

ANDREW ALLEN'S ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW AT THE H J DALEY LIBRARY WITH CORAL HENSON ON 30 MARCH 2010

AA Can I get your full name please?

CH My full name is Coral Henson.

AA What were your parents' names Coral?

CH My father was William Augustus Longhurst and my mother was Emily Hagan before they were married. She lived on a little farm off Briar Road which is the road that went down to the Woolwash. You could ramble around the bush behind their place.

AA How long have you lived in Campbelltown for?

CH Eighty two years.

AA How many were in your family?

CH There were four girls in my family. Beryl was my older sister; she was two years older than me. She died when she was 72. Hazel is three years younger, she married a farmer Boardman over at Camden and is still living over there and Lynette. I think Lynette is nine years younger than me and she is still living on the corner of Stewart and Condamine Streets, Campbelltown.

AA Where did you live when you were a girl?

CH We lived out on Georges River Road. Colonial Street runs along the top of the hill and it was a continuation of Colonial Street down the bottom of the hill. We were just off on the right. The street got blocked off and they made Broughton Street the main road.

AA Can you describe the house that you lived in?

CH It was a brick house. I don't know how many bedrooms. It had a sleep-out built on the veranda. The veranda went around two sides of the house, which was quite good. We had tank water which meant that we didn't have a lot of baths. Saturday night was bath time. Mum did the washing in a copper.

AA Is the house still standing?

CH No, it was bought by the Housing Commission and is probably part of Airds now.

AA Can you describe the sort of food that you ate as a child?

CH Healthy, I think. Mum was a very keen gardener and I know there were always vegetables from the garden. Having chicken was a luxury more than it is today. The butcher used to make deliveries and the baker and the groceries in those days. Obviously the meals didn't make a great impression on me.

AA What about the games and sport that you played as a child?

CH We played hopscotch and skipping ropes. I used to hit a tennis ball against a brick wall of the house. Dad had a barn that had a first storey on it and we used to often play Mums and Dads up there as kids. We didn't play much with dolls. I think we were more playing outdoors. Funny the things you don't remember.

AA What sort of things did your family celebrate? For example were they into Christmas?

CH Yes, Christmas was celebrated. But of course, early on it was during the depression and just after and money was tight I should imagine. I can remember Mum selling a little bit of gold jewellery which she had to a fellow that came around. There were fellows that came around to sharpen your knives and scissors and buy jewellery. That would have been the depression years I think. They didn't ever go overboard with celebrations such as birthdays, they were very low key.

AA Were your parents strict?

CH I never thought of them as strict. Dad had to only look at us and we behaved ourselves, but I don't ever remember him raising a hand. I remember getting a smack from my Mother for being cheeky when I was about 14, but that's the only time that I can remember. I think I deserved it! They were good parents.

AA Tell me about your school years. How did you get to school?

CH Shank's pony – we walked. There would be a group of kids from up the Settlement in Waminda Avenue, the Ross's were up there and the Hephers. I still see Jack and Lil Hopher and they are 95. Jack had a stroke unfortunately; he was very with it until then. There were empty paddocks up past George Street, that was Dredge's dairy and we used to cut across the paddocks. The Catholic kids walked around the road on one side and the public school kids on the other for some reason or other. They probably played together when they got home. For some reason, the Catholics and Protestants were anti each other. The feeling must have been running high in those days for some reason or other, which I think isn't to the same extent now. My grandson is engaged to a Catholic girl and they have a baby.

AA Were the classes very big?

CH I think there were about 30 in a class. I remember in first class I had Mrs Watson, she was a very nice lady. In those days you learnt your alphabet "A" says a, "B" says b. Second class wasn't so hot; we had a Miss Dennett who should have been teaching a class of rebellious boys I think. She was a tartar. She must have been there for a fair while because I'm 82 and Lil Hepher is 95 and Lil had her as well. Apart from Miss Dennett, the rest were all pretty good. There was Miss Webster and Lillian Crago who were nice. I liked Don Taylor the Headmaster; he had 5 or 6 kids. He was a bit generous with the cane towards the boys. But the girls didn't have any problems with him. I remember I learnt to play tennis playing with the Taylor boys. There was a tennis court at that stage in the public school ground and I learnt to play tennis there at weekends.

AA Did they use the strap then or was it the cane?

CH I think it was a cane that Mr Taylor used.

AA What about the games that you played at school.

CH We played hopscotch and skipping. We learnt the old ballroom dances out in the school yard, but I don't ever remember going to a school dance, but I suppose they must have held one. It was handy in later years.

AA How old were you when you left school?

CH I was fourteen. You did six years at Campbelltown Primary School and then went on to either Liverpool which was a domestic science school or some kids went to Homebush. The really brainy ones went to Sydney, but I had a lot of time off. I was asthmatic from the time I was about three, so I had a fair bit of time off from school. I did two years at Liverpool and then had to go on to Parramatta to do the third year for the Intermediate Certificate.

AA What did you do after school?

CH I went to Charters Business College in Sydney and learnt a bit of shorthand and typing, a bit of book keeping. I worked in a garage over at Camden for a while. I worked at Phil Solomons store in Campbelltown for a while. He had a grocery come drapery business where Spotlight is now. He used to call from one end of the shop to the other "Dear" and "Dear" would answer! They were a very nice couple. They lived above the shop. He was Mayor for a while, Phil Solomon.

Later I went back to Charters and learnt the book keeping machine and they offered me a job. So I stayed there for a while. Then Dad came home one day and said that there was a job going down at the Council if I wanted it. So I thought, I'll go down and see and saw Bob Bloomfield and they said right you can start, so I gave up travelling to Charters in Sydney and started at the Council. I stayed there for about 45 years until I retired.

AA What sort of work did you do there?

CH I started off just as a Clerk. At that stage they had the Nepean River County Council the electrical section as well as the Council. I was doing just clerical work for quite a while. Originally they started up in the premises beside the Old Town Hall. There was just a main front room and two or three rooms going down the back. After that, they moved down to the corner of Lithgow Street to the old School of Arts Building. Later on of course Council moved to the two new buildings in Broughton Street.

One day old Harley Daley said to me "You can start up a filing system." I didn't have a clue about how to start a filing system. I got on to a fairly bright young salesman from one of the stationery places and he helped me out to begin with and then later on records was computerised, but of course it had grown a lot by then. I was in charge of that until I left. Harley Daley was a very nice boss.

AA What did you do for leisure in your spare time?

CH I used to play tennis. We would get up a group of 5 or 6 people. There was the Southern Districts competition. There were a few courts around. There was one off Lindesay Street near Eaglemont Crescent. There was one down at King Street. There were the Council tennis courts. There was one at Leumeah. There were courts at Glenfield and Liverpool and that was mainly the district we played in.

AA What about night life. What did you do in the evenings? What was a good night out?

CH Not what is regarded today as a good night out! I was tied up with the Methodist Church so were the Hephers and the Triglones. Lil Hopher and Marj Triglone used to put on a concert every couple of years at the Town Hall. Roped into it would be anyone like the young people from the church and the Scouts, because Jack Hopher was in the Scouts, would all be part of the big group. The concerts were fun. I was never good at much, although I could sing a bit in those days. Eric was always into that sort of thing. The town folk all used to come because they all knew everyone. We would have full crowds as an audience and you could put in local jokes and things like that.

AA What about the movies. Were you a movie goer?

CH I think we probably went most Saturday nights. My parents would go along if it was a musical. I don't think Dad was musical, I think Mum was. I think the family got musical talent from Mum; we didn't get it from Dad. Dad used to sing Who Killed Cock Robin and that was about the extent of his repertoire. Mum used to play the piano, but I could play by ear. My sister Lynette plays the piano and my older sister was like Dad and couldn't sing a note.

AA Did you do anything that your parents disapproved of?

CH I doubt that. I don't suppose they approved of me all the time. Nothing stands out.

AA Did your parents have a car when you were younger?

CH Dad had a vehicle for his work. He was a builder. So he went through various vehicles. I remember him collecting a car in Sydney one day and we were all there and Hazel who was only a little tot at the time got her finger jammed in the door. There was a great commotion about that of course.

After that he got a utility and it had on the sides instead of coming straight up they came out and up like a little seat and he made a seat for us kids. It went across the back of the cab and it had a hood that came over the canvas. In the wet weather we could sit there with the canvas over our legs and were as dry as a bone. Everyone laughed as we went past, but it was functional. I should have taken a photo of it but I didn't.

AA Getting on to your husband, how did you meet your husband?

CH I met Eric at Church doing one of the concerts. He was the opposite of me. I was always a bit shy. I suppose being brought up not in the town you didn't get to meet that many kids, only at school. But Eric was the reverse. He invited all and sundry around. We got married in 1951.

AA Was it love at first sight?

CH I don't know about that. We got to know each other a bit at the concerts. We were married for 56 years, so we survived.

AA Where did you get married?

CH We married in the Campbelltown Methodist Church. It is the Uniting Church now.

AA Did you have a honeymoon?

CH We went to Katoomba. We didn't have any money. We borrowed his father's car and went up there.

AA It was a very popular place to go. My grandparents went to Katoomba. Did you both have the same ideas about bringing up children?

CH I suppose so. I can't remember us arguing about it much. Until my daughter was 16 and hooked up with a crowd we didn't like. She ran away because she knew best.

AA Getting on to the War years, can you tell me what your experiences were of the War?

- CH** I was pretty young, not that young I suppose. I would have been 12 to 16 during the war. There were shortages of course; things were rationed such as tea and sugar, material and clothing. I suppose everything was rationed, but Mum was always a gardener so there was never any shortage of food. Tea didn't worry me because I didn't drink it then. I still don't like it much. Mine's the first cup out of the pot if I have to drink it. I can remember Mum made our dresses and they were all cotton fabrics. I can remember the first Adora Cream wafer biscuits when they came out. That was a great thing and iced Vo Vo's. They were not available during the War.
- AA** Do you remember the blackouts during the war in Campbelltown?
- CH** I think that everyone got a bit slapdash eventually. There were submarines in the Harbour but nothing happened.
- AA** You touched a little bit on the Depression, what were your experiences of the Depression?
- CH** I think Dad travelled to Warragamba working, but I think he had work of some sort through the Depression. I don't remember him ever being around the house. He was a keen cricketer, so even on the weekends he wasn't around the house.
- AA** How did you feel about moving away from home?
- CH** I didn't move far. I only moved around the block and then there was a gate at the top of our back yard which went into Mum's place anyway, so we were not far away.
- AA** What are your memories of Campbelltown when you were a child? Does anything stand out? For example are there any old buildings you remember that aren't there any more?
- CH** There was Miss McPherson's shop which was near Milgate Lane. On the corner was the place that the Triglones lived in and then it was the shop. It was a haberdashery. She catered for practically everything from women's underclothes to all the things you would need for sewing and that type of thing. She used to ride to work on a bicycle. She seemed to be a little old lady at that stage. I am a little old lady myself now.
- Romalis's shop where we got our fish and chips and then there was a bank and Bursills shop.
- AA** Milgate Lane ran off Queen Street didn't it?
- CH** Yes, now it is a footpath.
- AA** Do you remember any other old buildings in Campbelltown that aren't there any more?

CH Reeves had a shop on the corner of Patrick Street. Fred Lowe had a shop on the other side of the road. He sold aniseed balls and liquorice sticks. Bob Moore's father lived on the other side of the street. I think that his father had been injured in some way, but he didn't get around too well. They had a little timber cottage that fronted on to the main street. I think my Uncle Fred Wilkinson had a place there too. Tripp's had a garage on the corner of Dumaresq Street. Riders had a garage in the middle of Queen Street. That must have been somewhere near Solomons shop. Miss Chinnick had a shop in the old Colonial buildings up near the Old Town Hall.

AA Do you remember Alpha House; I think the Good Intent Hotel replaced it?

CH I remember the Good Intent, but I can't remember what was there before.

AA Do you remember the Doctors and the Dentists and what their names were?

CH Mr Churnich is the dentist I remember. I remember Doctor Mawson vaguely. He sliced an abscess I had on my nose. I screamed the house down. I remember Doctor Jones, he came later.

AA What about the Hotels. Do you remember where all the Hotels were?

CH Lacks was on the corner of Railway and Queen Streets. The Good Intent was up near the Town Hall. There was one that was pulled down at the bottom of Railway Street. The other one was the Club Hotel. I didn't frequent them, but you knew that they were there.

AA Do you remember any colourful characters from when you were younger?

CH Not really. When we lived in Condamine Street there was an old wooden cottage that was almost diagonally on the other side of the street and Mick Daly and Jack Donner lived there. I think Dad said that Mick might have been a bit of a sportsman when he was younger, but I think he was the town drunk at that stage. Eric took a photo of his house which I've still got; a tumbledown old wooden cottage.

I suppose my life was probably pretty ordinary. I didn't go to the town dances when the Air Force was out at Menangle. I went to a couple at Menangle; I had a girlfriend who lived out there. For some reason Methodists weren't supposed to dance. It was some ridiculous rule at that stage. I think it was going out by then. I didn't take much notice anyway, we learnt to dance in the school yard.

AA How do you feel about Campbelltown changing? I guess it has changed a lot.

CH Yes, you go from a town that was basically from Allman to Chamberlain Streets and the Railway line and Lindsay Street and then all of a sudden it branched out in the 1950s. Neil McLean came around and did his big subdivisions. It went from a very small place, but it couldn't stay like that of course. I remember Mr Daley was very pleased we were going to be a City. More income for him I guess!!

AA Were you there to meet the first electric train in 1968?

CH Vaguely, I forgot about the electric trains, I think the sewerage was more important. I can certainly remember the time it wasn't. It wasn't very pleasant for anyone.

AA Did you remember the train Pansy from Campbelltown to Camden?

CH Oh yes, I used to travel on that when I worked at the garage in Camden. It used to sometimes have to take two goes at Kenny Hill when it was frosty. It probably only had one carriage on it.

Bradbury was a dairy farm. It was a two storey house and the slaughter yards were over near The Parkway, the other side of The Parkway perhaps. I can remember my sister Hazel and a fellow by the name of Jim Malone used to get on their horses and collect cattle from the railway yards which were apparently somewhere in Broughton Street and then take them across to the slaughter yards. That's something I'm sorry I never took a photo of either. You don't know what is going to become history do you?

AA What about the cattle tank. Do you remember that?

CH I think that was the Pound at one stage. If there was anything straying, they would put them in a paddock around the cattle tank. I don't remember when it was the only water source.