

**VICTOR HARBOR ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, 'Beside the Seaside'
Interview with Aileen Gale on 10th June 2016, at Marapana Farm at Back Valley.**

(AG: We're now called *Pondyong Murray Grey Stud*.)

Interviewer: Sue West

Welcome Aileen and thank you for being interviewed. Can you tell me a little about your parents?

AG: My father was Alf and my mother was Doris Bateson; and my Dad worked in the Railways at Port Lincoln. What else do we need?

You were born over there, Aileen?

AG: I was born at Port Lincoln in 1930 and had a very happy childhood; at the beach more often than not after school. Wonderful! We lived fairly close to what we called 'the scrub' and we had a wonderful time in the scrub with my friends playing, we'd make cubbies, and one of the most important things we used were the sarsaparilla plant, or it's now hardenbergia. That grew prolifically right throughout the scrub.

Your Dad worked with the payroll?

AG: Yes, that's right. He used to go up the coast, up the Eyre Peninsula, yes. Pay Clerk you would call him, yes.

He had to have a firearm on him did he?

AG: Yes, he did. He had a little pistol which we had in the home but after Dad had died we disposed of that.

Can you remember your grandparents?

AG: Yes. My grandmother was Isabella and my mother's mother was Hoad. I'm just trying to remember her Christian name. I didn't know her very well because she had died when I was very tiny. Grandma Bateson, we had a lot to do with her, she used to visit frequently.

They lived on a farm at Mypolonga?

AG: Yes they had a dairy farm. It was on the River and of course, milked cows. I think they got about tuppence (two pennies) for their litre (two pints) of milk. Probably a gallon of milk in those days.

Yes it would have been a gallon. Your Mum worked for a doctor?

AG: Yes in Murray Bridge. That's how she met my Dad. He would have been in the Railways there and then when they married they shifted to Port Lincoln.

Then you were in Grade Six?

AG: Yes and we shifted to Adelaide and Dad worked in the Adelaide Railway Office; yes, that's when I met Max, my husband.

You were telling me about Max' father.

AG: Yes, he had a milk round, he used to deliver milk right through Colonel Light Gardens and when Max was in Grade Seven he had a nasty accident. Early morning, he ran into a train on the Mitcham line and one train went through and he was caught with the one coming the other way.

Nanna continued with the milk round with staff and Max had to help a lot when he was still at school.

So you both, independently, had experience of dairying?

AG: Definitely!

And milk rounds.

AG: And milk rounds, yes.

Tell me about after you were married.

AG: We had a grocery business and then things were becoming very difficult in the grocery business but Max had always planned to perhaps work in the shop for ten years, sell it and then buy a farm. We bought the farm, one holiday at Port Elliot and we saw the little farm at Back Valley and fell in love with it immediately. It belonged to Prescott Sinclair. It was one hundred acres and we bought the farm and eighteen cows. Of course, eighteen cows wasn't enough to pay your mortgage and raise a family of four children so we had to very quickly buy more stock and that's when we started our *Marapana* Jersey Stud; we bought Jersey cows.

Why Jerseys in particular?

AG: They're an economical breed, they're small, you can run more stock on your property compared to the bigger breeds. They have good rich milk and they live a long time. They are a much longer-lived breed than the European stock.

What would be about the average age for milking?

AG: We were softies and we would keep our old cows. We had a geriatric ward and they were about twenty years old. You'd milk them in the dairy, probably ten years, maybe a little bit longer; that's economically.

I had no idea they that were more productive for longer than other breeds.

That's good. The initial piece of land, looking out your beautiful lounge-room window was actually across the road from where your farm is now?

AG: That's right. Then we purchased 1125 acres across the road from John Warwick and John died after we had processed all the legal papers and we shifted over to the farm, probably in the early seventies. I didn't say we'd come to the farm in 1964, to *Marapana*. We shifted our cows, we did an old dairy up on *Pondyong* and that's why *Pondyong* had been named previously to the Warwicks because it had been owned by Mrs Cakebread and that was named *Pondyong* so we continued the name.

Cakebread's another old Victor Harbor name.

AG: An old Victor Harbor name.

My understanding is that they are also related to the Rumbelows and the Shannons.

AG: Yes, that's right, that's right. Yes, yes. Her Dad, Mrs Cakebread was a Warland and her father was, at one stage, a Lord Mayor of Victor Harbor.

Would that be Albert Warland perhaps? There was a Warland Ward at the Hospital and a Battye Ward.

AG: Yes, yes. Our neighbours are Battyes although they've sold now.

You said there were eighteen milkers but it barely paid the interest on your bank loan.

AG That's right. It ended up, milking on an average, eighty Jersey Stud stock and we showed at the local Shows and at Royal Adelaide.

You had four children?

AG: Yes, four children. They all helped on the farm and we bought a milk round which helped with getting a better income from your milk and we sold milk to the local residents of Victor Harbor and the shops and there were a couple of delicatessens and they bought whole milk and sold a lot of milk shakes.

I bet they were delicious too.

AG: They were, very rich, yes, very rich. Yes, the children used to sell the milk in the caravan parks, specially in the school holidays and at the weekends. A great favourite was our flavoured milk; chocolate and raspberry, or was it strawberry? Probably both. I used to make up the mixture with the cordial, not cordial, with special flavouring that we bought from Anchor Products, I think it was. I made that up in the kitchen. And cartons. We had cartooning machine and on the cartooning machine was *Marapana Farm*, whole milk.

They talk about Fleurieu Milk now and producing it and on-selling their own product. You were quite ahead of your time weren't you if you were doing that in the seventies?

AG: In the seventies, yes, late sixties early seventies.

And the surfers I believe liked your...

AG: They loved the flavoured milk, yes. We had a great sale for flavoured milk in the caravan parks.

How long did you continue with the milk round?

AG: We sold the milk round when we bought *Pondyong* because we couldn't manage both. It was a decision either to sell the milk round or to continue dairying so we decided, as a family, to continue the dairying. It was a better lifestyle for the children than having holiday people, such a busy life trying to keep up with the production to supply the holiday people.

That would have been mainly Christmas holiday-makers? Or all times of the year?

AG: Every holiday, yes. Easter time specifically, yes, and Christmas holidays. All the holiday periods, long weekends.

How was the town of Victor different now to how it was then?

AG: All the main businesses were in Ocean Street and traffic wasn't so heavy and Harbor Traders wasn't there. Much quieter, much friendlier, yes.

Just checking battery and brief stop.

Just continuing from the battery change.

Aileen I first met you when I started Community Nursing. You were the first District Nurse in 1974. We'll talk about that in a minute. Tell me a bit about your training, where you trained.

AG: I trained at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, three years there and then I went to the Queen Victoria Hospital and did my Midwifery and then from there I went up to Mount Barker for twelve months and worked at the hospital at Mt Barker until I married.

You were telling me about a few things. I was always under the impression that the nurses, when they lived in residence, lived on-site at the Royal Adelaide.

AG: Yes, exactly. We had several areas that we lived. We used to shift around frequently. The Nurses' Home wasn't large enough for all the staff but first of all we started in the basement of the old home on the corner of Frome Road and North Terrace. Then we had, opposite that was another old home that was next to a ballroom and I can't remember the name of that place.

Was that Ayres House?

AG: No, that was next; there was another two-storey building, and then alongside that was Ayres House and we used to sleep, on night duty, we slept on the floor of the ballroom in Ayres House. (Chuckle). Then there were more cottages, two-storey cottages next door to Ayres House and that was before you got to the Botanical Hotel. There were several units there that we slept in, upstairs and downstairs. Night duty, we used to have a bus that took us out to Eden Park, another old home and that was our night duty quarters. Then the bus would take us in ready for work at ten o'clock at night.

Then take you back in the morning by bus.

AG: Then take us back by bus. But all staff lived in the Nursing Home; no-one lived out.

Your training then was how many years?

AG: Three years at the Royal Adelaide, twelve months at Queen Vic.

You worked then at South Coast Hospital for a while?

AG: Yes, when we came down to Victor Harbor and bought the farm, the South Coast was short of staff and I used to relieve the Night Sister, Sister Daniels, two nights a week and then I'd fill in day shifts when they were short and needed staff.

So you were doing Night Duty, you were running a dairy, you had a milk round and you were raising four children.

AG: That's right.

How on earth did you do all that?

AG: You managed, you managed, you had to. (Chuckles)

In 1974 you started District Nursing.

AG: Started District Nursing, yes. That was a full-time job. It wasn't very long after I started that Marg White joined me. Now what month did we start? Can you remember, you probably remember. No, no. It was towards the end of '64, '74 that Marg joined the staff and there were two of us, for quite some time; but the rounds then increased and staff were employed as was needed.

I distinctly remember, I think we should put this down for posterity, that day out on the Yankalilla road.

AG: Going to Yankalilla, yes.

Aileen and I were working together that day and I'll let you take over the story.

AG: Well I think you know better than I do, I think you were more observant than I was. I was too busy watching.

Suffice to say we nearly had a head-on collision with a car coming in to Yankalilla as we were heading out to do our rounds in Yank. If it wasn't for Aileen's good driving we'd have both been dead. Actually, there probably would have been three of us dead I think. It was a very close call. I'm forever indebted for your good driving.

AG: It was a dangerous road. Still is, still is.

Yes, yes.

AG: It's not improved at all I don't think.

Back in 1974 when you were out on the cars though, the Range Road would have been unsealed.

AG: That was a very dangerous road. There was a lot of loose surface.

And did the rounds then still go right to Cape Jervis?

AG: Yes, yes we did. I had a daily patient at Cape Jervis at one stage, for quite some time, yes.

Were you working full-time then?

AG: Yes, full-time, yes. Of course we had weekend work as well. (-----indistinct).

We saw a lot of people, a lot of lovely people didn't we?

AG: Wonderful. It was a privilege to nurse the older residents. Families such as mentioned, the Rumbelows, the Shannons, all those lovely old people. It was an absolute privilege to nurse them. Yes.

Yes, yes. We have a fund-raising Branch now that we're on.

AG: Yes, yes and they're very helpful. They supply the nurses with all the needs of the residents of Victor. Things that they can't get through the Head Office Branch.

Yes. All retired nurses seem to end up on this Branch.

AG: Yes, we expect them to join us, yes.

What year did you retire Aileen?

AG: I'm just trying to think. It would be in the nineties; yes, '90 it would have been, yes. I'm just trying to think how old I was. You have to retire at sixty and I'm now eighty-six so that would be right wouldn't it?

Yes. How is the farm being run at the moment?

AG: At the moment we're running about one hundred and thirty stud Murray Grey beef cattle. When my husband died we tried to run with staff but it just didn't work. It was very difficult to get really good staff so we sold our milking cows. We had a Sale, sold our milking cows and kept a nucleus of them to breed from originally but eventually changed over to Murray Greys. My son Peter comes to the farm every Saturday to do the farm work. He organises the breeding and the mating and the sale etc of the stock.

Do you still have poddies to hand-raise?

AG: Don't now. Occasionally you'll get a poddy where a mum won't for some reason or perhaps even die calving but that doesn't happen very often. Occasionally you'll get a poddy calf that you'll rear. We don't bring them in, we don't bring stock in, no.

Generally the Murray Greys are good mums?

AG: Good mums, they're quiet, they're good breeders and easy calvers.

Right. Now I know you said that the Warwicks, that you bought this piece of land from, had connections up north.

AG: Yes, they had Holowiliena Station in the Flinders Ranges and they bought this property mainly to finish off their stock from the drier area and finish them off in a greener pasture for sale. Yes.

Tell me a bit about your children; you said you have four children.

AG: Catherine and Mary-Anne, are both teachers; they're both teacher/linguists. Catherine's working at an Aboriginal school in Melbourne. Mary-Anne works with the Ngarrindjeri people down here at Victor Harbor and she does all the translating of their and teaching the language. Now it is managed by the Aboriginal people themselves but she still comes down here on a weekly basis and has rooms at both Victor Harbor High School and at Goolwa school.

Peter, he is a lecturer at UniSA and he lectures in Aboriginal Studies and so they're all involved in Aboriginal teaching and students.

Paul, who was Aboriginal, we adopted Paul in '61, he was what they classed as a 'hard to adopt' child because of illness but he died last year at fifty-four.

So he was in hospital?

AG: Yes, he was at the Brighton Babies' Home and he wasn't able to go back to his people due to ill-health.

Due to ill-health and you being a nurse?

AG: Yes. He was on special feed and also he had a chest problem and we reared him the first year, winter year, in our lounge room with a kerosene heater with a kettle on. I'd sit in a lounge chair with an umbrella and nursed him; he got through the first winter. Then he was fine. But he had suffered from ill-health.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

AG: Yes. Paul had two boys, Clifford and Desmond and they were both reared as small children on the farm. Their mother died with a cerebral haemorrhage and Desmond particularly, stayed on the farm until he was about twenty-six. He did work on the horse tram for a period of time but due to it being hard to get work down here he eventually went back to his biological home on Melville Island and he's working there now with his partner and little girl.

OK. I think I remember him when he was little.

AG: He was tiny; he had a very, very happy childhood on the farm; he loved it. Yes.

The children were schooled at?

AG: At Victor Harbor. All of our children except Peter, the girls went to Victor Harbor High, Peter went to Urrbrae because he always wanted to farm and Paul went to Victor Harbor High but his two boys, they went to Westminster School because we felt that, we being older and they being young people, it was better for them to have a boarding-school experience and they were at Westminster for five years from Year 7 to 12.

Any other stories about the farm; things that stand out, memories, or about Victor being a seaside town?

AG: Yes. Well the children had a very happy childhood on the farm. They didn't look to go in to Victor so very much. They all played sport; they played basketball for the Church. They played football for Encounter Bay, Peter did. Peter being small found he got a lot of injuries so he ventured into umpiring and he did that for several years in the Southern Districts, umpiring.

Paul was very happy here, he was very much a farm boy.

We're on the corner of Back Valley Road and Tugwell Road, if we shoot down through Tugwell Road to Victor we're what, about ten or eleven kilometres from there?

AG: It's about eleven ks.

And if we go round the other way along the main road?

AG: It's about the same.

It's about the same, right? Can you tell me perhaps about Back Valley?

AG: The district?

It's quite a unique geographical area. How it was when you first came here and the land use, and compared to how that is now.

AG: When we came to the Valley there were eighteen dairy farms. There is now one functioning. Yes, only one functioning in the Valley. Crompton's has sold now.

Is that Kirk's, the only one left?

AG: Kirk's is the only dairy farm left. That's a very sad story the dairy industry in South Australia. Any state; very difficult.

I think even when I moved here thirty years ago there were dairies up on Range Road and down Pannozzo's.

AG: Yes, yes.

You could list them off but they're all shut now.

AG: Yes, that's right. All the dairies, not all of them, quite a lot of the dairy-farmers, to get on their feet, they worked at AMSCOL's, the cheese factory, which is now the Lutheran Centre on the main Adelaide Road. I think nearly all our neighbours worked in the spring-time on the cheese. That was to get in extra money for their properties.

So when I think of AMSCOL I naturally think of ice-cream because I remember it coming in a sort of rounded but square tin.

AG: Yes, yes.

But the AMSCOL factory here dealt with?

AG: Made cheese.

Made cheese.

AG: Made cheese, that's right. There was more milk they say that came out of the Valley than the whole of the district, so we were told.

Right. That's quite significant isn't it?

AG: Well a lot of farms, a lot of farms, yes, yes. All dairies.

And when you think along this road what was the breakdown with Jerseys compared to Friesians?

AG: In the early days I would say would be half and half but now I think you could say they were all Friesian or Holsteins. Yes. There's only one dairy now.

I wonder how many head you'd need to run in a herd now to be viable?

AG: Probably getting in to the six hundreds.

Really.

AG: Mulherns at the back are milking about six hundred I believe. You could make a good living with eighty cows but as the years went by you had to increase your herd numbers. Probably it would all be about an average of over a hundred cows, the average but now you'd have to have many more.

What about your Show days? That must have been an incredible experience.

AG: Yes, yes. We showed at Yankalilla, Port Elliot, McLaren Vale, Murray Bridge, Strathalbyn and the Royal.

That's quite a circuit.

AG: Yep. In the Show season in the spring you'd have a Show most weekends. That was interesting because you weren't really competing, well I suppose you were competing amongst your friends, but you were also very friendly and you learnt a lot. You learnt a lot about your breed, you learnt a lot about the availability of stock. You didn't have many sales for bulls; most people used artificial insemination, so things have changed. When we first started you only had your bulls, you all bred with a bull but not very long after that we used artificial insemination. Beef cattle use bulls still.

I believe one of your grand-daughters is a vet?

AG: Yes, Jemima's a vet. She's just writing up a thesis now for her, it would be like an Honours year I suppose. She did that at Healesville in Victoria because she's very interested in native animals. She's been very successful in her vet work; she worked with a vet in Darwin, so she's had experience with other animals, snakes (chuckles), crocodiles and she would like to do her PhD and she would like to find someone who would be able to do her supervising. She wants to work and find a solution, a biological solution, hopefully, on cats, wild cats. Whether that will happen I don't know but she's well on the way.

Is there much of a feral cat problem out in the Valley?

AG: Yes, we do have them. People dump their kittens, they grow and they're wild and they're very hard to catch or to trap; they're very cunning. Jemima's always worked on her, any spare time she has, on holidays, Communities looking after the dogs of the Communities particularly. De-sexing and treating them for mange and all the other things that they have. Also one of the other things she has done is to work at Kakadu trying to trap cats and I'm trying to think of one of the stories she's telling me. They were out for ten days, I don't know how many traps they set and they caught one kitten.

They're very wily then.

AG: They're very, very clever; uncannily clever and they're big animals and they do a lot of damage, a lot of damage. Pity the cane toads don't poison the cats! You never know.

That would be a good biological control.

AG: Yes, yes.

Just looking at the rain falling out there now.

AG: It's wonderful.

It's wonderful indeed.

AG: It's forecast for a wet winter and a wet spring and we need it because the dams aren't anywhere near half capacity. We've had very dry seasons.

That just has me thinking back to when you moved here. How would you say the weather patterns, have you noticed a change in weather patterns?

AG: Definitely, definitely. When we first came here we had heavy rains. I just can't tell you what rains we had but I reckon it would have been about 1600 mls a year.

Really?

AG: Yes and it's gone down. You mainly notice every year in the early years, the Back Valley creek would overflow a couple of times but I can't remember it overflowing in the last couple of years. The rainfall has gone down tremendously.

The Back Valley creek is spring-fed?

AG: Yes lots of it would be, there would be a good few springs, yes, I'm sure it would be, yes. I definitely feel we're noticing the climate change. It's hotter, I think it's even colder and certainly less rain.

Yes. And what about bushfires Aileen?

AG: We've been very, very fortunate, we've only had one bushfire since we've been here and that was due to negligence. One of the neighbours started a fire to burn off some stubble on a nasty day so that was well under control before it did much damage. We've got a good fire brigade.

Any other major changes that you can think of in the Valley?

AG: We've still got a school bus but the school bus, in our time has always been full but it's slackening off now. Not so many younger families are shifting in to the Valley.

Having said that though, is there a bit of a change in land use from larger properties to smaller acreages and therefore more homes?

AG: Yes. There are a few. You can't divide properties off now but there is, I only heard yesterday that one small property of Crompton's has been sold but it would have had its own title I would say. We've got two bed and breakfasts have just begun. One's not building yet; got a permit to build. The other one's up and functioning and been quite busy in the Valley.

That's quite a different land use then.

AG: Yes.

It's a beautiful valley isn't it?

AG: Small properties sell easier I think, yes. The young people who've been grown up in the Valley since the '60s I suppose have done quite well, academically. The school bus used to call it the Backward Valley but I've lost touch with the number of PhD students we've raised from this Valley. They've done extremely well, yes. We've got a couple of vets besides Mary and Jemima. One of the Warwick children is a vet, Steph. They've all done quite well academically.

Must be the fresh air!

AG: And determination and study. Yep. I can't think of anything else to tell you. I think there are more older people settling, their way of life now; people want to get away from the city.

Thank you Aileen.

AG: My pleasure!

We've been having a visit from Star, your beautiful dog, so thank you very much for your time today Aileen. Thank you very much.

AG: My pleasure Sue. Would you like another cuppa, the kettle's there if you'd like it!

No thanks!