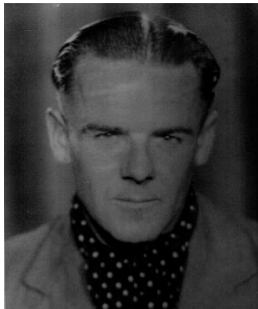


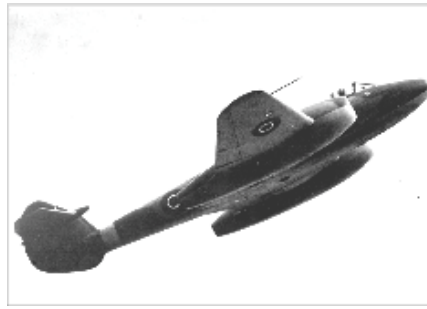
Trevor Beal

My family went to Leigh Creek when I was nine, on 25 April 1952. We had lived in Adelaide, moving from relative to relative, waiting for a house to become available.

Dad (Eric) had been involved in wind tunnel flight tests in England before WW2. He was in the Commonwealth of Australia Civilian Contingent, in-flight testing the *Gloster Meteor* in 1943. It was Britain's first jet fighter, and entered the war in 1944. His division rebuilt disposal army vehicles, formerly used on the Stuart Highway between Darwin and Alice Springs in WW2. After the war, Dad lectured on jet engines at Adelaide School of Mines, then part of the University of Adelaide on North Terrace.



Eric Beal (Trevor's father) 1945



RAF Gloster Meteor jet aircraft in flight, England 1944

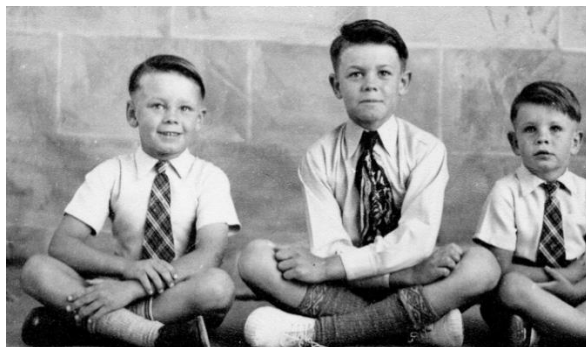


Beal's Northern Motors opened in 1955

When we moved to *Leigh Creek Coalfield* (there was no town named *Leigh Creek*), he got a job as Transport Foreman for ETSA, Leigh Creek.

After three years, he built Northern Motors at the north end of the town. It opened in summer, 1955—the year of the Suez (Canal) Crisis that my best secondary teacher had told us about at school. I worked with Dad all the summer school holidays. He was surprised when I suggested payment. I was up and clad right through a heatwave, and worked every day until first term holidays.

My two younger brothers, Malcolm, four years younger, and David, five, kept Mum (Audrey) busy, as she helped in the garage too. Leigh Creek Higher Primary School educated us well. We took punishment in good humour, calling the 'cuts' the Principal gave out, *The Hit Parade*.



Malcolm, Trevor and David Beal



At Prospect. *From left*—Mum's sister, Jean, Mum and Trevor's Grandmother, Lydia

We were all big lads and loved to eat. Mum wanted a Sunbeam Mixmaster to make cakes. So, when Dad went to Adelaide, he bought a mixer, and had it sent up. The box it came in was huge, and when Mum opened it, she found a Commercial mixer, suitable for making large quantities of mixture. She tore strips off Dad.

Old Leigh Creek had a beautiful picture theatre. It had a *peanut gallery* upstairs—a permanent Dress Circle, with raised seats up to the height of a man's head. The lower part, with the seats removed, was a massive dance hall and it was air conditioned. Leigh Creek Theatre was across the road from the school. The foyer had been set up by Adelaide Co-op Stores as a shop. We bought our school lunches there. When I was Dad's apprentice, Malcolm passed on to me his job as usher at the theatre. I worked 18 months for 30 shillings a night.

Dad was a part-time Ambulance officer. If a plane came in with only one engine, he'd take us out in the ambulance, racing alongside in case the plane crashed. He'd take the injured to hospital, we'd walk home in the dark.

At 14, Dad told me all about the birds and bees, and my choices, including excessive drinking and venereal disease. He finished up 'Drink booze—it's up to you. You pay for it'. I took him at his word, saved enough for a schooner, and pushed my one shilling and fourpence (the cost of a schooner), over to the barman. He asked my age, and said, 'Get out'! Incidentally, in SA, in a licensed premises on a mining lease, workers could drink as long as they were 16 or over.

I started work as a mechanic at Northern Motors, apprenticed to Dad in 1957. In 1959 I transferred to ETSA, for three years (it was then a five-year apprenticeship). Dad paid me £4.2.6 (about 82 shillings/\$8. 50), for 10 hours, six days a week. I paid £1 a week board. We were family.

Apprentices had fortnightly 'country release' study blocks. The last years of my apprenticeship were where it began (a requirement), at ETSA, Leigh Creek. Once a year, we went to the Auto Trade School in Adelaide. It was all regimented. We assembled outside in all weathers for Mr Hurst to 'welcome' us and bawl out roll call, but he also played St Peter's Cathedral organ for services. I finished up as a Mechanic.

Those old instructors in the Trade School were interesting blokes. One of them procured from Disposals, a *Jindivik** engine previously used as a Target at Woomera in the 50s. He dug a pit at his place, to experiment with water injection jet engines. Once he got the engine going, he changed some of the fuel injectors to water and ran it on fuel at an operating temperature. When he hit the injectors with water, the thing went nuts. Four or five houses had windows blown out.

In the 50s and 60s entertainment was provided for over-21s at the Roulette School, which had never had a permanent home. ETSA left it alone, and so did the Sergeant and two or three police who were there. Louie the Greek Petino, was the owner of the Roulette wheel. One night, a local wag, Darkie Dalton, lost all his money on the wheel. During the night Louie 'lost' the wheel. Darkie just happened to know where it was, and received a reward for returning it. Strangely, it was the same amount as he lost the night before on the gambling wheel.

Darkie Dalton, the black sheep of a family who ran a large business in Victoria, had gone to a private school. He was a good pianist and could mimic anything, or anyone.

I recall a terrible trick he played on me and my best mate, John Fuchs. (His name, pronounced *Folks*, greatly confused new, young chalkies calling the roll). Darkie took John, me, and a couple of other young fellows rabbiting with his rabbit traps and ferrets one night. We set all 150 traps, and went to bed in the pumpman's hut at Sliding Rock (where Leigh Creek's water originally came from). He said we had to be up before sunrise. So, we were up, waiting, and heard tapping on the window. We wondered who'd be way out there, pushed up the blind, and saw the ugliest thing outside—it looked like a monster from a horror movie. It turned out to be Darkie, with a torch under his chin.

* The jindivik was a jet-propelled target plane (drone), developed between Australia and UK. Its first flight was in 1952

Later, he worked in a Moomba cafeteria, where he was known as the ‘fastest dishwasher ever’. All the dishes were found at the dump. He’s been dead about 25 years now. Blokes were different then. A comment from one, that he was *as dry as a limeburner’s boot*, would set them off, outdoing each other, with colourful sayings. And, without swearing.

In the 1950s and early 60s, the State Government guaranteed the cost of running TAA. Workers flew up for the job, and their planes flew on to Alice Springs, where tourism was just starting. There were 900 people living at Leigh Creek Coalfield. *The Far Northern Topics* reported that workers from England made up 25% of Leigh Creek residents, then Germans, Hungarians, Russians, Latvians, Italians and a minority of Australians—mainly in Management.

Leigh Creek Mine management attracted a great line of men. Mine Manager at that time, Tom Robbins, had been a prisoner of war in Changi in WW2. The Assistant Manager, a Welshman named Ron Clement, started work as a coal miner leading a blind pit pony in Wales. He worked for the British Coal Board in Wales and earned a degree in Mining Engineering. He lectured at Sydney University before he came to Leigh Creek. He was a real man of the people, who’d stick up for anyone.

For a change, I took on a Caltex servo in Adelaide, although I’d always worked as a mechanic. It was a lesson to me. I soon realized that I needed to know about the accounting side of things if I was to succeed in running my own business.

When ETSA, Pt Augusta advertised for a Shift Supervisor, I applied, planning to get an interview by reading all the manuals and learning the terminology. Leon Sykes, who interviewed me, asked about my formal education. I told him I’d done Year 10, Leigh Creek. He gave me a job as Boilers and Pulverizers Fitter. Two years later, I had the job I’d applied for—Shift Supervisor at the old Playford Power Station (that the young ones know as Northern Power Station).

I met and married Sylvia in 1974, and we had a lovely home in Stirling North.

Dad rang one night in about 1979, to ask if I’d consider taking on his garage when it opened in the new town of Leigh Creek South (nine kms from the old town). He knew he’d have to change but didn’t want to. Sylvia said she’d go. We waited for two years in caravans at the back of the old Service Station, with all our pets. Mum and Dad lived there in their van. We enjoyed the time with our two daughters and Mum and Dad. We had great family BBQs and gatherings.



Leigh Creek Coalfield in about 1980.

The garage is the white building on an angle bottom right.
The two family caravans are parked on the side and back

I totally computerised the new garage (Leigh Creek Garage)—phone, self-serve petrol, tyre-changing, dynameter testing (for engine load- testing). 2,500 people lived at Leigh Creek South at its peak in the 80s. At the garage we grew citrus, including cumquats, stone fruits, loquats. We watered them with demineralised water. I fenced them off, so the dog, *Kaiser*, couldn't get in. One night I forgot to lock the shop. Next morning, I came to work to find the garden gate open, tell-tale blood stains on the top of the fence. Kaiser was grinning. The culprit hadn't taken the \$10,000 in the till, the cigarettes or drinks. Nor did he go to see the local hospital doctor.

When the local video shop closed, we rented out videos, and realised they were a goldmine. They brought in \$4000 a month plus the drinks, nibbles and self-serve food, tea and coffee that went with them. In 1993 we sold the Service Station to Breyton Ward, the grand nephew of Mabel and Darcy Ward, (who farmed in Quorn), and Robert Crombie's nephew.

Sylvia and I drove down to Quorn in Dad's old Toyota tray top, with our granddaughter and daughter wedged in. Our cat, German Shepherd and two Dobermann came too. We'd bought a business and a house in Quorn, and soon met our neighbour, when he shouted that effluent was running down the street from our house (no-one had lived there for a while).

Sylvia and I negotiated the purchase of Buckaringa Super Deli from Wayne Schutloff in 1994. It had one of the first computer check-out systems in SA. My daughter came over from Port Augusta to work it. After some years, and changes of trading names including Food Town, Buckaringa and IGA, we set up the Adelaide Cash Register Company system that IGA uses for updating sales into the cash register.

We'd had the business from 1994 to 2002, and were looking to sell. I had put it in the hands of an Adelaide Real Estate company, who hadn't been very active. Sylvia suggested I give it to local bloke, Geoff Williams to sell. Geoff said 'I'm coming round'. When he came, he had people interested who had already looked round and wanted to buy it. New owners, Grant and Sue Caddy, became very popular and took a great interest in the local community.

I took my 'crook' hips home, and worked on developing my interests—cooking, part-time bookkeeping for my daughter's business, gardening, brewing, and housework (both Dad and I kept our workshops like a surgery).

I have no intention of leaving Quorn now—I'll always be a Far North *Quornie*.

