

# ANDREW ALLEN'S ORAL INTERVIEW WITH SUZANNE McILVEEN ON 15 FEBRUARY 2023 AT THE GREG PERCIVAL LIBRARY AT INGLEBURN

**AA** Good morning Suzanne.

**SM** Good morning Andrew.

**AA** Let's start Suzanne with – I will get your full name.

**SM** Suzanne McIlveen

**AA** What was your maiden name?

**SM** Cook

**AA** And your birth date

**SM** 12 November 1942

**AA** Can you tell me your parents' names please?

**SM** My mother's name was Winifred Jean Hopping and she was known as Jean and my father's name was Francis James Cook.

**AA** Can you tell me a bit about them?

**SM** My father worked at Cockatoo Island from when he was a young lad until he retired, building submarines and when he passed away in the year 2000 he had asbestosis from being in the submarines with all the asbestos. My mum used to work at Woolworths on the lolly counter and ice cream counter in those days and they got married in December 1941. They lived at Chatswood and that's where I was born, at Chatswood.

**AA** Did his disease only happen in later years? Was he sick only in later years?

**SM** He worked well into his 60s so I think it was only after he retired that it really affected him.

**AA** What about brothers and sisters.

**SM** I have a half-brother that was born 12 years after me because of my parents' marriage separation.

**AA** So how old were you when they separated?

**SM** I was about 16 months old, and it was me that brought the domestic violence to the family's attention. I must have started speaking very early because my first sentence was "poor mummy's face" and that was in front of my grandparents. I think mum must have left him shortly after that. He had a temper but we found out years later his father used to flog him because his father was left with three young children after the mother passed away and she was only 29. In those days

it would have been difficult. Even though I wouldn't have understood it years ago I understand it now, it was very sad.

**AA** That seemed to be a bit of a trend when the parents of the person were involved in domestic violence it seemed to be passed on.

**SM** Yes, and I did never see him again until years later after I was married. He came looking for me. He did never remarry but he lived with a lady who had a Downs Syndrome child from another relationship and she was his daughter and then they passed away within three months of each other and that's when he came looking for me. I nearly had a nervous breakdown after all that time!

**AA** How was he with you? Did he apologise?

**SM** No, he blamed my mother. She wanted him to join the armed forces because her brothers were in the armed forces in those days but he was in a protected industry, but he never apologised. All he wanted to know was why I didn't ask him to walk me down the aisle when I got married. Even though I kept in touch with him after that he did not leave me a dollar in his will and he was quite a wealthy man. Not that I wanted his money but I never had a birthday present from him or a Christmas present. It's hurtful.

**AA** Yes I can imagine it would have been. So you lived in Chatswood you said.

**SM** Yes, then when mum separated we went to live at Gladesville with my grandparents. My grandfather was a telephone mechanic they called them in those days, and he and his wife Mary, his name was Reg Hopping. They travelled around New South Wales wherever the work took them, mainly living in boarding houses and hotels in the early days. He did all the telephone designing where the telephones would be in the Old Parliament House in Canberra and up until 20 or more years ago we had all the drawings of the placement of the telephones in the Old Parliament House.

## 5 mins

He was still with the PMG when he retired and we were living at Gladesville in a beautiful brick rented house but then the owner wanted to get married and so we had to come to Ingleburn in a hurry because that's where my grandfather's parents had been, in Ingleburn.

**AA** How old were you roughly when you moved to Ingleburn?

**SM** I was five, I turned six a couple of months later. So I went to school at Boronia Park Public School for kindergarten and then first class here in Ingleburn in 1948.

**AA** Where was the Boronia Park Kindergarten?

**SM** In Pittwater Road. Actually my local doctor has just moved to Gladesville to Boronia Park Medical Centre. It's in Pittwater Road. The school may no longer be there.

**AA** Do you have any other memories of Gladesville, I suppose you were fairly young?

**SM** We were just near St Joseph's College sportsground. We were on the border of Gladesville and Hunters Hill. I have quite a few memories going to the local shops and we only had one doctor at Gladesville and he didn't have a telephone. My grandfather was able to help him get a telephone. That would have been about 1945. People don't realise how tough things were in those days.

**AA** What was it like moving to Ingleburn then, it would have been very different.

**SM** It was, but I think as a child you just adjust. It must have been so difficult for my grandparents, when I show you the photos of what we lived in when we first arrived. My first memories of Ingleburn were coming up to clear the block of land where they would eventually build the house. We used to come across country on the bus to Burwood and then catch the electric train to Liverpool and then the steam train from Liverpool to Ingleburn and carry all the tools with us. It was hard work.

**AA** Was it like a country town then?

**SM** Oh yes it was. There was McIlveen's store although McIlveen's then I think had just about sold out to Smith's and then opposite was Collins and they were the two grocery stores. Then there was Dench's butcher shop which was next door to McIlveen's grocery store. We had a fruit shop, the service station was here in Oxford Road. It had a dirt floor, it was a corrugated iron building but it had a dirt floor. We had one barber and I think we had one hairdresser.

**AA** Was that George Craft?

**SM** Yes I think it might have been. Then there was Mick Thorman after that.

**AA** Were Percival's around then?

**SM** Yes, the Percival shop was down there on the corner where it is now.

**AA** Did you do your grocery shopping at Collinses or McIlveen's?

**SM** Well if you went to one you weren't welcome at the other. In those days the grocery stores used to send someone around to get the orders from the women and they would be delivered a couple of days later. The ice man used to come and the milkman used to come, we would put the billy out of a night and they would water down the milk. The postman used to deliver the mail on a horse, Noel Alfred was his name. It was so different.

**AA** Fancy delivering the mail on a horse.

**SM** He was such a handsome young man. There were a lot of horses in Ingleburn in those days. There used to be a polo club over the line, yes.

**AA** McIlveen's sold petrol too didn't they? That might have been in the earlier days.

**10 mins**

**SM** In the very early days. I've got photographs here of their store before they came to Ingleburn down at Leichhardt or Annandale or somewhere down there. I don't know too much about the McIlveen's because my husband's father died when he was only 42 and my husband was only about 15 or so and he was away at boarding school so I don't really know too much about the McIlveen family.

**AA** What was your husband's name?

**SM** Robert McIlveen

**AA** And his father was?

**SM** Wilfred, there was Parker McIlveen and George McIlveen and there was one girl Hilda and she became Hilda Chivers and she turned on the electric light for Ingleburn.

**AA** They're all Ingleburn names, Chivers and McIlveens.

**SM** This is it. I'm related to the McIlveens, the Hoppings and the Harrises. So it gets very complicated.

**AA** I think Ingleburn had their electricity turned on not long after Campbelltown and Campbelltown was about 1923 or 4. So I think Ingleburn was fairly soon after. It would have been a big thing.

**SM** Oh yes it was. Aunty Hilda! The Chivers were a wonderful family. Her husband went to two world wars along with Mr Dench. There is a lot of army history in Ingleburn.

**AA** Right. School days here in Ingleburn?

**SM** Yes the only school building there was is the brick building that is still there today and there was a weather shed which sort of had high walls and a roof but no window and that was where we were meant to have our lunch on hot days, cold days or wet days. But over the years there were a lot of European migrants come into Ingleburn. Germans, Estonians, Italians and we had composite classes. Like there were a few years all in together like kindergarten, first class and second class and so on. They had to use the weather shed as classrooms until such times as they were able to build new buildings.

**AA** So they just immigrated after the war.

**SM** Yes and they lived in unlined garages and sheds and shacks. There were a lot of migrants in Ingleburn.

**AA** What about school friends, who were your primary school friends.

**15 mins**

**SM** The neighbours usually. When I was ten years old my mother married my stepfather and he was the one who used to have the grocery shop here on the corner. Then he went from Ingleburn to Minto in the early days long before we knew him and he had that brick building at Minto Station, that double storey

building that is still there. His wife passed away, Gladys, with cancer and then he went and build a house at Caringbah and his daughter lived with him there and her husband and children. But then I lived with my grandparents here and Mum was a nurse at Gladesville Mental Hospital but she used to come to Ingleburn of a weekend and Mum met my stepfather Bill Harris dancing and they were second cousins. They married and that's when I went to Caringbah for about three years and then we came back to Ingleburn and lived in Oxford Road when I was 13. I've had a chequered life but it's always come back to Ingleburn.

**AA** So you still feel that connection to Ingleburn. You never considered leaving?

**SM** Well I went flatting when I was 22 to Cremorne Point and that was magnificent. That was only for about a year and I came back. That's when I met my husband. I had planned a trip to Canada, I had my passage booked to go to Canada but never made it because I met my husband, right on this very spot would you believe, the old RSL Club!

**AA** Oh really! Were there any teachers that you liked?

**SM** Oh yes I had a wonderful teacher Mrs Robinson. She came to our wedding all those years later. There was a Miss Smith who then became Mrs Alday and she lived here in Ingleburn for many years. Mr Fuller was the Principal and he lived in the schoolhouse next door to the school. He had no family but he had a wife who had a mental illness and we would be at assembly out in the playground and she would come out with a tea cosy on her head banging a saucepan. It was so sad for him you know. He was a very stern man but he was a very good teacher. He had a lot of respect from the students. There was a little Miss Brown and a big Miss Brown they were sisters, Miss Campbell and Mr Connolly. But initially there was only about three or four teachers there when I started and over the years it grew. There was Mr Allen, he was a bright spark.

**AA** Was he a local Allen because I know there were Allens in Ingleburn.

**SM** They were Allens who built my grandparents' house. The Allens, there was Wack Allen, you know about Wack?

**AA** I've heard of Wack. Did you know Wack very well?

**SM** Yes because the Hopping family were associated with the Baptist Church and the Allens were associated with the Baptist Church.

**AA** I thought I might have been related because I am Allen too but there is no association. They had Ingleburn House. What are your memories of Ingleburn House?

**SM** Where was Ingleburn House?

**AA** It was near the railway line, so it was kind of where Ingleburn Fair is. It was knocked down in the late 70s, 78 or something like that.

**SM** There was a creek that used to run across Oxford Road. It used to start up here behind us, I don't really know where it started it used to go behind the school and

then it used to go down sort of Carlisle Street and across near Percival butchers and then it used to sort of go across near where the car park is there now near the Fair and then you had to go across a bridge to get to Ingleburn House. There used to be an ice works down there near Ingleburn House as well. There was an ice works there.

**AA** It's hard to imagine a creek being there now.

**SM** It's still there, it's underground, it's still there, it's fascinating. You shouldn't tamper with nature.

**AA** No, no. What about when you left school then what did you do?

**20 mins**

**SM** When I came back I did first year high school at Jannali High School and that's when we moved back to Ingleburn and I went to Liverpool Girls High School for second and third year. I left school when I was 15, I had only just turned 15. Liverpool Girls High School was a wonderful school. It was a new school. I did home economics and it had its own little unit like a flat and we were taught polishing floors, cooking meals, taking care of the family, doing the laundry, it was a good grounding.

**AA** Did you take the train there?

**SM** Yes, took the steam train to Liverpool and used to walk from the station because it was almost at Warwick Farm, the high school in those days. Yes it was a good school. Because my mother was only getting one pound a week which was two dollars a week maintenance from my father for all those years and my stepfather wouldn't pay for any more education for me, I had to leave school and get a job.

**AA** You didn't want to?

**SM** I wanted to be a cooking demonstrator because I topped my year in home economics when I did the Intermediate Certificate but my mother couldn't afford to keep me at school under those circumstances. So I went to Business College and learnt to become a comptometrist, that was a calculating machine operator, at Burroughs Business College in William Street in the city and I went there for six months and then I went to work for the Shell Company for seven and a half years and then I went to work for Goodyear Tyre Company for nine years and then I left work hoping to have a baby but that didn't eventuate.

**AA** Did you enjoy those jobs and did you still wonder what it could have been like if you had been able to continue?

**SM** I think the young people these days don't realise the opportunities they're given. They just take them for granted. It was just a given, and I earnt £5 a week and my mother took £2.10.0 board so I was left with £2.10.0 to pay for my fares on the train which was 7/6d. It was tough, it was really tough but I enjoyed my work, I loved my work. The Shell Company was a wonderful company to work for a young person. They had their Christmas parties and the young people weren't allowed to go and mix with the adults because there was alcohol. They really

looked after the young ones. They had a social club, we used to go out of a weekend to sporting activities etc. it was a wonderfully run company.

**AA** I'm just thinking you must have had a lot of respect for your mum. You know, doing it so tough.

**SM** I have more respect now than then. I grew up with a stigma because all through my schooling I was only ever the student who came from a single parent family. That had a terrible stigma in those days and I think I'm still sort of not suffering but conscious of it. I think it affected my life a lot. It's only just recently my doctor said to me your mother was a very brave woman to leave your father when I was such a young child. I was born with badly knocked knees, so much so my legs were deformed and when I was 19 months old I had to have an operation on my legs. In those days you didn't need a referral to go to a specialist and it was a Macquarie Street specialist and she was told to go to a Doctor Hoots but she went to a Doctor Hertz who was also an orthopaedic surgeon. He was a German Jew. He was a wonderful man he did the surgery for no charge because she was a single mum. He had his own hospital, he wasn't recognised by the BMA and yet he had been the first orthopaedic surgeon at St Vincent's Hospital. I have got a lot of articles on him and he did the surgery. I was in plaster from the top of my thighs to the tip of my toes for three months and then I had to learn to walk again.

## 25 mins

**AA** How long did it take to walk?

**SM** I was about two and they thought I would never walk again because when they took the plaster off, the skin just hung on my legs like you know how you peel when you're sunburnt well it just hung off in sheets. Anyway one day we had a big dining room with a big dining room table and my grandmother just left me in there on my own and I taught myself to walk hanging onto the table.

**AA** How were the children that you mixed with, coming from a single parent family did they say anything?

**SM** It wasn't the children it was the parents. The parents must have said something or the children must have overheard the parents talking but it was a real stigma in those days. Children can be cruel you know but it was probably what wasn't said, do you know what I mean? You just pick up on things. Here I am 80 years old, I am still here!

**AA** When did you get married?

**SM** In 1973 we got married at the Wayside Chapel with Ted Noffs. Bob had a cousin who was an Anglican Minister but in those days if you have been divorced you couldn't get married in a church. But Ted Noffs took in all comers and he was wonderful.

**AA** Where did you live after you got married?

**SM** We lived in my grandmother's house funnily enough. We lived there. Bob had been an Ingleburn boy and he had three children from his first marriage. We lived

in my grandmother's house and when she passed away I purchased that house from the estate and we stayed there until 1980. We built a new house in Ingleburn and I am still there today. My husband passed away 20 years ago.

**AA** And children?

**SM** No, no children, I left work hoping to have children but that didn't eventuate and the way the world is today I'm not sorry. We are living in a crazy world.

**AA** Some of the other places in Ingleburn, do you remember Milton Park?

**SM** Yes I do. My grandmother used to know the lady that lived there.

**AA** Who were the owners then?

**SM** I am just trying to think of her name. It was a beautiful home.

**AA** I should be able to help you out but my mind has gone blank too at the moment. Was it Hilders?

**SM** No that wasn't the lady's name. We used to travel on the train with her into the city. It was great thing to go to the city. You would catch the steam train and then change at Liverpool. Although when I was working there was a fast train that we used to catch at 7.30 in the morning and it would go straight through to Central. We would stop all stations to Liverpool and then Strathfield and Central and all the workers used to go on that train. Then coming back of a night we used to call it the big six. It used to leave about a quarter past five from Central and sometimes it would run out of water and we would have to stop at Casula and they'd have to fill up the tank. They were the good old days.

**AA** I interviewed Peter Benson and he was talking about that train. They called it Farting Fanny because it made that sort of noise.

**SM** Peter Benson's father was my grandfather's best friend. Peter passed away.

**AA** I know, he was a wonderful man. Any other personalities from your childhood, anyone that fascinated you as a kid in Ingleburn.

**SM** I don't know, children were seen and not heard, do you know what I mean. We were there but no-one asked my opinion on anything until I was 18 and then I couldn't be bothered giving it because as I said we were seen and not heard you just did what you were told. There were some lovely people in Ingleburn. We all sort of were there for each other or the families were there for each other and there's not too many of us left. I used to go to the Church of England fellowship and the teenagers there used to say be careful what you say in front of Sue if you're talking about someone she is probably related to them because I was connected to so many families.

**30 mins**

**AA** What was your social life, what things did you do?



**SM** There was pictures at the Old School of Arts. They used to have balls there but I didn't go to any balls there. I taught dancing there in later years. We used to teach the footballers how to dance! We used to go to dancing classes at Campbelltown in the old Masonic Centre there in Browne Street and we used to have dances once a month at the fellowship here at the Anglican Church. The Campbelltown Fellowship used to come down and we would get together. We would go for hikes. We used to have paper chases, we would go out to the river at night for a paper chase. How we never killed ourselves I don't know. One time we walked out to Freres Crossing, I mean that was crazy, we walked.

**AA** It never ceases to amaze me when I interview people, how when they were children how far they walked.

**SM** Yes, we would think nothing of walking out to the weir at Ingleburn. I don't drive so I still do a lot of walking.

**AA** That is amazing. Did you swim?

**SM** I can't swim. I didn't learn to swim, my mother didn't swim. Other than the river, there was nowhere to swim around here.

**AA** No swimming pools or anything.

**SM** The closest swimming pool would have been Liverpool I suppose in those days. I know my mother took my brother to Liverpool to learn to swim but he is 12 years younger than me.

**AA** You knew the Percivals too, did you know Greg Percival?

**SM** Yes, and his daughter Virginia. I knew Greg's father, he was a great ballroom dancer Greg's father and I remember my mother and stepfather used to do old time dancing. We used to go to the Rivoli at Parramatta and I remember dancing with Greg's father at the Rivoli at Parramatta old time dancing. They were the butchers. Then there was the Collins grocery shop.

**AA** Do you remember when that was knocked down roughly? I don't expect you to remember the year but what sort of time period are we talking about when Collins was knocked down?

**SM** Next to Collins there used to be the stationmaster, the railway stationmaster's house there and the family lived there. It must have been in the .....

**AA** It was there after the McIlveen's shop the emporium.

**SM** The emporium is still there.

**AA** Same building?

**SM** Yes the same building. They took the veranda off, that's why you think it's changed. No that's the same building. I'll show you some photographs, there was McIlveen's there was Dench's shop and then there was a house next to that which was where the old Commonwealth Bank used to be. They knocked that house down. It must have been in the 60s, no we used to have a wonderful

hardware shop here. Not when we first arrived but in later years we had wonderful shops. We had dress shops, a gift shop, a linen shop, a baby wear shop, lighting shop. Ingleburn has gone to the dogs as far as shopping goes as a lot of suburbs have. It must have been in the 70s that Collinsees was demolished. Because the big hardware shop and I can tell you who used to have that, Mr Moore used to have the hardware, he had the hardware shop for a long time.

**35 mins**

**AA** I didn't know that.

**SM** That was part of Collins place. It had to be the 70s I would say when it was demolished. That's where the Post Office used to be and there used to be a residence behind that. When the creek used to flood, the Post Office used to flood as well because it would come across Oxford Road. We had a fruit shop and they had a residence behind the shop.

**AA** What about The Ingle?

**SM** My great grandmother had her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday there. The Ingle was a milk bar but it had a big hall next to it where they used to hold the monthly dances or the weekly dances and the soldiers used to come down from the camp and meet the local girls there and they had the dances. They always had live bands, there was no such thing as records. That was the social hub and then we had a baker that used to bake his own bread next to The Ingle across the road but on the next corner, Jack Williamson.

**AA** I've heard of the Williamsons.

**SM** There were two Williamson families, there was Jack Williamson and I am not sure whether he was related to the other Williamson family. John Williamson who was a few years older than me, when Collinsees had the liquor shop John took over as licensee, he was the licensee that managed the shop for them. He has just recently left Ingleburn and moved to Campbelltown to Park Central. A lot of the old residents have gone.

**AA** I might need to call on you if I have other questions about Ingleburn.

**SM** Oh please do. My great grandfather came here in 1908. The Harrises came here in 1892 and Mrs Harris and Mrs Hopping were sisters so that was the connection there. Their husbands and families started the Baptist Church and they used to have a Tabernacle where they used to have the services. It was just wattle saplings. Ingleburn used to have a lot of wattle trees. In August when the wattle trees used to bloom, if you were up at the camp and you looked over Ingleburn, all you saw was yellow. So they used the wattle saplings to make this Tabernacle to hold the Church services in.

**AA** They are beautiful trees aren't they, wattles.

- SM** They are, they really are. Actually my great grandparents' home was called Wattle Dell. He was the one who went on to be the Ingleburn Mayor in 1933 because Ingleburn had their own Council.
- AA** So they would have merged with Campbelltown not long after you arrived or about the same time you arrived.
- SM** Probably a bit later than that I think.
- AA** You remember the old Council Chambers.
- SM** Oh yes down there just along from where the hotel is now, that was the Council Chambers.
- AA** So where the hotel is. We've often tried to work out where it was.
- SM** A friend of ours built Ingleburn Hotel. He lived at Miranda the fellow that built Ingleburn Hotel, like actually did the actual work. The Council Chambers which later became the Baby Health Centre it was just a bit further along from my memory. That's where Peter Benson had his first surgery in there before he left here and went to Liverpool.
- AA** I can remember him saying that now. I've had fun talking to you, I've enjoyed it. I'm looking forward to having a look at your photos too. So, thanks very much Suzanne for being part of our Oral History interviews.
- SM** My pleasure, thank you Andrew.