

Don't go near the water!

We Collingwood kids thought we were pretty lucky. After all we had a great river almost down the bottom of the street. The mighty Yarra Yarra carrying all its silt and debris to Port Phillip Bay was one of our favourite playgrounds.

It was made all the more exciting because of our parents' regular warning. Every weekend and school holiday they would remind us not to go near the river. 'It is dangerous and people drown in it because they catch a snag. The snags lurk under the water and once you are caught you are a 'goner'.'

For years I thought snags were nasty animals rather than tree roots and broken branches.

Of course, we loved the river and its sandy banks. Sand fights were just as good as wading cautiously into the shallows but you had to be careful because the shelf could drop away. In one favourite spot you could slide down a drain which took some of the overflow from a local factory, and that was dangerous.

The river has suffered over the years. Before the white settlers came it was pristine. The Wurundjeri, the indigenous people, lived by it with plenty of fish, shellfish, birds and game on the banks. Then they left as it became polluted when tanneries, fell mongers and a host of other noxious industries exploited it.

But that is another story and although the environment has improved it will be up to you to ensure the river is saved. And I'll bet you don't know what a fell monger is?