighbors in Timor and Indonesia.

Rookwood, the dead centre of Sydney for over one hundred years, was first established as the city necropolis in the horse and buggy days of the 19th Century. Westward snaking rail provided Sydney with a unique method of conducting funerals. Frequently or even weekly, a funeral train would chuff out from a sandstone mortuary chapel on the Chippendale side of Central Railway carrying several mourning parties and associated coffins. Its destination, an identical mortuary platform built as a twin chapel, also in Gothic style, on a siding near the cemetery.

In the 1950's the platform at the Rookwood end of the line was dismantled block by block. Reassembled in the National capital it is now All Saints Church in Ainslie. Here, my wife to be, J J, grew and fostered her interest in the public practice of religion. When we met I worked with the Australian Museum train touring NSW with museum exhibits.



Author working on Museum Train

The train, decorated with a dinosaur skeleton painted along the sides of both carriages, was parked during summer school vacation in the twin mortuary chapel, still located intact near Central Station. Bones of museum specimens, loaded via the same mortuary platform were carried to the furthestmost regions of NSW to delight rural residents and the young at heart. And to provide a nifty premier with a nifty political tool.

Paul's moving "Why?" stumped Dad. His hesitation left us expectantly awaiting an answer. But why is it that only with age we become wise about some of our queries in life. 'Whys?' can arise following bolts from the blue with not an iota of apparent reason.

'Why are we leaving!' exclaimed Dad as a prelude to answering five year old Paul's question. We had watched our uncles juggle Great Aunt Flo's piano through the front door of our terrace. Slung by ropes from the top floor balcony, it took the strains and struggles of a morning to safely navigate it down the front steps on to Uncle Pat's truck. No doubt about it, we were well and truly on the move. And Dad's answer sparked immediate agreement, even though it was to a place we did not even know and a future we could hardly guess at.



Paul & Terry say good-bye to Grafton Street

'Well!!!' and he paused. All ears, we waited on his wisdom and an understanding of why the move from Woollahra to the West.

'They' he commenced, and us with not a thought as to who 'they' were. 'They are going to build a railway line under our house. It will tunnel right through from Town Hall and end up at Bondi.'

And they did. Thirty years later I was back living in the East and working near Circular Quay. And I had the option of training to the city as well as busing, biking or running.

Cool!... would probably be my grand daughter's response to such a revelation. But maybe we said Wow! Already we could see the possibility of our house falling down like a castle of cards.

In ominous tones Dad detailed our fate if we dared stay put.

'Trains will rumble through the underground tunnel day and night'. Dad could see we were growing sympathetic to the move so he enlarged on the catastrophe.

'Windows will rattle and walls will crack!' You could guess that by then we were all for joining him to avoid such devastation.

'Gee we better move... , and quick...!' we chorused. Anticipation showed in our eyes as we signaled our agreement in unison.

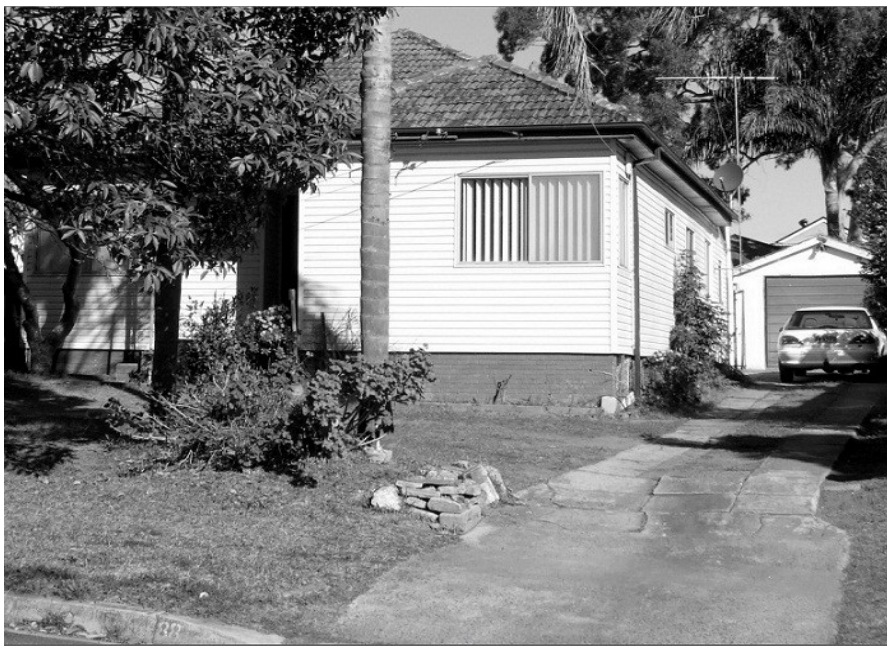
My brother was really the most agreeable person I have had the pleasure of knowing.

Why on earth did we leave?

Looking back now over what then had been unseen, a melancholy mist descends.

Whys in life may lead one to wisely turn to gratitude for the present slice of life now lived with joyful anticipation of what the future holds.

That was how it was when we went west.



Nest in the West ~ Old 88.