

ANDREW ALLEN'S ORAL INTERVIEW WITH NELL O'LOUGHLIN AT HER HOME IN REDDALL STREET, CAMPBELLTOWN ON 16 JANUARY 2015

NO'L My full name is Ellen, but I have always been called Nell.

AA Can you tell me where you were born please?

NO'L I was born at Elderslie, Camden.

AA What was your maiden name?

NO'L It was Thurn.

AA Where did you live in Camden?

NO'L I lived in Elderslie, this side of town.

AA Was that a farm?

NO'L My grandparents were on a farm. They got a grant from Governor Macquarie and they came from Germany and they had an orchard down from Elderslie. They had grapes and other fruit.

AA A lot of the German immigrants did grow grapes didn't they? Is the house you lived in at Elderslie still there?

NO'L One of my granddaughters bought the house and she lives in it now. There was only my brother and myself and he died in 2007. The house had been left for him to live in until he passed away and then it came to me. My granddaughter's father wanted her to buy it and it needed renovating badly. My brother had kept it in the same state. My granddaughter wants to put up a picket fence, it wasn't there when my brother lived there, it probably fell to pieces.

AA Do you know how old it is?

NO'L It was built in 1921/22.

AA Is it surrounded by houses today?

NO'L Yes, there are houses in that street now.

AA What is the name of the street?

NO'L Church Street. It's not far from the Caravan Park.

AA What sort of things did you get up to as a child in Elderslie?

NO'L My brother and I went to St Paul's School in Camden. There was rounders and hopscotch and skipping and tennis.

5 mins

AA Did you play much with your brother?

NO'L Yes, we were three years apart. I lost my dad when I was only eight years old and mum had raised the two of us during the depression which wasn't easy.

AA What did your father die from?

NO'L He had a burst appendix and septicaemia. In those days once the poison got into the system, there were no drugs or antibiotics like there is today.

AA How did your mum manage?

NO'L I think it was a widow's pension. I don't know because I was so young. Whether my grandparents helped out I don't know. I wouldn't say they did, but I know it wasn't easy.

AA So you had vivid memories of the depression then?

NO'L Yes. The tramps were under the bridge there at Elderslie. They would come to the front door and we would have to go with the lamp. They would want milk, bread, sugar, tea or anything to eat. Mum would always wrap something up as she would want them to move. They were probably harmless but you never know.

AA Did you go to things like the moves in Camden?

NO'L Yes, there was a picture theatre there.

AA Tell me about your schooling.

NO'L I went to St Paul's at Camden which was run by the St Joseph nuns. School fees were sixpence a week then.

AA Did you enjoy school?

NO'L Yes, but I wasn't an academic. I could spell but I wasn't good at maths, but I would probably know a lot more than some do today.

AA What about teachers. Can you remember if you had a favourite teacher?

NO'L No, I think there was a music teacher and then there was a teacher who taught kindies, 1st and primary. There weren't many teachers because it only went to 6th class.

AA Where did you go to high school?

NO'L I didn't go to high school because they taught what was called business principles in those days, a bit of typing and shorthand.

AA So you said before, you lived in Camden until you were 18. When did you leave Camden?

10 mins

NO'L I left Camden when I got married in 1945. I worked in Campbelltown and moved here when I got married. It will be 70 years on 24th February.

AA You must have taken the old train to come to Campbelltown.

NO'L The tram called Pansy. I have lots of memories of Pansy. You have probably read the book on Pansy. It was huff and puff. When it rained going up Kenny Hill, it would start to slip and go downhill. We would have to get out and I think it was sand they put on the line to try and get a grip. Or they would have to get another engine out from Campbelltown to push it up the hill.

AA So it's not true that the passengers had to push.

NO'L No, it wasn't that desperate.

AA Can you remember all the stations along the way?

NO'L Yes, every one.

AA It didn't stop at every one did it?

NO'L No, if there was no-one on the station it didn't stop. When you got to Narellan, you had to get out and get a ticket at the ticket box at Narellan.

AA So when it came down to Campbelltown after Maryfields where Narellan Road is now, it took a left hand turn, was that on the Camden side of where the railway line is now?

NO'L I think where the trains park now when not in use, that was where it turned and came into Campbelltown.

AA So you came to Campbelltown when you were married.

NO'L Yes, I was 22 in the June and we were married the following February.

AA So you were born in June 1923. Where did you meet your husband Frank?

NO'L I was working in a garage in Campbelltown where Subway is now. There was a garage on that corner and one on the other corner.

AA Was that Pope's?

NO'L That's the one I worked for. Tripp's was on the other corner. Frank's father came to the garage to get petrol and in those days during the war there was petrol rationing. If some of the farmers didn't use all their tickets they would give them to me and I would give them to Frank's father. Frank's father brought him in and introduced him to me and that is how our romance started.

AA What sort of things did you do at Pope's?

NO'L I did the books and served the petrol. You didn't just pull a handle you had to pump the petrol. It was quite interesting.

AA Was it right on the corner or was it a little way back?

NO'L No, it was right on the corner.

AA You must have seen so much change in the main street.

15 mins

NO'L Last year, Stella Vernon who also lives in the villas here did a presentation on Queen Street. Paul O'Loughlin and I helped her out a fair bit. I knew that part of town quite well. There is another cousin of mine who lives in St Andrews now knew the other end of town because she lived there. She was able to fill in on a lot of people. We did a pretty good job on all the people who lived in Queen Street and the shops.

AA So when you worked at Pope's, the drain would still have been in Dumaresq Street. It ran from the top of Dumaresq Street all the way down.

NO'L Yes, that's right, they called it Sewer Lane. It used to flood. It used to go down to the Blaxland Road area.

AA I was looking at an old photograph of around the Dumaresq Street area the other day. When Dumaresq Street went down to where Hurley Street is now or where the railway line is, what was there on the left hand side. It looks like a timber yard or something like that. It would have been across the road from where the cinema is now.

NO'L No, I don't know. I know on the other side of the railway line Frank told the story of that was where he learnt to swim. It was over where Crompton Parkinson and Nile's was. It was a creek and they used to call it the Willows. He said that was where he learnt to swim. When I came to Campbelltown, there were people by the name of Brunero who had a sawmill.

AA Yes, they were in Patrick Street.

NO'L That's right and there was Hayes and Howell cordial factory in that area too.

AA Where did you get married?

NO'L At St Paul's in Camden.

AA Frank was in the war, so was that before you were married?

NO'L Yes, he was in the army when I met him. He was called up when he had just turned 18 and he went to New Guinea during the war. Then his father was sick and he had to get out of the army to run the business. He was discharged on compassionate grounds.

20 mins

AA Was he on the Kokoda Trail in New Guinea?

NO'L No, he said something about they built an airstrip down on Milne Bay. He got malaria while he was in the army. When he got home he still got malaria for years after.

AA Do you remember much about the war years? Were there blackouts?

NO'L Yes. We were married in the February and the war ended in the August that year. Frank was out of the army when we got married.

AA After that he went into the family business.

NO'L He came home to run the family business. In the early years Frank's father had trucks. He used to deliver groceries out to Wedderburn. There weren't many cars and trucks around and people had to have supplies. He used to deliver and he also used to pick up hay and things like that and deliver them to the farmers around the district. In later years when Campbelltown started to go ahead after the war, we used to supply the builders with sand and metal and cement.

AA After you got married, where did you live?

NO'L We lived over where the other villas are now. Frank's mother and father lived in the house alongside us. Frank was born in Reddall Street in the house where the other villas are. That was 92 years ago.

AA So you would remember a little school house that was just down here.

NO'L That was a Sunday school. When kindergarten started to be the go, they took children in as a pre-school. Just down here in St Peter's. Around where St John's is now there was a scout hall. There was the school, and then the scout hall and the school grounds still went on the other side. In

the end the church bought the scout hall and I think they built a scout hall somewhere else.

AA Do you remember the St John's Presbytery that was pulled down? Was that roughly where the Presbytery is now?

NO'L No, where the Presbytery is now would have been tennis courts many years ago. The old Presbytery would have been probably where the parking area is.

25 mins

AA Did you have any children?

NO'L I had five children, one boy and four girls.

AA Where did they go to school?

NO'L They went to St John's.

AA I suppose with all the children, you wouldn't have had much time for socialising. Did you go out much?

NO'L Yes, we did. We found time. I can't remember being house bound. We got there. It was busy, we had the business and I was answering the phone to customers and I did the books, so I was kept busy.

AA Where did you go shopping?

NO'L There was Bussill Brothers where the ANZ Bank is now. There was Bursill's on the other side. There was no Mall. It was either of those two shops and there was Downes later on. They were more of a general store, not groceries.

AA Did you go to Sydney much or could you do what you had to do in Campbelltown?

NO'L We did in those days. We would go in on the train. We only had an old 1927 Buick when we got married; you wouldn't drive that into Sydney. The last train home would be around 12 o'clock, so if you didn't catch that train you were stranded.

AA Can you remember any of the characters of the town back in those days?

NO'L I suppose I more or less remember Frank talking about Rose Payten. She was a very good golf player and Frank used to say he used to caddy for her when she was playing golf.

AA I've heard of Miss Payten, she used to walk up the middle of the main street.

NO'L I don't think that was Rose Payten, I think that was another one. She was a bit funny I think.

AA Do you remember Paddy Hunt?

NO'L Yes and Jack Donohue.

AA Do you remember the barber Mort Clissold and Charlie Nichol?

NO'L I remember Mort Clissold and Charlie Nichol was the undertaker. He owned lots of houses; he was a builder as well. There are probably lots of people; they just don't come to mind.

30 mins

AA I was reading the other day about a tornado that came through Campbelltown in about 1944.

NO'L No, I don't remember a tornado but I remember an earthquake or an earth tremor when we were living in the house across the road and the windows shook. No I don't remember the tornado. I remember floods in Camden.

AA It used to always flood on the flats.

NO'L Where I used to live, the floods never came that far. But where the caravan park is and where the fruit mart is, it came up to the front gate of the people that lived there. That was the biggest one that I have ever seen.

AA What sort of things do you do with your time now?

NO'L I play carpet bowls at the Catholic Club on Mondays. I go out with the family mostly on the weekend. The girls take me out for teas, dinner and whatever. My son lives in Queensland so he'll be down next month and I'll see him. I'm kept fairly busy. If the girls are going for tea anywhere during the week at the Tennis Club or anything they will ring me up and take me.

AA Have you got grandkids?

NO'L I have thirteen. I have eleven great grandchildren.

AA How do you feel about Campbelltown today? Do you like the way it is going?

NO'L I suppose you could say there is good and bad. It had to go ahead because it had nothing going for it. Camden could always run rings around it because it was a one horse town until after the war. After the war with the war service homes, Campbelltown started to boom. We wouldn't be where we are today if it didn't go ahead. We wouldn't have made a bob!!

AA So there is a bit of rivalry with Camden and Campbelltown is there?

NO'L Oh yes and there will be forever more, Rugby League Football mostly.

AA Do you still feel a connection with Camden or are you Campbelltown now?

NO'L No, I'm Campbelltown now. I think I have been here so long. I couldn't say that I don't like Camden; some of my family are still over that way. I am connected.

AA Did you used to go to the football?

NO'L Oh yes, Frank played at the Duguid Oval. He played for the Kangaroos. We had good times.

35 mins

AA Have you any other stories that stand out about Campbelltown? What about cafes in Campbelltown. Did you go to any?

NO'L There was one down this side of Patrick Street which was called The Balalaika and there was Romalis's. There was another one up further near Lack's Hotel that was Gralleis's. I don't think there were any down the far end. There was a bakery on the corner of Sewer Lane where the drain used to go.

AA There was one called the Monte Carlo or was that a bit later. It was past Tripp's Garage on the left.

NO'L Oh yes, that was where the Thai Restaurants are now. The name rings a bell with me.

AA Did you go to the Balalaika sometimes?

NO'L As a matter of fact, Paul O'Loughlin's grandmother had the Balalaika when it first opened. I didn't know them at that stage, that's how long ago it was. It was a good little restaurant. People by the name of Mulholland had it in later years. He was the mayor. Frank's mother's great grandfather William Caldwell was one of the mayors of Campbelltown. His name is up on the Old Town Hall on the stonework up the top, his name and the year he was mayor. Her name was Packer, so her grandfather was Packer and her great grandfather was Caldwell.

AA Thank you, it has been good talking to you.