

VICTOR HARBOR ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, 'Beside the Seaside'

Interview with Carlene Farmer on 22nd August 2014

Interviewer: Heather Watkins

Carlene, thank you so much for your willingness to be part of the Oral History Project. I understand you were born in Victor Harbor. Can you give me details concerning your birth?

CF: I was born at the South Coast District Hospital in 1932. The hospital was fairly new then. It's on Bay Road. My father and mother lived on a farm at Inman Valley at the time on Sawpit Road. They had sheep and Dad cut wood and brought it in to the guesthouses to sell. He had an old truck called a Burleigh A truck and it had solid rubber wheels on it. I can remember the saw bench and not being allowed to get out near that when I was little.

What were your parents' names?

CF: My Dad's name was Erskine Ernest Anderson who was known as Erk and my Mother's name was Dora nee Wilson. They both lived in Mt Barker and came down to Inman Valley after they were married.

Do you remember what year they were married?

CF: Yes, 1931.

Was there other produce they brought in to town? You mentioned the wood.

CF: Yes, Dad and Mum milked cows by hand and he churned the milk into cream and made butter and he brought the butter in to the grocery stores in Victor, to Stan Bruce's shop and to Bell's Stores. They even had their own butter paper with their name on it to put the pounds of butter in.

After your birth, which you probably don't remember much about, what are your earliest recollections of family life in Victor Harbor?

CF: Originally I can remember being on that farm and Dad would carry me in a potato bag on his back, back from the dairy to the house when it was raining. (chuckles). I can also remember waking up in the morning and getting out of bed and a whistle; I had a whistle beside the bed and I would go out to the back door and blow the whistle and then Mum could come back from the dairy and attend to me. A bit primitive!

Did you have younger brothers and sisters living on the farm at that stage?

CF: No my brother was born eleven years later when we lived at Mt Compass.

When did you move to Mt Compass?

CF: We moved to Mt Compass, first to Flaxley near Mt Barker and then we moved to Mt Compass in 1939.

Was there a reason you moved to Mt Compass from Flaxley?

CF: Yes, we'd been involved in a very bad car accident when we were living at Flaxley and my Dad had to raise money to fight the Court case so he sold the farm and leased it back for awhile. Eventually we bought land at Mt Compass and we lived there for eleven years.

Were you involved at all with the 1939 bushfires in the Flaxley/Macclesfield area?

CF: Yes, that fire went right round our house; luckily it was a reasonably new brick home and we stood by the kitchen window and saw the blaze go straight past. It was very, very hot. We didn't have any stock on the

property at the time so we didn't lose any stock but there were a lot of homes burnt around Macclesfield area and a lot of stock lost.

After you moved to Mt Compass, you told me on a previous occasion, you had holidays in Victor Harbor. How did you travel to Victor; what sort of vehicles did you come in; how often did you come; were you well-to-do people that you could come to Victor Harbor to holiday?

CF: No, we did have a Vauxhall car and an old buckboard on the farm but the Misses McNamara ran "*Seaforth*" Guesthouse in Ocean Street which was where the telephone exchange is now. They were Dad's cousins so we could come to them for presumably a cheap holiday perhaps a week once now and again. They originally ran it as a full guesthouse but in later years they let the rooms and you had a table in the dining-room and use of the kitchen so you provided your own meals.

It was a beautiful old home, it had a tiled verandah and the doors all had porcelain doorknobs with flowers painted on them and you walked into this huge passageway down the middle; it was so cool in the summer. They had louvred shutters on the windows and I suppose it would have been about five bedrooms and of course the toilets were out the back. The bathroom was off the back verandah so everyone had to share that. We had some nice holidays there.

What else can you tell me about that? Did you only come for summer holidays or was it during the winter as well?

CF: Only in the summer. Dad used to, we didn't have green feed for the cattle at all in the summer so he dried the cows off and that's when we had our holidays.

So your Dad came with you on holidays?

CF: Yes, occasionally.

Is there anything in particular you remember about Victor Harbor at that time? Were there any special events or special things that happened?

CF: In my childhood?

Yes.

CF: I can remember going out to Granite Island; on New Year's Day they always had boat races out on Granite Island so we'd have to walk across the causeway, and being a child it got a bit boring I think at times.

Do you recall what Ocean Street looked like at that time? You were obviously staying in the guesthouse.

CF: There were two other grocers in Ocean Street and Shannons had a department store there, *The Central* guesthouse was a beautiful three-storeyed white building where the Westpac Bank is. There were several cafes; the buildings haven't changed a lot in position.

Those that are still standing.

CF: Yes.

Tell me about the little kiosk at the end of the train line that you mentioned earlier.

CF: Yes it was just in front of the whale museum, not the whale museum, the ordinary museum. Flinders Parade was a dead end just at that spot; you didn't cross the railway line. There was a little kiosk there that sold icecreams and various other things including trays of tea and coffee and scones so you could go and buy a tray with a pot of tea and cups and everything and take it out onto the lawns and sit down there and have your afternoon tea.

So it wasn't "take away" cups?

CF: No, china cups.

You did your primary schooling at Mt Compass.

CF: Yes, primary schooling at Mt Compass and when I finished Grade Seven it was time for six of us to come to High School. My Dad was Secretary of the School Council up there and he approached Mr Abbott who owned the buses, the school buses and he got Abbotts to come out and pick us up so our first school bus was a little black limousine with pull down seats in the back for five or six of us. They'd come out and pick us up every morning and bring us home at night.

How many years schooling did you do at Victor Harbor?

CF: Only three.

Where was the High School at that stage?

CF: The High School was the main brick building that is there today but there were two other portable buildings there then. There was a tennis court out on the side and we used the Oval for hockey and vigaro and cricket and Sports Days.

What's vigaro?

CF: It's ladies cricket! (chuckles). Played with an unusual shaped bat.

I've not heard of that before. What years were at High School at Victor Harbor?

CF: 1945, '46 and '47.

At the end of that time?

CF: I had a little brother by then and I went home to work on the farm for a couple of years. Eventually Dad sold the farm and we came back to Victor to live permanently. During the time at Mt Compass in my teens, we used to go to all the dances around the place. A lot of money was raised for the War effort during those years.

During the time you were at Mt Compass you came in to Victor to the dances during the War?

CF: Yes, to the Balls and the Saturday night dances in the Town Hall.

Did you come in with your parents?

CF: Sometimes. Sometimes it would be with three or four young ones together in a car.

Tell me about the dances.

CF: Mrs Fisher was the pianist, she had a wonderful dance band. Her husband played the drums and Arthur Hurrell played the big string bass. All the Balls finished at one o'clock and the Saturday night dances finished at midnight. They were well attended; they were great. We had long gowns and then later on ballerina length dresses came into fashion and every year there was a Debutante Ball. They were really lovely happy days.

Some of that was happening during the War years; were they fundraisers for anything specific?

CF: Most of the money raised in those days went to the War effort I think; particularly the monthly dances they had in Mt Compass in the little Hall.

You also mentioned the Ozone picture theatre in Ocean Street.

CF: That was a beautiful theatre; lovely Saturday nights when there would be queues at the ticket office. The queues would be out the door and around Bell's corner and down to the RSL for a big film like "*Gone with the Wind*" or something. Of course you could book up ahead too. The carpet in the theatre then was black and white – all the Ozone Theatres had the same black and white zebra-type carpets. It was all very glamorous to me!

You sound as though you enjoyed going to the movies and going to dances and Balls. You also mentioned about New Year's Eves.

CF: Yes, people would come out to the games area where the hurdy-gurdy and things were and then they'd all fill in to Ocean Street. At midnight the Mayor would stand up on the balcony of *The Central* and address the people and give them a New Year's Eve message. It was very happy and exciting times really.

How much of the street was filled on occasions like that?

CF: The whole street, you couldn't move in it.

We think our Christmas Parade gets a few people but that sounds like a lot of people. What other activities happened around town? Things on the Island during holiday time? Boat races?

CF: On Granite Island? I don't remember much about anything there except the boat-racing but I think that during the War that all stopped. We did have, when I was at High School, we did have a visit from the submarine called the Vox. That was moored at the Screwpile Jetty on Granite Island.

This was during the War?

CF: Yes. It would have been in 1945 or '46 I suppose; '45 I guess. The Vox was moored there; it was a small submarine and the whole school, the whole one hundred and forty-four of us walked from the High School out to Granite Island. We all had a tour of the Vox and even the schools from Strathalbyn came down by bus to look over this submarine so that was really something!

It certainly was.

CF: No lessons!

You also mentioned to me about an excursion, a school trip to Adelaide.

CF: That was, again, the whole school went to Adelaide by train, which was a four hour trip each way in those days. The purpose of the trip was for every child to have an X-ray for TB, to see if we had TB or not. Luckily we didn't but it was a great day out. We went to the Museum after we'd had the X-ray. Those of us who lived out of the town had to stay in overnight and be billeted with a friend because the train went too early for the school bus to get in.

So a four hour trip to Adelaide and four hours back is a long day in itself.

CF: Yes.

Plus having X-rays, plus going to the Museum. That was quite a school excursion.

CF: That was a really good excursion.

Continuing with schooldays, did you play any sport during that period?

CF: Yes, at High School I played basketball, it was called basketball in those days, it's now called netball. We had a good team and sometimes we would go to Strathalbyn or other schools for Interschool Sports Days or there would be an Interschool Sports Day on our Oval here at Victor Harbor. I went in running races. We didn't have organised tennis or anything in those days; it was wartime.

You played as part of a school team?

CF: Yes. After I left school I joined the Old Scholar's Basketball team and we won the premiership the two years that I played for it. I was a goalie.

That was just after the War?

CF: Yes.

When you left school you worked for a couple of years on the farm.

CF: Yes then came back to Victor Harbor to live and that's when I joined the Old Scholars' basketball team.

Were you working then?

CF: Yes I had a job in the office at Toop Motors for two years and then I married and went to Naracoorte for twenty-seven years. My husband had an electrical business there and then we went on to a farm and in 1980 we came back to Victor, so we've seen a lot of changes since then even. We've even got traffic lights and roundabouts.

We've gone from horses to very fast cars.

CF: That's right! My husband liked fast cars.

You were telling me about the doctors who were in town. You have a good knowledge of a variety of doctors, so would you tell me about that?

CF: Yes. The doctors all had their surgeries in their private homes in the earlier days. Dr Douglas had his in his home on Crozier Road, where Woolies complex is now. Dr Shipway was also on the corner of Crozier Road and Acraman Street, where the car-park is. They were very nice and usually their wife was the secretary and nurse. Dr Collins came from Bordertown and then we had a Dr Edelman whose rooms were where Veg Out Car Park is, on that corner. Gradually the doctors increased and they had their rooms in Ocean Street etc.

Do you remember any time when you or any member of your family had to be taken to a doctor?

CF: When I was fourteen and living at Mt Compass I had the measles and, as a complication, I had bronchial pneumonia and Dr Tassie from McLaren Vale, he came out to our farm at Mt Compass at ten o'clock at night to treat me. They all did house calls in those days, but that was special.

What changes were there after you and your husband Tom came back from Naracoorte, besides the traffic?

CF: By that time Woolworths had been built on the corner, where it's Target now; some of the guest houses had been demolished. *Pipiriki*, I think was gone, that was on the railway line opposite *The Anchorage*. There used to be a guest house and a garage and now there's a motel, just around from Albert Place. I can't think of any more but there have been a lot of changes.

Why did you choose to come back to Victor Harbor?

CF: We liked being near the sea and my mother lived here; she was a widow for a long, long time. Tom always said that when he retired he'd come back to Victor. Our three daughters were married and gone so there was no

reason to stay on the farm so we came back here and had a most enjoyable life with the City Band, Probus, helping with Encounter Craft in the earlier days. We've been pretty active and enjoyed our life here.

Carlene, thank you so much for sharing your insights into Victor Harbor, we certainly appreciate the time you've taken. It's been very valuable input. Thank you very much.

CF: Thank you Heather.

That was a good first go for both of us!

CF: With my hearing as it is I really don't know how loud I'm speaking.

I think you'll find it's pretty good.