

## ANDREW ALLEN'S ORAL INTERVIEW WITH BARNABY PONSONBY ON 14<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2014

**AA** Barney, I will start with asking you your date of birth please?

**BP** 25<sup>th</sup> July 1950.

**AA** Were you born in Campbelltown?

**BP** I was born in St Margaret's Hospital in Sydney. All of us kids were born there.

**AA** But you have lived here all your life, have you?

**BP** Yes, Frank Thornton built the house in Chamberlain Street in 1946 when they moved here from Summer Hill. My grandfather was the Stationmaster out at Menangle and my mother lived in Menangle. She was born in 1920 and she was there in 1932 when the harbour bridge opened, because they all went in from Menangle to the city.

**AA** What was the first house that you lived in?

**BP** That was 49 Chamberlain Street, Campbelltown.

**AA** Is that house still there?

**BP** No, that was demolished about two years ago and they put the new units there on the corner of Chamberlain Street and the By-pass.

**AA** So, how long did you live there for?

**BP** I bought a house in Allman Street in the early 90s and I lived on my own there. That was before I was married.

**AA** So you spent all your childhood in that one house.

**BP** There were only two schools, the Catholic and Campbelltown Central where we went until Campbelltown North School opened in 1959 and we thought that it was lovely to just walk across the paddock from Chamberlain Street. It was the first new school. Kids used to come in from Minto and all around.

**AA** So you would have been pretty sad to see your old home go.

**BP** It was, but that's what happens. Campbelltown has changed a hell of a lot. I can remember a great lot of from the late 50s and 60s.

**AA** Who were your neighbours when you lived in Chamberlain Street?

**BP** Arthur Campbell lived on the corner of Moore Street it was called in those days. We were the second house. Bill and Jean Fairburn lived next door to us on the down side and Bill's brother Wally had a fruit shop in the main street. The Fairburns were old Campbelltown people.

**AA** Did your father have much of a garden, a vegie garden?

**BP** In the early days he did grow some vegies. He had a big strawberry patch, I don't know why. My mother was a great gardener. Dad liked a neat garden, Mum didn't, that was the way it was. We didn't grow many vegetables that I remember. Maybe they did after they got there when I was a baby. I know that we did have a big strawberry patch. We had a lot of fruit trees. We always had good fruit, Dad religiously sprayed them, and he was a pretty methodical bloke and made sure that it was done right.

**AA** Do you remember Mossberry? That was in Chamberlain Street wasn't it?

**BP** I remember, that was the double storey house. I can't remember the lady's name but she drove an old Ford V8 Pilot I remember that. She was related to the Milligans; Bob Milligan is a great friend of mine.

**AA** Which school did you go to?

**BP** I went to Campbelltown Central. Campbelltown North opened in April 1959 and we transferred there. We used to walk along Moore Street which is now the Bypass up to Lithgow Street to Campbelltown Central.

## **5 mins**

**AA** Did you like school?

**BP** I don't think I did in the beginning. The bus used to bring in all the kids from East Minto, it used to come along Rudd Road then up Chamberlain Street and I was allowed to get the bus. Mr Baker had the buses and Mum said that I used to like catching the bus to school.

**AA** Were the teachers strict at both schools?

**BP** I think that the teachers were much better at Campbelltown North, it was a lovely little school. Des Bannon came out from Bankstown and John Gill still lives in the town. There was never any problem with teachers, they were all lovely teachers. It was a great surrounding, there were a lot of snakes and lizards there in the early days.

**AA** You would have been pretty handy to the show living in Chamberlain Street. Did you go to the show every year?

**BP** We used to get the Friday off school to go to the show. The Rixons used to live behind us and we would go through the fence to the showground. The show was a big thing in the town. I wasn't into cattle as much as my younger brother.

**AA** What about things you did as a teenager. Were you into sport?

**BP** No, I was into bikes. I built up a racing bike that I used to ride. I went into what was called the Schoolboy Championship in 1963. I had to race on Menangle Road a guy called Danny Homer from Camden. I didn't really have a good bike and the Homer family had racing bikes. I was more into bikes, not sport like my other brothers would be in.

**AA** You raced mainly in Menangle did you?

**BP** I used to ride down the back road from Campbelltown to Glenfield in the early 60s. It was 63 when I rode in the Schoolboy Championship in New South Wales. That is what it was called. It wasn't really a big race or anything; there were only a couple of boys from out here. They held it on Menangle Road which was a quiet road in those days.

**AA** What did you do when you left school?

**BP** I started an apprenticeship with W H Lavers in Woolloomooloo. I travelled in on the steam train. I started my apprenticeship in February 1967. I had a good 12 months travelling on the steam trains; they were so reliable always on time. I used to catch the 6.00am train in the morning and got home at 10 to 7 at night. They were long days, but I was young and I learnt the city, it was great.

## **10 mins**

**AA** Did you go on Pansy, the Camden train?

**BP** I can remember Pansy, but can't remember going on it.

**AA** Do you remember the day that the electric trains started?

**BP** That was part of the festival and I was at the station when it came in. There were a lot more services after that. I used to catch the train from St James, whereas before I had to make my way up from Woolloomooloo to Central Station to the country platforms to catch the steam train.

**AA** Did you swim much as a kid?

**BP** Yes, we would go out to Menangle and swim in the river. It was good swimming there, the river flowed really well. Dad used to get us up at 6am in the summer and we would go out there. I had a brother who was blind and it

was good for him as we didn't have to worry about anything, it was beautiful water.

**AA** It is hard to imagine now.

**BP** It is very hard, because I was out there not long ago to spread one of my mother's brother's ashes and I couldn't believe how overgrown it is and it doesn't flow at all under the bridge. It's hard to believe as it was such a beautiful swimming area. They even used to have swimming classes in the school holidays. I learnt to swim in 59 when my sister was born. I went over to some friends in Manly and I learnt there. She was an Olympic swimmer and had baths there. I suppose my parents paid for it, but that is where I learnt to swim.

**AA** You talked about your bikes. Was there anywhere else you liked to hang out on a weekend? Did you go to the movies?

**BP** No, I was a kid who was always out riding on a bike. I was also interested in cars.

**AA** We interviewed a bloke David Milligan, did you know him?

**BP** Yes, I am friends with his brother Bob.

**AA** He was into cars.

**BP** David had an MG and would come flying around our corner. David was friends with Bob Fairburn next door. When Clintons was being built that was a big thing for the town.

**AA** How long ago was that.

**BP** I went there the night it opened in August 62 when they released the EJ Holden. There was a nice photo of Mum and Dad on the front page of the local paper from that night. When a new Holden came out in those days it was a big thing for lots of people and Queen Street was all blocked up.

**AA** Where was the original Clintons?

**BP** They started in Camden. They started the mines and then after the war they got the dealership from GMH and that is when they started selling Holdens in 1948. They started in 1945 selling Chevys, Buicks and Oldsmobiles. I think that was a big thing for the town when Clintons opened. That was the first big car yard. There used to be all homes along there.

**15 mins**

**AA** What was the first car you owned?

**BP** The first car that I drove was my grandma's Morris 1000. The first car I bought was an FC Holden. It was a pretty well-known car in the town. The mechanic Ray McDowell owned it and I bought it from Don Malvern. That was a long time ago! What was your first car?

**AA** A Toyota Corona with a column change. Do you remember any characters or identities when you were a kid?

**BP** I can just remember people and probably the cars they had. Ron Harris had the timber yard and he always had big American Chevs. There were the Clark brothers who did the milk run. They used to come around. You would leave a billy out and they would fill it up. They were both characters. Mate Sedgwick who was with the show was a good friend of my father.

**AA** Ted Sedgwick, we interviewed him last year. Do you remember much about the pubs?

**BP** There was the GI or Good Intent pub. I used to drink there when I was young bloke. You had to be careful as there were long stairs down to the toilets.

**AA** Did people call it the GI?

**BP** Oh yes. There was Lacks, that's where all the punters went on a Saturday. The Club Hotel always had a band on a Sunday. My parents lived in Cordeaux Street and you could always hear the band, because it had a beer garden and people would drive out from Sydney. It was 35 miles away and they could have a drink. But I remember the GI pretty well.

**AA** They shouldn't have pulled it down really I suppose. I suppose they had no choice.

**BP** No, well look where it was in the town. But the Town Hall is still there. There was a little driveway between the Town Hall and the Hotel to the parking lot and there was a bit of an outdoor area where you could drink. There wasn't really a big bar inside actually. The toilet was around the other side and you went down about 40 odd stairs to the toilets.

**AA** Do you remember Titus Oates? He used to own the Liquid Intent but he may have been a bit before your time. I think he was into cars too; he had something to do with the rally that Jack Murray was in.

**BP** No, can't say that I remember him.

**20 mins**

**AA** Did you ever drink at the other hotel near the station, the Railway Hotel?

- BP** No, I never really went to the railway one; it was always classed as a bit of a rough one. I did go in there a couple of times, but not very often.
- AA** It was nice and handy to the Police Station I suppose, which was probably a good thing.
- BP** One of my mates went in to get his licence and they said where is your licensed driver? He said, oh he is the pub over there. He said I drove down myself.
- AA** Your parents lived in Cordeaux Street did they?
- BP** No, my parents lived in Chamberlain Street; my grandparents lived in Cordeaux Street. My grandfather was the stationmaster at Menangle and he came here to retire in about 1954. They died in 57 and 58.
- AA** Were there any other buildings that you were fond of and were sad to see them go? There have been a fair few.
- BP** The main street was always going to change. I wasn't probably into that sort of thing. I can remember where the Council building is now is where we used to have the circus. Sullivan's garage was there and then the Council took it all in the late 50s.
- AA** So that was on the block where the Council is now?
- BP** That's where they put the big circus tent. On that corner is where Gordon Sullivan had his Ampol garage. That was a portion of it and then when Council decided to build there he got rid of his garage.
- AA** Then you had what is that department store they had?
- BP** There was Downes and Benjamins stores.
- AA** Carlisles that is the name I was thinking of.
- BP** Oh yes Carlisles, we used to get all our groceries there. Everyone had chooks in those days, we had chooks and we would get the food out of bags out the back of the store. Tim Parkinson was a lovely man and a good friend of my Dad. I know he was very kind to my brother who was blind. My brother Matt was a very intelligent guy and was pretty inquisitive. I don't know if anyone mentioned Freddy Lauer. He had the fruit shop on the corner of Patrick Street. He was a lovely guy. He didn't have any children and he was in the band.
- AA** So Downes was the big department store then.
- BP** I can remember Downes when they had the wires in the roof and the envelopes would go along. I can remember Santa Claus being there and being taken to see him there.

**AA** Are you quite happy with the way that Campbelltown has progressed?

**BP** What can you do? I think that it has grown too big for the roads. Look at the industrial area; you would never believe that it has grown like that. Barry Clinton and I have always believed that we didn't want to leave the main street but I think that it is time now. It really is, because for the amount of vehicles that we do each day, we just don't have the room. We service 50 cars a day and if we get this new place we are looking to do 100 a day. We get a lot of Toyota cars.

**AA** That ends my questions Barney, I don't know if you have anything else you want to talk about?