



voiceprint

Newsletter

of the New South Wales Branch

of the Oral History Association

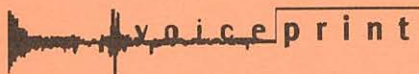
of Australia

29

October 2003



*...is a
- a form of
as the result
ined interview
means of finding
the past by asking
ions of people who*



Voiceprint is the newsletter of the NSW Branch of the Oral History Association of Australia and is published quarterly
ISSN: 13224360

Issue No. 29 – October 2003

Oral History Association of Australia
(NSW) Inc. c/ – State Library of
New South Wales, Macquarie Street,
Sydney, NSW 2000
Tel (02) 9273 1697 • Fax (02) 9273 1267
email: rblock@ilanet.slnsw.gov.au

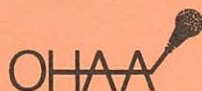
Editorial Committee: Joyce Cribb,
Diana Covell, Sue Georgevits

Please send articles and correspondence

to: Joyce Cribb, 48 Bungalow Avenue,
Pymble 2073, email:
ivancritto1@optusnet.com.au

Layout and Design: Vanessa Block

All information presented in this publication is not necessarily endorsed by the NSW Branch of the Oral History Association of Australia, nor its editors



Editorial

I hope members enjoy this edition of Voiceprint. Our main articles present three different aspects of life in Australia. They are all stories of hard work and a struggle to achieve a better future for themselves and their families. Oral history does seem to be the ideal way to tell these stories. Thank you to Pauline Curby, Jan Henderson and to Paul Aston and colleagues from The Australian Centre for Public History at The University of Technology for their interesting contributions.

When you read the short profiles that are included from our new members of committee you will get some idea of just how far and wide oral history has expanded. There is I know so much more that is going on out there, all sorts of interesting projects. Australians seem now proud to speak of their heritage and there is a lot of history being recorded. At Voiceprint we wish members would proudly send in lots of contributions! We know everyone is busy, but is there a story waiting to be told to a wider audience or can you tell us a little about your work?

We will continue to bring some further profiles and I hope not just from committee members. We will await the mail!

Joyce Cribb

Contents



News

New Members 3

Nuts and Bolts

Life Membership Awards 4

New Committee Members 7

REPORTS

OHAA National Conference 9

OHAA (NSW) Seminars 10

ARTICLES

Keeping the Home Going – *Pauline Curby* 12

Daylight to Dusk: A History of Sydney's Italian Fruit Shops –
from The Australian Centre of Public History, UTS 26

It's Different Here – A Life in the West Kimberley WA –
Jan Henderson 32



Diary of Events 39



New Members

Welcome to the following new members:

Sisters of Mercy	North Sydney
Sydney Church of England Girls Grammar School, Darlinghurst	
Sydney Centre for Public History, UTS	
Sydney Harbour Trust	
Louella McCarthy	Academic historian
Anna Roache	Heritage consultant
Gill Amos	
Lynne Gall	Grazier
Julie Petersen	Education officer
Brian Harrision	Tour guide
George Monical	Volunteer, Woollahra Library
Jan Bowen	Consultant historian and writer
Diana Openshaw	Retired librarian
John Ryrice	Retired, volunteer, State Library of New South Wales
Dr Caroline Lemerle	Scientist
Katherine Knight	Historian and journalist
Diana Tapscott	Oral History Officer, Old Parliament House, Canberra
Dr Martin Glasson	Medical surgeon
Cheryl Northey	Radio broadcaster
Bev Holland	Retired, local historian
Jean Eikemo	Retired, interested in oral history
Maria Boyd	Teacher
Olwen Morris	Conservationist
Irene Buschtedt	Family historian

Nuts and Bolts

Honorary Life Membership of OHAA proposed for Judy Wing

Judy Wing trained as a secretary after she left school, and retired from work after her marriage in 1950. When all her children were well established in their schooling she joined the Marriage Guidance Council, was a successful candidate after a stringent test, and commenced her eight year counselling career in 1969. This inspired her to seek further education and she completed her HSC in 1978. She enrolled at Macquarie University in 1979 and completed her degree in 1985. Her study of history, training in counselling and her secretarial skills made her the perfect choice for a position with the New South Wales Bicentennial Oral History Project in 1987. This project was superbly administered, its interviewers well chosen, and indeed some of those names are luminaries in the academic history world today. Judy, however, did not stop at administration and became herself an active and tireless interviewer with Sydney's Millers Point residents as focus for her interviewing. The project's over 400 interviews are considered one of the jewels in the crown of the State Library's oral history collection. Judy's life in oral history was set.

She was secretary of the New South Wales Branch from 1987 when she joined, to 2003 when she retired to live on the coast north of Sydney. However, she was more than an office bearer. She was one of the faithful few who carried the standard of oral history beyond the excitement of the Bicentennial Project and saw the branch into the era when the Oral History Program was established at the State Library of New South Wales in 1991 – and she stayed on, continuing to be a pillar of the branch. Her husband Brian was the honorary treasurer for the 1993 National Conference in Sydney. Judy has also been national secretary of the OHAA for four terms in the last decade.

She has been a consultant oral historian for a number of years and earned her Masters degree in applied history from UTS in 1998. Among other projects she was an interviewer for Public Works and Services, for some heritage sites, Pyrmont/Ultimo and other inner city life stories, and the Chinese in Sydney. She researched and published a history of the Institute of Patent Attorneys of Australia which was a strong contender for one of the state history prizes. She is at present researching and writing the history of Norfolk Island.

The smooth and energetic transition from the small group in New South Wales to the flourishing branch it is today could not have been effected without the devotion, support, wise counsel and interest of Judy Wing. It is with deep gratitude for all of this that the Branch nominates her for Honorary Life Membership of the Oral History Association of Australia.

Honorary Life Membership of OHAA proposed for Richard Raxworthy

In 1990 a survey of oral history was carried out by the State Library of New South Wales. It was discovered that in New South Wales oral history was small, but very much alive. During that survey the name Richard Raxworthy occurred over and over and quite rightly so. Richard was undoubtedly the pioneer professional oral historian in this state.

Richard was born and educated in England and was destined to take over his father's engineering business. Death duties put paid to this intention and he went to sea instead. In the merchant navy he spent 15 years in engine rooms little knowing that this would give him a superb background for his initial projects interviewing engineers, trade unionists, workers, masons, builders, architects and others.

Having chosen by then to make his home in Australia he enrolled in 1982 at UTS to commence a Bachelor of Arts in Communication. Since it was the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge he thought to make that his project in the course. The Roads and Traffic Authority assisted him to reach former workers engaged in the building of the Bridge and he conducted interviews with 44 of them, and made two radio programs. He went on to write *The Proud Arch: the Story of the Sydney Harbour Bridge* and *The Unreasonable Man: the Life and Work of Dr J.J.C. Bradfield*.

It was not at that time easy to make a living from oral history and Richard had to think up projects and then encourage the likes of the New South Wales Parliament and the Labour Council of New South Wales to support them. Where he could not fund his ideas he would carry out the project anyway and hope to sell copies to institutions. This is how the State Library of New South Wales, which did not then actively collect oral history, began its collection. The 'Sydney Harbour Bridge Builders' is No. 1 in the cataloguing sequence for the Mitchell Library's oral history collection – and rightly so!

Richard worked actively for various Australian Credit Unions in New South Wales and country-wide. Other commissioned projects include those for the Department of Public Works and Services, Institution of Engineers, Eveleigh Railway Workshops, Sydney Morsecodians Fraternity, Royal Agricultural Society of NSW, State Rail Authority NSW, Cockatoo Island Dockyard, Sydney Olympic Authority, Sydney City Council, Trinity Grammar School, Sydney and the Road and Transport Authority, NSW. This is a selection only of his nearly 1500 interviews. He was engaged in interviewing on behalf of the NSW Teachers' Federation when the ill health which has led to his retirement overcame him.

Richard always considered that he had more to learn and attended seminars and conferences on a regular basis. Not only did he come to learn, but his innate generosity and interest prompted him to offer his good advice and ideas about best practice. From such an experienced oral historian these were much appreciated.

This same generosity caused him to embark on projects for which he had no sponsor and the State Library is grateful for his large 'Sydneysiders' project which includes a number of interesting people in many walks of life, modest and influential, from that city. His energy, his devotion, his interest, his focus, and his knowledge set standards for others and all contributed to the growing profile of oral history in New South Wales

We know that oral history is addictive and we know that Richard was more addicted even than most. The profession, the institutions, the associations are so much the richer for this devoted oral historian. We can't imagine him retired, but we wish him well. The pursuit of oral history became his life – who better then to receive an Honorary Life Membership of the OHAA. Richard was about sound – and never fury – and that will live on!

About the Committee

We thought members may not know all the NSW committee members or know of their work and interests. In this edition we start with brief biographies of the three members, Margo Beasley, Stephanie Coleman and Frank Heimans who joined the Committee at the July Annual Meeting. Welcome!(Ed).

Margo Beasley is a consultant historian who conducts oral history projects and writes commissioned histories. Her most recent oral history work has been for the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and the South Sydney Development Corporation. The latter project resulted in a book entitled *Everyone Knew Everyone: Memories of Green Square*. Other books include *The Sweat of their Brows* (Sydney Water), *Wharfies* (Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia) and *Sydney Town Hall: a Social History* (City of Sydney). She is in the final stages of a PhD thesis at the University of Wollongong and is the current NSW Ministry for the Arts Fellow. This project is a book about young people on Sydney's northern beaches and it will be based primarily on oral history.

Stephanie Coleman comes to the Oral History Association with a background in television and video research and production. She has a bachelor of Communications from UTS where she majored in Journalism.

After working for several years in freelance research and production roles, in 1998 Stephanie became an in house researcher for Channel Nine. During her time there she researched, among other things, a series of one hour historical documentaries for the Our World Program on the great Australian Explorers including Leichhardt, Stuart, and Burke & Wills. Stephanie also researched the 1999 series of the RPA program, which was the first series of the long running program to win a Logie.

Over the last few years Stephanie has brought her research skills to the youth related projects of the Inspire Foundation, an innovative organisation dedicated to inspiring young people and helping prevent youth suicide. Her main focus has been on the ActNow project (www.actnow.com.au) a project designed to get more young people involved in volunteering.

Stephanie has always had a passion for research, history and volunteering and so decided to combine her loves by becoming involved in The Oral History Association, which she is very excited about. She is currently researching aspects of her family history with the ultimate aim of producing a documentary.

Frank Heimans is a filmmaker and oral history producer and interviewer. Since producing and directing the 1970 television documentary *What Have you Done with My Country*, a searching look at Australia from an Aboriginal perspective, Frank Heimans has researched, directed and produced more than fifty television documentaries and recorded over 300 oral history interviews. The subject matter of his films reveals diverse interests – from the arts, in *Australia Dances*, life stories in the 32 programs produced on eminent Australians for the *Australian Biography* series, to bizarre mysticism in the feature-length *The Occult Experience*.

Films on Asia and the Pacific include *The Elusive Geisha*, *Cave of Dreams*, *Island of the Spirits* and *Japan Nearby*. Despite the scope of his work, Frank keeps returning to themes of society and human interaction. In the documentary *In Moral Panic* he takes an international perspective on jails and punishment, while *Margaret Mead and Samoa* documents the scientific controversy surrounding Prof Derek Freeman's refutation of the famous anthropologist's field work in American Samoa during the 1920s. The film caused a stir in the US after its screening and its story became the theme of David Williamson's play *Heretic*.

Documentaries on historical themes include *Class of '39*, the story of the Vienna Mozart Boys Choir trapped in Australia at the outbreak of war, *Paradise Camp*, *The Sword and the Flower* and *Where Death Wears a Smile*, which, for the first time revealed the fight for recognition of two Australian prisoners-of-war thrown in a brutal Nazi concentration camp.

Oral History assignments have included a project of 30 interviews for the Faculty of Engineering, University of NSW, four projects for the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority, two projects for the NSW Department of Public Works, 22 interviews for the Institution of Engineers Australia, a project on Maitland Gaol and a recent project of 25 interviews and a video production on White Bay Power Station for Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority. Frank has also recorded 15 interviews for the National Library's Oral History Collection, including recent interviews with Peter Garrett, Wolf Blass, Alex Buzo, Justice Marcus Einfeld, Robert Manne, Alan Trounson and Tony Vinson. He has also contributed seven interviews to the National Library's *Bringing Them Home* project on the Stolen Generation.

Frank's films have won 21 Australian and international awards, including three Gold Awards from the International Film & TV Festival of New York and two Blue Ribbons from the American Film and Video Festival. His recent video production for the White Bay Power Station Oral History Project won an award from the National Trust in 2003.

REPORTS

'From all Quarters', the 25th Anniversary Conference of the Oral History Association of Australia, 2 – 7 September 2003 in Perth WA – Rosie Block

'Fellow oral historians', were the opening words of Emeritus Professor Geoffrey Bolton, Patron of the OHAA, WA and Pro Chancellor, Murdoch University. He created with that opening an immediate feeling of fellowship amongst his listeners and this proceeded to be a hallmark of the conference. Added to this was a palpable delight with the carefully planned and diverse program. Together with perfect weather every session had a real buzz (and the food was excellent!). If people are pleased with a conference they always stay to the very end and the hall continued full for the last session on Sunday.

The conference ranged over a number of topics, with various presentations of particular projects and from all over Australia. New South Wales presenters included the Sydney Maritime Museum Oral History Project in the State Library of New South Wales 'charted' by Rosie Block. Helen Andreoni took us on delightful journey to the Northern Territory to a very unusual school. Peter Rubinstein gave a moving account of Alex Campbell, Gallipoli's last ANZAC. Frank Heimans spoke on his Public Works

project which documented the responses of individuals in that department to the Royal Commission into the Building Industry in 1990. The Royal Commission brought a number of changes and the oral history accounts are full of interest and surprises. Jenny Hudson gave a reflective view of an interview she had done with her mother 17 years before and asked and tried to answer some questions she now poses to herself. Julia Horne asked the absorbing and important question, 'Can oral history be a modern form of personal papers?' Laurel Wraight discussed the 'heights and hazards' of recording life stories on video and DVD.

Having investigated the lives of Australian girls who went overseas in the 1950s and 60s, Valwyn Wishart has found in her present project, 'Young Men and Post-war travel from Australia', that their experiences indeed differed from those of the girls during that time. Tim Carroll presented his inspiring Bankstown project which involves local school students and has run successfully over many years. Dianne Dahlitz introduced the National Library's

'Bringing them Home Project' and we were very interested to hear John Bannister recount his experiences as an interviewer for this project.

The panels were stimulating. Janis Wilton and Julia Horne played a large part in the examination of the guidelines of university ethics committees in relation to scholars in social history. This is a topic which has been taken up since 2001 by the OHAA and there is strong evidence that there are significant changes on the way. The meeting made strong representations, and as a consequence of that there was already some good news of progress by the end of the conference. The panel on libraries which involved Ronda Jamieson, Battye Library, LISWA, WA; Jan McCahon of Victoria Park Public Library, WA; and Rosie Block, State Library of New South

Wales examined issues of 'growth, stagnation or decline?' in managing oral history in historical collections. Some lively debate ensued.

By no means was this conference entirely Australia-centred. There were inspiring and scholarly papers from Bill Bunbury of the ABC and Professor Bolton. Our two visitors from Mexico, Gerardo Necochea Garcia and Graciela de Garay presented their fascinating oral history on the first housing project in Latin America. Anna Green from New Zealand wondered if there was such a thing as individual memory. Janis Wilton spoke of local as well as global issues in oral history, and noted in addition that the OHAA proposed to host the International Oral History Association's conference in Australia in 2006. More of this later!

Seminars

Two seminar have been held this year. Oral history Live! – May 3rd and Oral History to Best Seller – July 26th. Both seminars were well attended and proved most interesting to the audience.

With **Oral History Live** members had the opportunity to watch experienced interviewers at work. Our President Rosie Block and Ouranita Karadimisa conducted interviews with Ros and Tim Bowden who were invited to exchange their usual roles of being the interviewer to become interviewees! Members have

of course, considerable knowledge of the Bowden's work, some of it featured in the past in Voiceprint, however, there was much of new interest – great to see four professionals at work. The final interview was conducted by Peter Rubinstein of Radiowise Media Networks with a World War II veteran Ethel Lang. Like all

veterans of WW II Ethel is no longer young and the audience learnt much from watching Peter's sensitivity and experience in slowly getting Ethel to tell her fascinating story. Great example as so many oral history interviews are with older people.

Oral History to Best Seller

Diane Armstrong, an experienced writer and historian presented the background to her popular books *Mosaic: a Chronicle of Five Generations*, a family history in Europe and Australia, and *The voyage of their Life: the Story of the SS Derna and its Passengers*, a post World War II migrant ship to Australia. Oral History interviews were conducted around the world as Diane gathered information for her books. The story of how the books were written, the slow and careful research to find the passengers had the audience enthralled for the morning. A book could be written about writing the books! It was marvellous to have an expert share their experience and knowledge. (Voiceprint No 20 published a review of *Mosaic*. Below a short review of Diane's second book)

***The Voyage of Their Lives: the SS Derna* by Diane Armstrong,**

Reviewed by Diana Covell

Diane Armstrong begins her account of the epic voyage of post war immigrants on a rust bucket named SS

Derna with an anecdote about a postcard sent by her mother to her aunt on the day the family set sail to Australia, 30 August 1948.

She then introduces us to a remarkable cross section of passengers, all hoping to build a better life in the land of freedom and promise. For many of the passengers, especially those from Eastern Europe, the indignities of the voyage are nothing compared to what they have suffered in their homeland during the war.

A significant number of passengers (perhaps more than the quota specified by Australian authorities) are sponsored Jewish refugees escaping from the Nazi Holocaust, including 61 orphaned children travelling with their kindly chaperones, Professor and Mrs Frant.

But there are others from the Baltic States who believe they were "liberated" from the Soviets by the invading German troops. This sets up irascible tensions between some of the passengers and crew on board, as well as some reflective soul-searching within the author's own narrative.

What is truly remarkable about this book is the way the author has managed to link and weave all the stories together based on her extensive oral history interviews with all those she managed to trace and follow up fifty years after the eventual voyage took place. A well researched and highly recommended read!

ARTICLES

Keeping the Home Going – Pauline Curby

(Voiceprint acknowledges the sponsorship provided by the City of Ryde to Pauline Curby in the creation of this oral history. Our thanks for permission to publish here. Ed)

In the late 1920s when Ernest and May Johnson moved to Ryde the future looked bright. Their four children were healthy, Ernest had a job that seemed promising and May was adjusting to life in Australia. Although she missed her family and friends in England she had regular contact with her husband's family who took a keen interest in the youngsters: Doris, Ivy, Gladys and Len. The Johnson family was moving into a War Service home which, they anticipated, would one day be theirs.

Five years later Ernest no longer had a secure job, the family had lost their house and May was dead. The difficult years of the 1930s and early 1940s were recalled in 1997 when Ivy, the second eldest of the children, recounted her memories. She spoke about the pathos of the Johnson family's plight and conveyed with humour their determination to get by. In telling her story she reflected on her own and her siblings' reactions to their mother's death and on her father's struggle to keep his family together.

He didn't set much store on medals

Ivy barely remembered the move to Ryde but recalled that it occurred sometime before she started school, probably in about 1927. Their War Service home in Falconer Street is a clearer memory: 'I just remember the house, a little weatherboard place – a nice neat little place'. When the Australian economy turned sour there were no special favours for World War I veterans. The Johnsons lost the house and began living in a series of rented premises:

I remember that he [Ernest] did lose the house. I remember quite clearly, and that was when my mother was still alive and we had to move. So we moved to a place in Parkes Street right opposite where the TAFE College is now – number 60. We were there for a few years. And then I don't know why we moved from there but we ended up at number 98 and the house is still there on the corner of Falconer Street. I've always thought it was a wonder they didn't make an effort, some kind of effort to let him keep it, but I don't know the circumstances, whether he just didn't ask for help I don't know.

Ernest Johnson (1) was, as his daughter recalls, a very strong personality. He was brought up in the country where you had to be strong to survive. He went to work when he was about 10, so he didn't really live at home. That was Devon Farm at Wellington. I've got his little bible. They gave him a little bible when he went away to the war, and it's just got, 'To Ernie from your friends at Devon farm' on it and that went all through the war with him. I've got that and his medals.

In World War I he was a signaller and that's where he got his military medal. He was in the trenches and he used to have to go up ahead of the other troops and find out where the enemy were.

I know that because I used to hear him talk to one of his mates about that. I don't know what the actual circumstances were when he got the military medal. It was for rescuing his officer. But he didn't set much store on medals. He never went to any RSL things or any marches and he didn't worry much about medals because he said, 'Oh there were plenty of people that should have got medals'. It was just that somebody had to notice what you were doing for you to get a medal. Because his officer was involved he probably put his name in for the medal.

In England on leave from the trenches Ernest met May Cross, a young munitions worker. They were married when the war ended and he brought his

wife back to Australia. Ernest soon had a job as an insurance agent. Ivy understood that he was 'quite good at it because he was a good talker'.

I remember he used to come home every Friday night with chocolates and peanuts for us. I only spoke to him not that long before he died about that. I said, 'Why did you stop being an insurance agent?' He said people just couldn't pay. That was the first thing that went. Even though it might only have been threepence a week or something. They couldn't pay it so he lost his customers and he lost his job.

May Johnson had several pregnancies during these years, but only four of the children survived. After three girls a boy, Len, was born in 1927. This was not, however, the end of her reproductive life. Ivy recalls:

In those days you know there was no contraceptives or anything. She had two other stillborn children that I know of. I remember being shown one baby in the bag that the doctor had come and delivered and it had died. I think my mother just decided to show it to us. We probably didn't even know she was expecting it because people wore these loose dresses in those days. But I can remember being shown it. It was a complete baby. I think that's probably why she wanted to show us because it was just a dear little baby, only it wasn't alive.

A big Easter egg

In March 1932 Ivy's secure world was turned upside down when her mother was admitted to a city hospital:

I'd saved up this money and bought her a big Easter egg and my aunty (my father's sister) took me in to see her. For some reason or other I was the child that was always taken with people for company. I think I was just quiet and I used to not do something I shouldn't or make a fuss about things. I took this Easter egg in but of course I couldn't give it to her. She was so sick and I don't know if she was even conscious. I can remember she was tossing around in the bed. I think my grandmother and my aunty were there and my father and there were several people I know round the bed and I couldn't even get to talk to her. She wasn't well enough. And I said,

'Oh, I've brought in the Easter egg for her'.

And they said, 'Oh no you eat it yourself'.

Well, I didn't want to. I wanted to give it to her. It was quite a big one and you had to save up the money.

She died in hospital and I think it was Sydney Hospital. Because Dad used to go in every day for about three weeks and he used to come home really down. He had his own sort of business then but he couldn't do anything. He just went into the hospital every day to sit with her. It was 9 April, 1932 when she died and her

birthday would have been in May. I think she was 41 that next birthday.

Ivy remembers her father's sister, breaking the terrible news to herself, her sisters and her little brother: She was in bed because it really knocked her around. I think she spent most of the time in bed while my mother was in hospital. She mightn't have been very well. She lived in the country and she was down staying with us. I can remember her calling us over to the bed and holding on to us and telling us what happened and of course she was crying and saying 'Your mother's died'. And I don't think we children really realised right then that we wouldn't be seeing her again. I know I used to be worried because Dad was in at the hospital every day for about three weeks and I was just wishing that she'd get better and come home and that he didn't have to go in there every day. I don't know any medical details except that I know she was sort of delirious and tossing around when I went in to see her. Probably I was the only one of the kids that did see her while she was in hospital.

Ivy is still not sure what her mother died of:

I always heard it was septicaemia and I think it was to do with the kidney and back ache problems she had. Whether she was pregnant as well at the time I'm not quite sure. She had had a lot of kidney problems and problems with the

back ache and the next thing we knew she was in hospital and she got very sick. It was like blood poisoning, I suppose. We were just told it was septicaemia. I think that was on the death certificate. It was something these days that would be able to be treated, that's the sad part of it.

We did attend our mother's funeral and a lot of the relatives thought that Dad shouldn't have arranged for us to attend it. But I don't think he ever thought of anything else. He just thought we should go and, I was glad we went, because although you didn't believe it, you still thought that maybe she'd just gone away somewhere and she'd come back. It takes you about two years to really realise the person has actually gone. I remember the funeral at the Field of Mars Cemetery. I remember us all standing around you know, and it's terrible when they put the dirt in on the coffin. It's really miserable the funerals, especially when it's wet or anything like that.

He thought we should know

In the first year after May's death the extended family helped. The children's aunt, Rose who lived at Nevertire visited regularly and Len, who was only five, went to live with another aunt at Merrygoen for a year. The first day back at school after the funeral was difficult for Ivy:

I can remember I was in fourth class and I'd been away for the day. I went past the teacher at the desk and I said, 'Oh' (Miss Whirlie her name was), 'I couldn't come to school yesterday because I had to go to my mother's funeral.' And I can remember the gasp. You know she gasped from surprise, because she hadn't known about it. For me just to say it like that!

You know kids are so callous in lots of ways. There were a couple of girls that used to like to get me in a corner and ask me about the fact that my mother had died. It made you feel that you were a strange sort of person because your mother had died. My eldest sister was only 11 when our mother died so she and I between us sort of looked after things. I cooked the dinner every night when I was in fifth and sixth class because she'd gone to high school. I can remember burning my hand. We had a fuel stove and one of those iron fry pans, and I remember grabbing hold of this pan and it must have been red hot. The handle burnt all the skin off my hand. Dad was working out in the back yard and I'm crying and calling out to him and he yelled at me till he realised what was wrong and he came in. I can't remember what he put on it, because people used to put oil and things on burns in those days. Anyway it got better, but it was very very sore. I think it must have been the

end of me cooking the dinner at that time. [laughs]

We weren't allowed to run wild or anything, even after our mother died. We always had to tell Dad when we were going anywhere. He always had to know where we were going. My father wasn't really strict, except that if he said anything we did it. He never had to threaten us or smack us. We wouldn't have thought of not doing what he'd said. There were lots of times when we didn't do something that he expected us to do but that was because he didn't tell us to do it. He thought we should know. He'd come home and he'd say, 'Oh, you kids should have had the place tidied up by now'. But he didn't tell us to do it, so naturally we didn't do it. We didn't even think about it. (laughs). I don't think men can think of things to do and organise things the same as women do. They don't think of a lot of things and they don't know they have to really get the kids organised if they want them to do something.

We didn't do a lot of things properly at all. I used to help to get my brother dressed for school. Well, dad used to say that I was the only one that made my bed. Our house was in a mess most of the time. We had a poor lady there once. Dad got her to come and she used to do the washing (I'm not sure about the ironing) and clean up the house for six shillings a day. Of course it was a fuel

copper and laundry outside the backdoor. We got sick of her coming, us kids. Because she used to tell us to pick up the things off the floor, so we just said to Dad, 'We don't want her to come any more'. We didn't want people telling us what to do.

So he said, 'Well you go round and tell her then'.

So we went round to tell her. I suppose for that poor woman that six shillings was probably keeping her going. Really she did give the house a good clean up and it didn't get cleaned up once she wasn't there, not properly. Dad did it himself every now and again but he worked pretty hard to try and earn a bit of money.

We used to have a lot of children come and play at our place because they said, 'There's nobody here telling you, "You can't do this and you can't do that."' So they used to come over and play at our place, all the kids round about because they thought we could do as we liked. But they didn't realise that there was nothing we would have liked better than to have someone telling us what to do. Doing some of the things for us. Oh no – people were badly enough off during the depression anyway and the fact that we didn't have anybody to manage the house made it a lot worse for us.

Nothing decent to wear

We had nothing decent to wear most of the time. Different people used to offer us clothes and Dad used to send us round to get them. My sister used to hate that. She'd say, 'I'm not going to go round and get any clothes off anybody'. I think I went once because I used to think, 'Well at least we'd have something if we went and got them'. He was short of money and he had no idea what to buy for girls. He'd sometimes go and get some things for my brother. We were really badly off as far as clothing and household things and sheets. Every now and then he'd wash all the sheets if we hadn't. But I remember once saying to him, 'Dad our sheets are in rags'. My sister and I used to sleep in a double bed I remember saying to him, 'Dad we haven't got any sheets on our bed'. So he went and got us a pair of sheets, but see the thing is, he was a little bit hard and unapproachable and we often wouldn't ask him for things that we really needed and he didn't see that we needed them. Not like – (mostly) women do those things anyway, just provide things and have things there.

I remember once we were going out somewhere. We used to sometimes go and see another aunty over at Enfield. (Dad got on very well with her.) My sister was ironing a dress this day, or trying to iron it, and she burnt a hole the shape of an iron out of the back of it. I remember

it was pink crepe, a really nice dress. It was her good dress. My mother had bought or made it for her. And my sister had to go out in this dress because she didn't have anything else. I remember her going out in this dress with the iron shaped hole. [laughs] I think Dad used to just give up and let us do the best we could. But he did always take us with him if he went somewhere for the day, if we were invited over. We'd all be trailing along. Goodness knows what we looked like half the time because we weren't very tidy. We'd probably need new shoes. It wasn't easy.

We used to write to Granny and write to my aunty. I remember writing to my aunty Rose. She was very good with clothes. She often sent us down clothes and I wrote 'Aunty Rose can you send me down some pants?' And she sent me down three pairs of bright green pants. I remember having a pair of these bright green pants on at high school and we were doing PE and the teacher saying, 'You're supposed to have your black pants on'. And I thought to myself (I didn't say anything but I thought) 'It's all right if you've got any black pants' – which I didn't have. But they were three good solid pairs of green pants. I suppose they were better than nothing. She often found things that would be suitable for us and sent them down. So I don't think Dad bought us any clothes, us girls.

Those damn white shirts

The fuel stove didn't really worry us. We'd always had it. We used to have to light the stove to get a bit a water to have a wash, to have a hot drink. I could light a fire, that was no problem. We had the Mrs Potts irons on the stove and it wasn't the fuel stove [that bothered us] it was those damn white shirts they used to have. The men's white shirts. You couldn't get them ironed no matter how hard you tried. You'd damp them, and sometimes if you got the iron off the stove a bit of black would go on them. I don't know who washed them, but we used to iron them. I can remember ironing one of those terrible white shirts. When we were in this house at Parkes Street mother was still alive. She had got an electric iron and after she died Dad wouldn't let us use that. He was a bit frightened of electricity and he wouldn't let us use it so we had to go back to Mrs Potts. It would have been much easier for us, if he'd let us use that. But after she died he wouldn't let us use the electricity. We didn't have electric lights. We used to use lamps which were much more dangerous. Kerosene lamps.

We must have had electricity. But we used lamps. He must have not had the electricity on at all then because we always carried these glass lamps with the glass globes and lanterns with the handles. We used to carry those into the bedroom or the bathroom. We didn't

use candles. We always used the lamps. He wouldn't have thought that was dangerous because he was brought up with that. He'd always used kerosene lamps. He didn't worry about us using them even though the lamps were heavy to carry a lot of the time.

As far as bath water is concerned we used to have to heat up the water in the copper, carry it up these steps from the laundry. Just three or four little wooden steps and round into the bathroom and pour the bucket into the bath. Two or three buckets to fill it up. You had the weekly bath and you'd just have a wash in between times. I never not appreciate a hot shower, even now. People don't realise who have always been used to them. It's something I always still appreciate. The fact that you can get in and turn on the water and get under and have a nice hot shower and wash your hair or whatever you want to do.

We really thought Dad was doing a good job. [laughs] Well, I did. I don't know if my older sister felt it as much. I think she probably felt more responsible and feeling that she was the eldest, and although she didn't do a lot to look after us at least she was there. I think that she felt very much that she didn't have anybody there. And of course she was very close to my mother when she was alive and I think that would have affected her more. My father used to (even when I was very young) teach me,

you see. My mother used to teach my sister to sew, use the machine and my father – I was more or less left for him to do things for and I seemed to always get on well with him. I could always approach him and talk to him. The other kids were a bit scared to ask him because he'd be likely to bite your head off.

I felt very disadvantaged through my school days and I think my brothers and sisters felt the same. For one thing we just didn't have the things we needed for school because a lot of the time we wouldn't like to ask for them because we knew that Dad was short of money. Struggling to go to school without all the right clothes and books, and I know my sister [Doris] missed a lot of time. She went to Hornsby Domestic Science and she wouldn't go when it was cooking day because she just didn't have the things. She'd be told to bring certain things for cooking and she wouldn't ask for the money for them so she just didn't go. I managed to get enough things to keep me going. A lot of things I didn't ask for I'd do without them. But something I had to have I'd ask and of course because I was going to high school Dad would give me the money to get them.

He just made enough to scrape along

Dad had his own fuel business because he'd lost his job in the depression. He set up this wood, coal and coke type business which was very hard work. He

used to have a contract to clear paddocks out in Dural. He'd have the contract to clear a certain paddock and sometimes we used to go out with him in the school holidays. He had an old truck and we'd go out with him and stay for a week out there and other times he went for a couple of days during the week while school was on and we had to stay home, but we had somebody round about to check on us. He had a contract to clear all the trees, from places at Dural or Casula. Places that were out from the city at the time.

He'd fell the trees. Then he used to cut them up into logs up there. He had the circular saw in the yard at home, but I think he just did it with the axe up there. He felled them and then he had to cut them into logs. He had a contract to supply the baker's wood at a place in Parkes Street. That had to be cut very precisely into shaped logs to fit into the oven. They had to be packed in because you had to have really high heat to cook the bread. He used to bring it home in the old truck and we children used to sit on the back of the truck against the cab on top of the load of wood. [laughs] We weren't allowed to move. In fact once he had somebody in the cabin with him and this chap said, 'Oh the kids are standing up out there'. But it wasn't, it was just that our shadows looked long and he yelled out and I thought, 'Gee we would no more have been game to move and

stand up'. We sat there. He was strict that way. If he told us to sit there we wouldn't have moved.

He used to go over to Mortlake to get the coal and coke over in the ferry which was just across the river. It was very heavy work. The bags of coal were really heavy. He had his own weighing machine. He had orders from people around the district because most people had fuel stoves and fuel fires and he used to cut the wood and put it into bags and then he'd weigh it. It was ninety eight pounds for the wood. I think it was a hundredweight for the coal, just over a hundred. He used to have his own scales there and he'd weigh it. But the whole problem – it was only one shilling and sixpence a bag, the wood, but a lot of people couldn't afford to pay him, so he didn't collect a lot of the money that was owed to him. He certainly didn't make much money. He just made enough to scrape along and that was all. So he didn't really have much money to spare. He had to pay rent, having lost his other place. We lived in a few different places round the Ryde area then. The rent had to be the first thing. He used to pay that with the endowment cheque. Thirty shillings a fortnight I think it was and that was the rent money. It was twelve shillings and sixpence a week we had to pay.

He loved the musicals

He would have been very lonely. Just occasionally he would take himself into town. He loved the musicals. He didn't like the pictures or dancing or anything, but he'd go to see the Merry Widow. He took me a couple of times. He used to just take me for company I think. He took me to the Theatre Royal and the Tivoli a few times, when Roy Rene was on, and the comedians. He used to like the live shows, like Gladys Moncrief. So he took me a few times to see those, but it was only occasional. Roy Rene, Mo – he was what you went to the Tiv. to see. And there was another chap, George Wallace. He was good. And the dancing girls and those big statuesque girls. They used to stand there and not move, the girls. I think they were, were they nudes? Well, they might have had a bit of something on but not really fancy.

Sometimes he'd be away for the weekend and I'm not sure – I don't know if he had any other girlfriends. I don't think he could afford any. Occasionally he would be away for the night and I remember him coming home once and we kids were saying, 'I wonder where Dad is, when's he going to get home.'

And he said something like, 'Oh wouldn't you like to know' or something. [laughs]. You see he was only 36 when my mother died and had all us kids there and he did his best. She told him not to let anybody take any of the kids away.

Dad left us in charge of Nigger, the dog [laughs]. We had this black retriever. And he used to pad through the house every night and every morning to see that we were all in bed. Dad put a lot of faith in him. A lady gave Nigger to him, because she couldn't afford to pay the 1/6 for her bag of wood. And he was a wonderful dog. We had him right from when he was a tiny puppy.

He needed some help

Well, he was coping to a certain extent. But he needed some help. My younger sister says now our mother should never have asked him not to separate the kids. You see one of his sisters wanted to take my younger sister home with her. Because she knew she was a problem. My sister said she would have gone with her willingly, but Dad wouldn't let her go because he reckoned that his sister only wanted her there to do some work for her. My younger sister, she said (just to put it bluntly) she was neglected and I think she probably was. Although there were many families in poor circumstances at the time. Ivy felt that they were much worse off than most:

People who were working were still quite well off. I've got friends now that don't even remember the depression or didn't even notice it. If they worked in government jobs and if they had a job where they were getting paid (although the wages might have been reduced a

bit or something) they didn't notice any inconvenience. It was only if they were out of work or had jobs that were short of money.

My father worked so hard so he wouldn't have to go on welfare. But he also was never game to ask anyone for any help because in those days there weren't readily available things to help you and he was frightened that if he asked for any help they might just say, 'Well you know, you can't look after all these kids' and just take them. Which at least never happened to us. And I often think with all these sexual assault cases you hear of now. We were home on our own, us four kids, sometimes when Dad was away, when he hadn't got back from working, and he used to ask one of his mates to check on us, wake us up for school. We never ever had any problem with anything like that. I think my father's personality was so strong that nobody would have been game to touch us.

We did have that big orphanage, St. Brigid's orphanage, up there at Ryde. He was always probably thinking that's where they put children who don't have families. But nobody ever approached him and I don't think anybody would have reported him for anything he didn't do. Because he did look after us. We were all there and we were reasonably fed although sometimes not as well as we could have been, but we often must have looked pretty terrible. Our clothes

weren't in very good order or anything. But, I think people thought a lot of him as a person and they knew he was under difficulty. They knew our mother and that she'd died and he was just managing the best he could. Sometimes, you know, his sister would be down and then his mother used to come down but she wasn't a great deal of help with doing anything because she wasn't well enough. She had cancer and she had to come down to Prince Alfred Hospital and she'd stay with us. She died though when I was about 12. And that was a real blow, because, you know I don't think I realised so much what was happening when my mother died, but when Granny died, and she wasn't there any longer you really missed her, although she wasn't there all the time.

Sharing a house

After four years of 'more or less looking after ourselves', another family, old friends of Ern's from Wellington, came to live with the Johnsons. They stayed for several years.

Our father had known the woman when he was younger and she was very young. I think he used to look after her when she was a little girl. She used to come down quite a bit because her little boy had asthma and she had to take him over to the Mater [Hospital]. The little boy was in and out of hospital so much they all just lived with us. They had four

children so we were all packed into the house. Dad gave them his bedroom and he used to have a bed in the lounge room. I have his medals because at the time this family came to live with us I was afraid they would go astray. Because I was a very conscientious child I collected those and put them away. He hadn't gone and taken them when he took his other things out of the room. He didn't set much store by medals and things like that.

But he still made sure we had our rooms you know, because I was going to high school then and I had homework to do. He made sure that I had somewhere to do that and I had a desk and had things. Nobody of the other people was allowed to go into the room. We three girls had the room together and I think my brother just got tossed around with the rest of them. While she was there she did help organise the place a bit more and told us quite a few things. We could talk to her. So she was good in that way. She did help out with a few things like that, that you could talk about.

After completing primary school Ivy was one of only six students in her class who qualified to go Hornsby High School. Ern was very proud of his daughter's achievement:

Dad used to sit with me while I did my homework. I had a lot of homework. He made sure no one disturbed me while I did it. I'd sit at the table and he'd

sit. We did have an old radio but we didn't have it on much. It wasn't working a lot of the time. He used to just sit there and smoke, you know, smoked his pipe and watch me while I did the homework. I would just sit at the table and go through all this stuff, and when it got to 9 o'clock, he'd say, 'That's enough now, I've, time to go to bed'. Too bad if I hadn't finished it!

I asked Ivy if her father sometimes read a book or the newspaper while she did her homework. She explained the situation patiently:

We didn't get the paper every day. That's all money. In fact on a Sunday, there was a lady opposite and we used to run over to her place on the Monday morning. We were allowed to go over and she'd give us the comics. But he didn't buy the paper. Well, you save money on a lot of those things. You just didn't buy them. We didn't have any [free] local papers in those days. We didn't have libraries like the kids do now and we didn't have access to libraries. There were no libraries at the school. There was no public library and I used to always ask for a book as a present. We had a few books around but we didn't have a lot like you do these days. It's a wonder we got on as well as we did really.

I only had one dress

After completing the Intermediate Certificate Ivy left school, as most students did at that time.

I could have gone on but we were just scratching for enough money all the time for things, and I thought if I go on I won't have the money to get what I need for school and I won't have money to spend and also the work looked pretty hard. [laughs] My father wanted me to have a year at business college, he said. But then my friend, her uncle was the secretary who hired the people in this large company – Larke, Neeve and Carter, who were the Chevrolet distributors at the time in William Street. So he asked my father if I wanted to have an interview for this job that was vacant in the office. I went up to his place. I didn't have to go into town. I didn't have a big trauma with the interview. I just had to go up and he talked to me about it and he gave me the job. I didn't even need references or anything. I was very lucky. They needed somebody, and it's better for them, even these days, if they have somebody recommended to them. At that time, there were jobs but there weren't a lot of jobs and when they did advertise for anyone they would get a lot of replies. So I suppose they thought, 'Oh well they probably need the money'. So it was an easy way out in a way.

I remember my first pay. It was seventeen shillings. And I said to Dad,

'Can I keep all my pay this time to buy myself some clothes?' I only had one dress I could wear and it wasn't in real good condition.

And he said, 'Oh no, you've got to start paying board' and I gave him eight shillings out of the seventeen. I shouldn't have given him as much but I was sort of thinking, 'Well he's probably expecting that'. You sort of wanted to please him, you know. So I gave him the eight shillings. By the time I'd paid my two and six fares didn't leave me much to buy anything with, but at least I had a bit of money once I started work. I could gradually save up a bit. The lady down at the back whose daughter was a year older than me, she must have got sick of me going to work in this one dress all the time. She gave me three quite nice dresses belonging to her daughter and I used to wear those to work. I had these three dresses and I had this other old one and I think I just was happy to wear those for quite a while because I didn't have much, and you had other things to buy, stockings and underwear and sanitary pads and all these things.

We did all right

Although Ivy had secure employment her father's financial position was still precarious when war was declared in September 1939:

My father joined the services again. I think because it was probably a better

proposition financially for him. He was sent away. He went down to Bonegilla and that meant that we were at home, and I would have liked to have gone into the woman's army, but he said, 'Well you just tell people if they think you should do anything like that, that your father's in the army'. Well I couldn't go because at that time my sister [Doris] was married and they'd been living with us for several years, but at that stage she'd just gone to live in the country with her husband who was on the railways at that stage. I was the oldest one at home. I was only 19 and I was the oldest person at home then, with my sister and brother. My father allocated us some money and after a couple of years we got this letter to go in and see them and apparently he put me down as housekeeper. Because I was working he shouldn't have done that, and my other sister wasn't old enough to put her down. It had to be someone over 18. And even though I was only getting about £2 a week they said, 'Oh well, you can't do that'. They didn't make us pay back any money, but we didn't get the allocation after that and they said, 'Why did he do that?'

And I said, 'Well, we had to keep his home going'.

We weren't getting enough money because my younger sister wasn't working and my brother was still at school. So we had to give up that

amount of income, but luckily they didn't make us pay it back or anything. They understood what had happened. I think he just had to pay the rent with the money that he had and we kept the house going with my board money. If he was on leave he came home.

We did all right. We didn't worry. We managed all right. Actually my younger sister – she'd been a bit of a problem but she was quite good during that time. She used to look after the house and cook our dinner and things like that. She'd left school, but she wasn't working. I think she had been working. But jobs weren't all that plentiful at that time, until maybe after the war. Well, we weren't little kids. My brother was 15, so he'd have been all right. I think he just struggled on. He feels now, from talking to him, that he got pretty much of a raw deal when he was at school because he didn't have the things he needed either. But I feel as though I did as well as I could with the way things were.

Postscript

Ivy married Keith Williams in March 1946 in the West Ryde Methodist Church. For several years they rented flats and then in 1951 managed to buy the house in Hollis Avenue Eastwood where they still live today. Keith was in secure employment until his retirement. They paid off their mortgage and together raised their family in Eastwood.

Ivy had five children between 1949 and 1962. She, and the women of her generation, benefited not only from the healthy Australian economy of these years but also from improved pre and post-natal health care. Her experience was very different from her mother's. May, with her indifferent health, must have feared each pregnancy. Keith's life too, with its job security and steady mortgage payments, was quite different to Ernest Johnson's hand-to-mouth existence.

Ernest eventually had a home of his own at Emu Plains. This is where he was living when he died in 1974 at the age of 78. He had been a widower for 42 years, but he had kept his home going.

(1) Ernest was the son of a Danish migrant. His family name had been anglicised from Johanson

Daylight to Dusk: A History of Sydney's Italian Fruit Shops (1) – from the Australian Centre for Public History, UTS

Food and the localities in which it is grown, distributed, purchased and consumed are a fundamental part of a community's history. In Sydney the Italian community has been an integral part of this city's history through its fruit shops, delicatessens and restaurants.

The Australian Centre for Public History (ACPH) at The University of Technology, Sydney, is researching the history of Sydney's Italian fruit shops in collaboration with the Italian community group CoAsit. The title of the project, *Daylight to Dusk*, is how one veteran Sydney fruiterer, Tom Cincotta, describes the daily routine of fruit shop life.⁽²⁾ It also encapsulates the trajectory of this important part of Sydney's urban heritage and social history from its establishment in the late 1800s to its decline in the last twenty years

The project uses oral histories, heritage photographs and items of material culture to document the experiences of Italian fruiterer families. To date the project has collected over forty oral histories and 150 photographs. A seventy year old fruit barrow, wooden apple and citrus boxes, a 1960s Banana Board recipe book, a fruit shop masonite painting, leather aprons, a tomahawk axe and a diary written by a

fruiterer have also been located. The development of an archive, a radio program, a photographic exhibition and a pictorial history publication are the project's envisaged outcomes. Of importance in this endeavour is the involvement of the Italian community and fruiterer families. Public historians from the ACPH have trained volunteers in oral history techniques and the volunteers are instrumental in conducting interviews and providing access to Italian fruiterer family networks.

Diverse histories and localities

The stories of Sydney's Italian fruiterer families are characterised by complexity and diversity but they are also bound by common themes and narratives constructed around collective Italo-Australian memories. They criss-cross Sydney's suburbs from Bondi to Brookvale, Woolooware to Wetherill Park and are framed by nostalgia, gendered and cross-generational perspectives, aspirational middle-class values and resigned explanations of how 'the big supermarkets', ill-health and contemporary Australian lifestyles heralded the demise of the family fruit shop. The Italian fruit shop with its meticulously arranged fruit stacks and

window displays has become part of Sydney's suburban history and mythology. Many so-called fruit shops were in fact mixed businesses. They originally opened as fruit and vegetable shops but their enterprising owners quickly capitalized on a steady neighbourhood clientele, long opening hours and readily available family-based labour to diversify, combining grocery store and milk bar with fruit and vegetable shop. The romanticised image of the Italian fruiterer, complete with white apron, offering friendly customer service, has endured. Photographs of smiling fruiterer families, eager to present a picture of respectability, family unity and migrant success, belie the 18-hour days, physical labour, financial risks and familial and social sacrifices that had to be made for their shop full of dreams to succeed.(3)

Beginnings

Si lavorava tutta la giornata fino alle undici e mezzo di sera. La vita non era buona e la paca era trentacinque scellini la settimana. Era troppo poco ma non avevo cosa fare.(4)

I worked all day until 11:30 at night. Life was not good and the pay was 35 shillings per week. It was too little but what was I to do. By 1900 Sicilians and Italians from the Aeolian Islands had been well established in food production and distribution in Sydney as fruit and

vegetable shop proprietors, wholesale agents in the produce markets and as market gardeners. By the 1940s Italians had established market gardens in Wetherill Park, Liverpool, Fairfield, Brookvale, St Ives and Ryde and fruit orchards in the Marsfield area. From 1890 to 1940 over 25,000 Italians had arrived in Australia. Predominantly from agricultural backgrounds, many early arrivals, the majority of them young men, quickly established themselves in the fruit and vegetable industry. A desire for economic independence and advancement and the opportunity to work and live within community and compatriot networks was the impetus for establishing small businesses which could be operated with the skills and knowledge they already possessed. The fruit shop offered opportunities to attain a level of economic independence, social status and material well-being difficult to achieve in the areas of Italy from which they came. Once on their feet, the first generation of fruiterers used chain migration connections to sponsor family and compatriots to join them. The fruiterer family often provided lodgings, work (some well paid, some exploitative) and employment connections for new arrivals.

The first groups of Italians from the Aeolian Islands who established themselves in Sydney at the turn of the twentieth century had very different homeland and migration histories from the post World War II Italians from Calabria and Sicily. By the 1940s and 1950s many Italo-Australian fruiterer families were already in their third generation.

Changing tastes

Prior to the 1950s Italian fruiterers catered to their Australian clientele's culinary needs with lettuce, tomatoes, peas, beans, potatoes, carrots and other soup vegetables. Fruiterers purchased 'Italian' vegetables predominantly for their own family table with only the occasional fruiterer selling then-exotic vegetables and advising customers on how to cook them. With the influx of European migrants after WWII, particularly in the inner suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne, Italian fruiterers introduced eggplants, zucchini, garlic, broccoli, artichokes, endives, capsicums and peppers into their shops to cater for the growing demand from migrant families. From the 1950s and 1960s, young educated Australians travelled to Europe and, having acquired a taste for European cuisine, opened up a demand for Italian food in restaurants and delicatessens, a demand which flowed on to market

gardeners, produce markets and fruit shops.(5)

Localities of interconnection and exchange, Italian fruit shops were not only points of produce distribution. They functioned as sites of social, cultural and linguistic exchange. They were one of the first localities in which Italians and Australians interacted as retailer, consumer and neighbour. Women played a key role in this cross-cultural contact as recipes on how to cook with pasta, eggplant and garlic were exchanged for instructions on how to make a baked dinner. Advice was given on childcare, doctors, chemists and what the note from school in English said.

The Italian fruit shop was a site of family cohesion for long established and newly arrived Italo-Australians. Most members of the family worked in the fruit shop. Newly arrived family members and compatriots became part of the fruit shop's labour supply or independently established themselves in their own fruit shops, supported by family and compatriot networks. Many Italians saw the fruit shop as a haven where Italian and Catholic family values could be maintained through tight-knit social and economic networks and the constraints of fruit shop life. Family events such as christenings and birthdays were sometimes held in the

fruit shop after hours or on weekends. The fruit shop also functioned as a meeting place for future spouses where single Italian men met future wives in familiar social networks.

A man's world

The men's role in the fruit shop centred on preparing the fruit and vegetable displays and 'doing the market', where hard physical labour and knowledge of informal economic networks were required to negotiate the competitive wholesale markets. Prior to the 1960s fruiterers had little access to forklifts and other hydraulic technologies and they boast of their physical strength in hauling sacks of potatoes and banana boxes on their shoulders. The markets were also a point of social contact for the fruiterers as they played cards, drank coffee and exchanged jokes in an environment of Italian male camaraderie.

'Doing the market' is a key theme in fruit shop stories through which the fruiterer families validate the ethos of migrant industriousness and ingenuity in the face of adversity – the early morning drive to the fruit markets, the ordeal in finding parking and the backbreaking work in loading and unloading trucks. The truck in fruiterer stories is both a lifesaver and a curse. Its accompanying mechanical problems

are a constant affliction. However, as a symbol of entrepreneurial success, it represents access to technology and social standing unattainable in the socioeconomic conditions from which fruiterer families emigrated.

Working women

The wives of Italian fruiterers played a pivotal role in the fruit shop. They frame their memories around their roles as wives, mothers, business partners and guardians of family and cultural values. Their stories resemble juggling acts as they tell of stoic support for their husbands, raising children in a fruit shop, wrestling with the English language and always maintaining a spotless shop and an immaculate reputation for their business. Anecdotes are told with nostalgia and humour, food burning in the back kitchen while they served customers, managing the fruit shop in their husband's absence, cooking and washing for young Italian men who lived and worked with the family in the shop.

The giovane (6)

An important member of the fruit shop team was the giovane, the young male employee who took care of the heavier labouring tasks in the shop – hauling boxes and barrows, loading and unloading trucks, stacking fruit as well as serving customers. Many giovani married daughters or relatives of the

fruiterer family for whom they worked. Their apprenticeship in the fruit shop facilitated their own entry into the industry.

Children at work

Children were an integral part of the fruit shop. From as young as seven many learnt to serve in the shop, clean and tidy up. It was not uncommon for the children of fruiterers to do their homework at the back of the shop or have chores to do in the shop before and after school. Italo-Australian children, raised and educated in Australia, also played an important role as language brokers, especially for their mothers whose command of English was sometimes not as strong.

While many informants who grew up in fruit shops acknowledge the limitations the shop placed on their adolescent social lives, they also emphasize the interpersonal skills and informal business know-how with which the fruit shop provided them. For the adolescent Italo-Australian, coming from a fruit shop family was both an advantage and a social liability.

Dusk and new directions

After weathering such upheavals as the Great Depression, internment of non-naturalised Italian men and economic difficulties during World War II, the Italian fruit shop has been in decline for the past two decades. Changes in Australia's urban lifestyles and consumer patterns and the spread of shopping malls and supermarket chains coupled with the move of subsequent generations of Italo-Australians out of the fruit shops and into the professional classes has seen the demise of the Italian fruit shop. Some fruiterers made the transition from fruit shop proprietors to wholesale agents at Flemington Markets. Joe and Rocky Antico, born and bred in the fruit shop industry, are still known as the 'Grape Kings' and Tony Cremona of Cremona Bros was one of the first agents to introduce a storeroom and coolroom system to his patch in the produce markets.

Not all Italian fruit shops have disappeared. Those families for whom the fruit shop presented the best opportunities for prosperity kept their fruit shops, passing them on to the next generation or leasing them to other proprietors. The role of the Italian fruit shop in many neighbourhood economies has now been replaced by newer small business enterprises such as Vietnamese and Lebanese grocery stores.

Michael Lombardo's shop in Milson's Point (established by the Taranto family in the 1920s), Galluzzo's in Glebe Point Road (operated by the Galluzzo family since 1934) and the Homebush Fruit Bowl, owned by Frank and Antonia Siciliano since 1952, among many others, still proudly operate as fruit shops today.

Notes

(1) An earlier version of this article appeared in *Phanfare*, no 191, August 2002. The current article is based on a synthesis of the key motifs and narratives in the project's oral history collection.

(2) Tom Cincotta interviewed by Ouranita Karadimas, 17 July 2002.

(3) This term is borrowed from J. Collins et al, *A Shop Full of Dreams: Ethnic Small Business in Australia*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 1995.

(4) From the diary of Sydney fruiterer Giovanni Raffaele courtesy of Marie Raffaele – Mansour. This excerpt of Giovanni Raffaele's diary describes his early days as a carrier and fruit shop employee in Sydney in 1926.

(5) Sue McInerney, 'Fruitful links with Italian Culture', *UTS News*, November 2001, p.8.

(6) *Giovane* translates as 'young fellow, young man'. The plural is *giovani*.

'It's Different Here' – A Life in the West Kimberley, WA – Jan Henderson

Ann Jane was born in Derby Regional Hospital, WA, in 1947, and has lived in Derby most of her adult life. She was brought up on her father's cattle station at Mt Elizabeth, five hours along the Gibb River Road from the small town 2500 km north of Perth on the West Kimberley coast.

Family background

Ann's mother, Teresa Mary Bardwell, was born at Thangoo Station south of Broome in 1913. Her father, Frank Boswell Lacy, was born in Dunedin, New Zealand, in 1898. Frank was a Kimberley identity, and told his story in *The Rivers of Home*, published in the 1970s. Teresa 'left school at an early age,' Ann says, and 'was housekeeping for a local doctor in Broome. Then she did laundry work for the pearlers, and cooking as well at local hotels.' Frank was a contract musterer on the Murrانji stock route [from Newcastle Waters] in the Northern Territory and East Kimberley. 'He often took cattle into Broome to put on the boat, and they met there.' Teresa went to Derby and cooked at the Club Hotel. 'And things got serious. And dad liked her cooking and he proposed.' They married in 1943.

Ann had no contact with her maternal grandparents, who died when she was young. Her father's parents migrated to New Zealand from Ireland.

She remembers receiving photos of them, but never met them.

Ann remembers that Frank 'did just about everything,' including boring for water. He and Teresa lived in Broome 'for a little while,' and Ann's brother, Peter, was born there in 1945. At that time the authorities were encouraging Aborigines to come in from the bush. 'Leprosy was rife,' Ann explains, 'and starvation, as food was running out'. Missionaries set up 'feed lots', and Frank won the contract to move 500 head of cattle from the East Kimberley to Pantijan (Munja), on Walcott Inlet, in the West Kimberley. Ann says, 'He fell in love with the Hann River – with the lovely big gums, trees on the sandbanks, pandanus palms, and just the general beauty of the area.' In 1945 he took up the lease of Mt Elizabeth, 650,000 acres, to run 3-4000 cattle.

Growing up

At first, conditions were 'very basic with just lean – tos'. Then Frank built 'a lovely house of ant bed and rock with a thatched roof'. Due to the extremes of wet and dry weather, and because he and Ann were asthmatic, he replaced this with a corrugated iron roof after about six years. Although Peter Lacy built a new homestead in 1970, the old house is still standing, 'but the worse for wear, without anyone living in it for some time'.

'I had a beautiful childhood', Ann recalls. 'Different to now. No mod cons. An old pedal wireless operated with batteries. Royal Flying Doctor Service pedal radios. Tilly lamps, kerosene fridges, Coolgardie safe and flat irons.'

'There was never a dull moment'. They fished and swam with turtles and freshwater crocodiles in the Hann River, a couple of hundred metres down from the homestead. They carted water from the river in buckets on yokes, helped by Aboriginal women. Ann's mother grew vegetables and fruit trees. For meat, the family ate beef or goat.

They 'knew the bush really well'. Sunday was picnic day at the local gorge. Ann says, 'We just enjoyed life. We didn't think of living anywhere else'. Family holidays were beyond reach, but some years they came into Derby for Race Week. The trip took four to five days. For pets they had kangaroos and emus. Ann missed young company, but

she had two brothers to play with. And 'a lot of young Aboriginal people' they saw regularly. The girls worked in the garden, and the boys helped on the property.

Ann believes 'young people now wouldn't really comprehend' the enjoyment she had growing up. For example, most stations had goats. Due to 'terrible problems with dingos', they were locked up every night, milked first thing in the morning, then let go. Aboriginal women tailed the goats in the bush during the day. When Ann went along, with a bottle of water and lunch packed by her mother, the women showed her bush tucker such as plums and yams. Ann says, 'I probably took it for granted, but looking back now, I can really treasure those days.'

'A lot of "bush blacks" were coming in. We had two couples to start with at the station. They used to roam in those days from one station to another in their tribal area. They stayed from one to six months, then at the next station. They came in for tobacco and tucker. We taught them English. My mother made dresses out of flour bags, washed and dyed. They loved that. We all got on really well, and they were part of the family.'

School and nursing

When it came to schooling, 'My older sister, Mavis, my half – sister on dad's side, taught me for the first two years,' Ann says. For their primary school years she and Peter went to Halls Creek. Then Ann went south to Dongara, to the Dominican Ladies' College, for three years of high school. At fifteen she gained her junior certificate and left school.

Ann learnt to ride, 'but not a lot,' she says. 'My father didn't encourage me to go into men's areas and stockyards and branding jobs. That wasn't allowed unless my mother was with me. He was concerned about language and rough behaviour'. When home for school holidays during the wet season, she and Peter 'often had to ride back to Gibb River station, 20 miles [30km away], to catch the plane out'. Mt Elizabeth's airstrip was too small for the DC3s used for the mail rounds and picking up children for school.

'I hated it, of course, leaving home,' she continues, but 'it was quite an event'. They had to swim rivers. Mules carted their cases. 'It was ridiculous trying to keep them disciplined to keep on the track. They hated swimming. You'd see a case going down the river in a pack...it always sticks in my mind, having to ride

to school. We had to walk the horses over boggy patches. At the end of the day I had a sore bottom. We would leave home at eight am and take four to five hours to get to Gibb River, absolutely exhausted, and catch the plane next morning.'

'Not sure what to do' on leaving school, Ann returned to the station. Her older sister's marriage ended, and Frank and Teresa looked after her daughters. Ann 'governessed them for a couple of years'. She worked in Reception at Derby Hospital. The local matron was a friend of her father. When she returned to the station, the matron phoned to talk about nursing as a career. 'I jumped at it,' Ann says. 'It was always my wish.' At the end of her training in Perth she was a nurse's aide (enrolled nurse). Then, back to Derby for six month's probation, including three at the Leprosarium.

Marriage and family

Ann met Rick Jane in Perth. He found work as a mechanic in Derby, and they married in 1970. Ann gave up nursing in late 1971. Rick continued as a mechanic, then a truck driver. Derby Toyota, which incorporated a Shell outlet, came up for sale. They leased it for twelve months, then bought the agency, and held it for 27 years.

'We had our ups and downs,' says Ann. 'It was hard work, but we stuck with it and survived.' The Toyota agency's

premises contained a workshop and the Shell service station. 'As years went by, more service stations opened up.' Another service station bought the Shell agency in late 1989. Then, Ann says, 'We just had the Toyota franchise and workshop at the back. It grew so much. There was a demand for a bigger workshop, so we built new premises a couple of hundred yards down the road. We were there for about eight years.'

'We worked pretty hard, of course,' Ann says. 'Getting reliable staff was always a big issue. We tried to get locals. It wasn't always the right choice, but usually they were quite good. We had to advertise. People came from Perth, Sydney or Melbourne, even New Zealand. They usually only stayed two years, saw the Kimberley and then they were off. But we had a few loyal ones stay five to six years or longer...It was one of the biggest businesses in Derby, I suppose. We sold a lot of cars, new and used. We had a well set – up dealership. With new cars and new attachments and devices to service, we were always sending staff away to keep up with it.'

They closed Derby Toyota in 1997. 'We tried to sell it, but couldn't get the price we wanted. So we closed it down and the franchise went to Broome. We sold the premises to TAFE. They have a

building and the whole site now. Rick is quite relieved and a happier person. It was seven days a week, so he's got less stress.'

Their three daughters, Mandy, Lisa and Simone, were born in 1972, 1975 and 1977, respectively. They attended the Catholic school in Derby. 'Then they went south for the last five years, to a private college, Santa Maria, in Perth, boarding,' Ann says, 'We did quite well to educate them all. It cost a small fortune. All went to university. Now they all have careers and are doing very well.'

Ann's father died in 1985, her mother in 1997. Both are buried at Mt Elizabeth. Brother Peter, and his wife, Pat, run Mt Elizabeth with their son, Brett. A camping area caters for travellers along the Gibb River Road, and Pat has overnight accommodation in the homestead. 'She's booked out most of the year and is kept pretty busy.' Ann and Rick have an interest in Broome Toyota. In the dry season they run Bushtrack Safaris, mainly in the West Kimberley.

In the tourism industry

Ann says, 'We enjoy the safaris very much. It's for four to five months of the year. We average ten tours each year. We like six people minimum. The biggest group varies between thirty and forty. They come to Mt Elizabeth in a coach, and we transport them to Bachsten Creek [overland back towards the coast

from the station]. They have their own cooks and look after themselves. I do bread-making, and we assist if they are unfamiliar with the set-up. But regulars come with the group each year, and they know the set-up and surrounds.'

"Standard" tours last six days, to the Mitchell Plateau, or eight days, to the Bungie Bungles or Walcott Inlet via Bachsten Creek. However, business has developed to the point where itineraries can be tailored to suit special interests.

All trips depart from Derby, although tag alongs can join at Mt Elizabeth. It takes seven hours to reach the station from Derby. That's comfortably, calling into a couple of the gorges along the Gibb River Road. Then it takes two days to Bachsten Creek. A lot do land/sea content if they want to go on to Walcott Inlet and the Munja airstrip. We do the land trips, and quite often do swap-overs and fly-ins. That is, we put people on a plane and take another group coming in by plane.' Flying in or out of Munja can include a two – hour scenic flight over the Buccaneer Archipelago on the way to or from Broome.

Does Ann feel her upbringing at Mt Elizabeth underpins her safari activities? 'I suppose I take it for granted. That it's my life, and I don't see it as special, but people think it's pretty special. Life on the station was a wonderful

upbringing, and knowing about the different areas that we go to. Rick is always learning more and more about the bush and what it has to offer. He's interested in trees, the general outback wilderness.'

'There's a big difference now. Fires now seem to be a yearly occurrence. They're burning out the younger stuff, and the bush is changing. We don't see many reptiles, snakes or frill-necks. Just lizards or dingos. The bird life has dropped a hell of a lot.'

'The wet season has changed as well. The different watercourses are changing, the reliable deep water holes. We seem to have a more severe wet now. It starts in November, December, goes off and comes back in February, March, even into May, with terrific storms and floods that do a lot of damage. There's gradual rain between February and April. We used to have floods, but nowhere near as severe as now. It flooded in the old days at Mt Elizabeth. The river came up over the pig and chook pens. Often we would see pigs and chooks disappearing down the river. After the wet, the road [to Bachsten Creek] stays basically where it is now.' Ann, Rick and helpers go out a couple of weeks before the first tour and do up the roads and creek crossings.

'After the season ends Rick does a major overhaul of all vehicles. Then they are put away until the new season starts.' As for transport, 'in the old days

there were two personnel carriers. Also an ex-Army truck converted to carry tourists. It seated sixteen in bus seats and had a tarp over the top. People really loved that old truck. They were high above everything, and could see more than in a closed-in vehicle. Now we have an Oka that seats eight. People love that as well because of the height. We also have a troop carrier that seats six. They are all air conditioned and very comfortable.'

'Food for two weeks is quite difficult. I've got to really put on my thinking cap and keep a clear mind the whole time I'm shopping, or I forget things. Tents and swags are probably the easiest part. I've got it down to a fine art now. Lots and lots of things are needed. Sprays, mosquito repellants, pages and pages of shopping. Now it's all on computer, and we tick off as we go. It's a big help'. 'You never know what sort of diets or quantities people will eat. We usually bring some back, but it's better to have too much than not enough. I bake our own bread every couple of days and that goes down very well. Vegetables and fruit are wrapped in newspaper, and last up to three weeks, airing overnight and closing up during the day. So we are able to take fresh stuff right to the end.

Our longest trip is sixteen days. It takes us two days to get home. When we get back, we have to unpack. Everything is covered in dust and dirt and hand marks, so it all gets washed down and put away until the next trip. We usually like five to seven days between each tour, and use a day to unwind and relax. Otherwise we're not in the right frame of mind to start off a tour.' Groups have different interests. Ann says, 'Birdwatching is a very relaxed tour. From Derby to Bachsten Creek. We have a few acres leased there, with toilets and showers and a kitchen area with tables. We stay six days there. We do day trips every day or people wander off, through the rocks and hills. Bachsten Creek is one of only three areas in Australia where the black grass wren is found. But numbers are down. That's another thing affected since the fires every year.'

Tourists keen on fishing go on to Walcott Inlet. Ann says, 'It's quite pretty, but we only stay two days, as there are flies in the day, mozzies at night. There's no fresh water. There are saltwater crocs in the lakes. But the birdlife there is terrific. We do general sightseeing. It's a very beautiful track down to Walcott. Lots of gorges, rock formations. It's just the beauty of the country. And there's ancient rock art on the way.'

Life in Derby

Derby's population is around 5000. Ann worked for the Victorian Section of the Royal Flying Doctor Service there before it re-located to Perth, becoming Western Operations. Now she works part time at Derby Tourist Bureau between safaris and during the wet, when others are on holiday. 'I enjoy it very much,' she says. Ann has been in Derby's Meals on Wheels team for over thirty years, and the Ladies' Auxiliary at the hospital for almost twenty years.

She says, 'We love the north. We've made lovely friends and probably will go on living here. But every now and then I get a little bit disgruntled when we get back from holidays. Life here is just so hard compared with down south. With gardening, everything is against you – pests, plants, having to spray the lawn for cutworm, and one thing after another.'

Is life tougher in Derby? 'Oh, definitely, it is,' Ann says. 'But you learn to live with it, and it just becomes part of everyday living.' What's toughest? 'The heat and dust. The cost of goods with the freight added on. Although we've all got mod cons now like air conditioning, ceiling fans and things like that. But just trying to establish a garden is a big thing as well, continuously spraying for

bugs, and lots of fertilising. Fortunately we have a good water supply. We have our own bore for the garden, and the town water supply is very good as well.'

The sign at the Visitors' Centre proclaims "Welcome to Derby – It's Different". Ann Jane agrees. 'It's a nice place to be, and we wouldn't want to live anywhere else,' she says, particularly now that her grandchildren are there too. These days more and more visitors to the Kimberley use Derby as a gateway to the Gibb River Road and beyond. This memory biography provides a perspective of life in and around the town from one born and bred in that spectacular region of Australia.

Diary of Events



Executive meeting Dates for 2003

Members are welcome to attend the Management Committee meetings to be held at the State Library 5.30pm: 21 October and 25 November.

Next Seminar – 8 November,

The Professionals – and a practical seminar.

Noticeboard



Oral History Transcription Service

Professional transcriber. Reasonable rates. Contact Gabrielle Godard on Ph 9331 8864 Fax 9331 8863 karvan@bigpond.com Urgent work accommodated