Phillip Island and District Historical Society
EST 1941

Phillip Island life 1940-2022

Oral History
Interviews 2021-2022

Andrea Cleland
Christine Grayden and Rebecca Sanders

Edited and compiled by Christine Grayden

Phillip Island life 1940-2022

Oral History Interviews 2021-2022

The following interviews were conducted as part of an oral history project by oral historian Dr Andrea Cleland. Also included with permission, a 2007 interview with Heather Hamilton conducted Dr E Rebecca Sanders and an interview with Josephine Kent Allen by Christine Grayden.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live, work and learn, the Bunurong people. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their Elders past, present and emerging. The Phillip Island and District Historical Society Inc honours Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people's unique cultural and spiritual relationship to the land, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.

Phillip Island Life 1940-2021. Oral History Interviews, 2021-2022

Cleland, Andrea; Grayden, Christine; Sanders, Rebecca

Compiled and layout by Christine Grayden

ISBN: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

For further information about the Phillip Island and District Historical Society inc. see:

https://phillipislandhistory.org.au

To see many more images from the society's collection: https://victoriancollections.net.au/

This oral history project was funded by the Victorian government through Public Records Office of Victoria Local History grant.
Project Co-ordinator: Christine Grayden

Phillip Island & District Historical Society Inc gratefully acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government, through the Community Support Fund, and Public Record Office Victoria for making this project possible.

The Covid pandemic brought many challenges to billions of people around the world. For oral historian Andrea Cleland, appointed by the Phillip Island & District Historical Society in Victoria, Australia, to conduct a series of interviews for a major oral history project, the challenges were many. Interviews were conducted in various venues during periods when lockdown were lifted, and one interview needed to be conducted by phone. Two were held in nursing homes, with the bustle of family and staff coming and going. The ever-present threat of contracting and passing on Covid, and the real possibility of lockdowns being suddenly implemented was very stressful, to say the least. Our thanks to Andrea and all those involved in bringing this project to fruition under difficult circumstances.

Table of Contents

BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY

Josephine Kent Allen
Art as business on Phillip Island

Interview conducted by Christine Grayden on 10 January 2022

C: Christine Grayden, interviewer
J: Josephine Kent, (aka Josephine Allen) being interviewed

Josephine Allen in her studio 2021. Photo: Josephine's own collection

Early life:

C: Where were you born? Where did you go to school?
J: I was born in Launceston Tasmania in 1955 and I went to several schools because we moved around. We were in Smithton for a couple of years, then went to the Mallee and then to Melbourne. I went to 3 State Schools and then secondary school was Melbourne Ladies College, Kew.

C: When and how did you develop your love of art?
J: I didn't develop it, it was just there. I don't ever remember a time when I thought "I've developed my love of art", it was always "I love art". I have this incredible memory of the very first time I made a mark on paper. I think I remember it because of my mother's story. I remember picking up this red pencil and touching the page and going "Ahh!" and flipping the page and doing it over and over and over again – in her best recipe book!

C: Good start! Would you say that was a family influence, that you were provided with pencils?
J: Yes, definitely family influence. Art was considered – all creativity – was important in our family. Education, reading, literature. Creativity was just naturally included. I never thought it was something different. It was just something we all did. Mainly my family were musical and I was a bit if the odd one out because I loved to draw. And also write of course. My brother drew a bit as well. But it was always just considered part of everyday life. It wasn't something special.

Allen family Jenny Mum Don Josephine and Dad c 1958. Photo: Josephine's own collection

C: Did you have any particular teachers who encouraged you at school?
J: Mr Bainbridge (laughs) – that was year 6. There was a grade 4 teacher too. Most of the teachers recognised that I had a bit of skill so they'd get me to drawings on the blackboards and things like that. But again I never felt it was anything greater than anything else I did. The most influential teacher was in secondary school where I had the great privilege of having the same teacher for 4 years in years in third form, fourth, fifth and HSC (ed: Higher School Certificate, now known as VCE). Her name was Olive Hilson. She was fabulous. Still now when I'm drawing and I might have a little problem, I hear her voice. She really helped

me.

C: You obviously had access to art books and good art materials at that stage. What about formal art training after secondary school?
J: Well, I was fairly addicted. I decided at the age of 11 I was going to be an artist. After an experience in a very hot shed on a very hot day. I'd set up a tiny art studio there with a tiny easel and a couple of pieces of Masonite and someone had given me some oil paints. There I was steaming in this garden shed – I must have been high on turps (both laugh). But I had this gestalt! This is what I'm going to do for the rest of my life. I was copying out of one of those very big books you used to get at hardware shops. I think they were called 'How To' books. This was back in the 1960s. I was learning to paint a portrait. I was using the book and copying; teaching myself to paint a portrait.

During HSC I was very fortunate to get into Caulfield Institute of Technology to do Fine Art where I got in half way through the year. I thought I was going to fail my HSC – I don't know why – so I thought I'd be able to do what they called a 'preliminary year' or just go straight into first year. Well I passed and I went straight into first year, which was great. I was there for one and a half years and had a little heartbreak – or 'Artbreak' – as in "We're only going to bring Abstract Expressionists out and anybody else who has a different style – you will be failed".

It's quite interesting because I see a lot of Abstract Expressionism in the way I paint. They actually did very well in making that skill even though I'm a figurative artist.

C: People might think that Surrealism was a passing phase from the 1920s and 1930s, but it's everywhere. Russell's art for example has Surrealist aspects. (Ed: Russell Kent, Josephine's husband was also an artist).
J: Oh yes.

C: So that one and a half years did influence you in a way, even though you didn't really want it to. What other studies did you do about then?
J: Yes, I studied by travelling. (laughs) I decided to do the 'gap year' a bit later. I went off travelling with a girlfriend just around Australia and worked our way around. I soon found I was getting very tired of hospitality and those sorts of jobs, so I ended up in Perth and decided to go to Teachers' College where I did secondary teacher training, and finished it – I'm a qualified teacher in Communications and English.

C: Did you actually teach in schools?
J: I actually mainly did the teaching course because I wanted to make films. To direct films was my dream at that time. That would have been putting all of my creativity into one category. So I chose a teaching course where I could make a movie. I'd actually applied for the Film and Television School when I was 18; the first year they started in Sydney. For directing. They said "Look, you're just the type of person we need. But go away and make a film and come back".

I thought the teaching course will cover everything, I'll be able to make my film and apply again to get into the Film and Television School and it (ed: the course and the film) will be useful in my future employment – which it certainly was. I made a film, yes. I made several.

(laughs)

C: That's lovely – where are they now?
J: They're in a cupboard in a box where I'm hoping that the dust is not corroding them! I can't use them because we don't have projectors now. But I must try to get them digitised.

C: How did they happen? Did you recruit your friends to act in them?
J: Yes. It was Super 8. I had friends as actors and the subject was 'Unemployment'. It was a symbolistic sort of film. I had my poor friend climbing up a rope play thing, and I did about 10 takes of that scene! (both laugh). She would often complain about that afterwards!
But it was the actual physical editing thing – you had your cutter and you had all your strips of the best of them hanging up there – your 'rushes'. It was fun, it was good. That film was submitted to the College and if you were admitted they would give you a 16mm to play with. There were only 2 films submitted for the place: 2 men and me. And they got it. Although most people said mine was more interesting. (laughs). We won't go there.

C: Those were the days, Josephine. There weren't so many women film directors.
J: No, but the first year of the Film and Television School was Jane Campion, maybe Jocelyn Moorhouse. I would have been in hugely, wonderful company.

C: When you were living in Perth, is that where you met Russell?
J: Yes, I met my husband Russell Kent – who was a wonderful man – there. He was practicing his art in Perth. We met when I was in my final year of teachers' college. He was living studio lives in abandoned office buildings in Perth and then later in Fremantle. We actually met like Venn diagrams. I was with one group of friends who were very creative-minded people in theatre and writing and I was having my little break from visual arts. There was a lot of music. And he was with a lot of the artists of the era and the two little groups used to meet. So we met up that way. One day Russell heard that I was no longer with the boyfriend I'd been with, and he dropped around and that was it. 40 years later…

C: That's a lovely story. He was living pretty rough back then?
J: He was living very rough. It was basically 'camping out' in abandoned office space. They were really exciting times actually. You might have a toilet down the hallway, you might have your little washing area with a bucket, or you'd go out to visit friends when you needed a shower.

C: It was like the archetypal struggling artists in the garret.
J: Well it was real! There were a few of them.

C: Were they actually creating in that space too?
J: Not in the same space, but it was a trend at the time. It started in Perth and moved to High Street in Fremantle where there was quite a lot of empty space upstairs that artists and musicians and different creative people would take on. Russell was paying $10 a week or something crazy.

We didn't have phones, we didn't have mobiles. How we managed to communicate, I think it was through ESP! (both laugh). But if you went around to visit him you had to stand in the road and yell up. (both laugh) He always left the window open a bit. It was Perth after all.

Russell Kent, High Street Studio, Fremantle, Perth, 1979. Photo: Josephine's own collection

C: How long did you stay in Perth?
J: I was there for 4 years. I met Russell in the last year and we fell in love. We actually ended up moving into a little house together in North Perth that was fun. Russell was born on Phillip Island in Warley Hospital and he goes back several generations in Dalyston, right back to Kingdon Kent – I think Kingdon was the first of 4 generations of farmers there. So of course, Russell had a great feel for Phillip Island and the region. But I must admit that until I got to Perth I didn't know where Wonthaggi was. (laughs) I had to go to Perth to find out that there was a place called 'Wonthaggi'.

First years on Phillip Island

I'd heard of Phillip Island because I'd visited when I was a kid. When we were really little we used to catch the ferry over for the day. The first time I ever met Phillip Island was from the sea. I still have a picture of that landscape – that really lovely old landscape with the Isle of Wight and the Rotunda. We've all seen it in pictures. It was just so romantic and beautiful.

C: There's nothing like arriving to a venue via the sea. It's such a wonderful sense of arrival.
J: It is.

C: It was a little bit the same driving onto the old bridge.
J: I don't think I ever did go on the old bridge.

C: Well, there's not much sense of arrival with the new bridge, but with the old bridge you'd hit and it would be: Rattle, rattle, rattle and you'd be: "Oh, we're here on Phillip Island!"
J: I think when I was about 12 I came over for the day to visit a friend who was staying at the Continental Hotel. All I can remember is driving and thinking "What a barren place". It was so yellow and there were these funny little chicory kiln buildings.

C: How come you ended up living here?
J: Because my husband was born here. It was actually because his father had a stroke. His parents had a business on Phillip Island – the Anchorage general store at Ventnor. Russell

came over to help out and I was left there to decide "Is this someone I want to follow on not?" By that time I had finished my teacher training and had a really great job working with the Spastic Welfare Association as a craft worker and I loved it.

C: You gave that up because to be with a man and work in a shop!
J: Yes, I was in love. What do you do? But I had visited the year before to meet his parents so had seen the shop. We drove over. But when I came here to live it was October 1980, and then you had very strict seasons. It was the 6 weeks over the summer – Christmas, Easter, the school holidays. There wasn't that constancy as it is today. But it was an incredibly conservative community.

Basically, Russell went off travelling at about age 20 and went to Perth specifically to do art. He lived in this amazing house in Mounts Bay Road where there were about 12 people living and a whole lot of creatives came from there. He actually started his artistic life there by joining... I don't know if you remember when they used to go door-to-door selling paintings? The paintings were really formula where they would have 10 in a row and somebody would do the sky, someone else would do mid ground, that sort of thing. He was selling these paintings and he decided "This is crazy. I can do my own." So he started painting and just going and selling his own door to door. They sold quite well.

Kent family at The Anchorage, Ventnor, 1981.
L-r: George, Josephine, Russell, Nanette, Peter,
Craig and Jean. Photo: Josephine's own collection.

C: Had Russell ever had any formal art training?
J: No. He did go to art school but the same reason as me he wanted to be a high realist and the stream was Abstract Expressionist so he decided to leave. He is basically self-taught. He went to life drawing, but that was sessions. Life drawing is the greatest skill that any artist can have. It just teaches you. He also associated with some amazing artists. You learn from them. It's a lot of just learning from your peers. Russell – whenever he wanted to learn anything he would just pick it up. He had a phenomenal brain.

C: Did they work together in the studio or were they in separate areas? Could they see each other's work developing?
J: No. They were in separate studios.

C: Did they have any exhibitions?
J: Yeah, yeah. I met Russell's art before I met him! At the time I had this boyfriend who was a musician and did avant-garde music and he was playing at an exhibition opening at the Perth University of all the up and comings.

C: Avant-garde – Did he use a synthesiser?
J: Yes a synthesiser, and he would also tape sounds. He had a 4-track reel to reel mixer! (Laughs) Those were the days! He would go out and record how the wind vibrated on the masts of yachts, and cars, lots of different sounds. And then bring in instruments as well. There was an incredible, beautiful work; he did beautiful work! Yes he had a synthesiser of course. Probably now he would have a laptop.

I was his roadie. (Laughs) he was the musical entertainment and I was his roadie. He had a little Honda Scamp and he had amplifiers in it, boxes, the reel to reel. It took us a while to set up, but I've always enjoyed a bit of technical stuff. Once it was set up I went around and looked at all the art. There was quite a lot there I was a bit bored by. But there were 2 pieces there that I just kept going back to. One was a very high realistic one of an army water bottle

and the other one was of a cracked wall. You could just feel the paint peeling – it was amazing. I just loved them.

I'd been watching this guy wandering around all hair and beard, jeans and hippie clothes. He was getting a little bit drunk. And I'm thinking "He'll be one of those Abstract Expressionist artists" and I wasn't taking too much notice of him. But at the end because my boyfriend did his work for free, they paid him in the leftover flagons of wine. That's what they used to do at those openings – flagon wine and little cubes of cheese. So while he was packing up or talking to someone I was sitting on some steps minding the wine and this guy wended his way over to me minding the wine. And he says "Can I have a drink?" And I said "No. This is the musicians payment I'm sorry." I'm thinking he's had enough (laughs). I'm trying to ignore him!

Hoping he would go away and he said "I'm one of the artists". I said "Oh yes, which one?" And he pointed to the two that I had been admiring all night and I took a second look at him. (Both laugh). And then he wanted a lift home in our Honda Scamp. No room. There is no room in the car. (Laughs) But he didn't forget me. And that was that Venn diagram thing. My boyfriend and I used to have Sunday sessions where people would bring their art or poetry and we would have some wine and food and it would just be a gorgeous afternoon. And Russell came along to a couple.

C: What a great afternoon. And then you move to Phillip Island…
J: (laughs) Yes when we got here I said to Russell "What have you done to me? You've brought me to a cultural desert." But not entirely true. For a while I was terribly, terribly

lonely. We just thought we would do this for a while then we would go to Sydney where "I would go to film school and you can be a great artist and we'll be famous" – as you do think when you're in your late 20s. So I was quite lonely for about six months. But then I met a wonderful Yolande Royal

Russell Kent 'Water Bottle', Oil on Canvas 1978. Photo: Josephine's own collection

C: Did she used to come shop?
J: Yes she used to come into the shop and she and Jean (mother in law) used to love talking and Yolande of course was from theatre and acting and of course I immediately enjoyed talking to her too. She used to come at night and go out the back of the shop with us and have a drink and talk with Russell and I. And she said "You should come along to the film society". The film society at that stage was showing in the Penguin Parade in the little theatre there.

C: Was that in the building down the ramp?
J: Yes. We go in there after the Penguin Parade closed, down the ramp. And the first time I went Yolande had said "You'll meet people there. You'll meet the people you want to meet." So we went there. It was a really foggy night and Yolande was driving at about 40 ks and it was quite exciting. We got there and everyone was having drinks and nibblies and I heard someone say "Oh that's a bit existential" and I thought: "I'm home."

The first person I met was Jill Ryan, Eric Juckert, who was a wonderful potter – several people. I can't remember all the names. I don't remember the movie but the funny thing about it was that because it came in four reels, somebody accidentally put the second reel on first. I thought "This is classic"! I didn't care, I was just there for the people.
Anyway I got to know a lot of people and the start of realising the artists were here, it was just you had to find the right person to meet to get to know them. I think it still happens today although there are so many more of them. It's exponential I suppose with the population. Then there was really very little opportunity for those sorts of get togethers then.

C: You were lucky that Yolande lived here in Ventnor.
J: That's right. The other person who was instrumental was Reg Langslow.

C: He was a lovely man.
J: Yes, he was beautiful. Reg was an illustrator and an artist.

C: He used to do those massive billboard advertisements that in those days they actually painted onto the sides of buildings. I've seen photos of that work.
J: Yes, he was amazing. Russell was in the Anchorage and Reg lived around here, and Reg picked up Russell's natural talent. It was actually Reg who taught Russell to paint, and encouraged him, and probably really fostered his art. So when we came back Reg was one of the first people we met. Yes, so with Reg and Yo and Eric – when I met Eric, there's a whole line from there. I can't remember how I met Jan Bodaan but she was along the way.
I'll go back a bit. The feeling of meeting these people was like, I've always called it, 'out of the tea tree'. It's like they've always been there but they suddenly come out of the tea tree. Because tea tree can seem very ordinary, but when you go in there it is stunning. The beautiful textures and subtle colours.

Russell Kent and artist Reg Langslow c1980. Photo: Josephine's own collection.

C: And it's full of life.

J: Of course it is. It was that sort of syndrome. And once you meet one, you meet another and it just grows and I realised there was an amazing lot of talent on the island.

C: How long were you in the shop?
J: Eighteen months. Yes, and then we moved into a funny little farm house in Kitty Miller Bay Road. (Laughs)

C: Joe Grayden's house?
J: Was it Joe or John? His wife was Margaret. When I was lonely my mother-in-law she said to me: "Do you want to come and meet some people? I'm going to the Ventnor Progress Association meeting tonight." I thought yeah, I'd meet some people there, not really knowing what it was about. (laughs). Well, guess what they were looking for? They were looking for a secretary weren't they, and they said "Oh, you've had teacher training". (both laugh) So what do you do with the newbies – secretary!

I did enjoy it. It was a good experience, because then I realised that Margaret was one of the first secretaries of the Ventnor Progress Association. There I am sitting in this old house doing the work that she would have done there once. Probably sitting in the same spot.

C: There was a bit of synergy there.
J: Yes, it was amazing. I found it that way. And of course if it wasn't for the Ventnor Progress Association I wouldn't have become have become an environmental activist, would I Christine? You remember Saltwater Creek?

Beach protest, Saltwater Creek Action Group. Secretary Josephine Kent in striped jumper centre, alongside husband Russell Kent, Mary Anderson with Mandolin. John Eddy at left with guitar and Greg Johnson spokesperson.

C: I think anyone with any sort of sensitivity eventually becomes an environmental activist here in some form or another. Unless they're walking around with their eyes closed. But anyone with any creative sensibility become inspired enough to want to protect it.
J: Yes. They do go hand in hand I think. The first major letter we wrote was in this house (Ed: Christine's house) for the Saltwater Creek campaign. You may not remember. But I had to come here and John (ed: John Eddy, Christine's husband) and you wrote it and I had to put my name to it and I couldn't understand why I had to do that. But I soon learned that was the

secretary's role. Letting people know what was going on at Saltwater Creek (Ed: threatened with a residential canal development). That was the start of – again – meeting more and more people. So it did work.

C: Josephine, this is a loaded question, but did you ever feel regret that you hadn't stayed in Perth and pursued what you wanted to do there?
J: I was ready to leave Perth. There had been times when every now and then I'd say to Russell "Come on.. .Sydney."

C: Do you regret that you didn't move to Sydney and pursue your film career?
J: No, I didn't have regrets. I can't do the Edith Piaf accent - Non, je ne regrette rien (Ed: translation: "No, I don't regret anything") but you know what I mean. But no, not at all, because I did end up directing in many ways over the years.

C: Offshore Theatre.
J: Offshore Theatre, well there was a few little sketches and in 2009 I directed a play that I wrote, which was a pretty amazing thing for an amateur theatre to take on. That was very brave of them, even with my little budget. (laughs)

Early involvement in art exhibitions on Phillip Island

C: Josephine can we talk about when you and Russell decided on this ginormous step to open a gallery. Where did that come from?
J: It started at a life drawing group at Jan Bodaan's house where about 8 or 9 artists would gather. They were wonderful days. That was again in the mid-1980s. We'd draw in the morning from a life model, then we'd have this great lunch. Everyone would bring a plate, a bit of wine – a bit slow in the afternoon. (laughs) But lots of talk went on. One of them was, because at the time the exhibitions were the Lions Club exhibition at the Anglican Church hall (St Philip's), and also Tudor Inn Gallery was there too.

Offshore Theatre, 'Two Days on the Road', directed and written by Josephine Allen 2009. Caroline (Alison Kingston) Prem (John Coulton) Jo (Katherine Paterson) Photo Hayley Justice. Photo: Josephine's own collection

C: Sutcliffes and Reids.
J: Yes. There were people like John Canning. Walt was a bit later. Brookes. They were very much the traditional type.

C: Landscapes, seascapes, watercolour, oils..
J: Yes. It's certainly got its place – I've done them over the years.

C: It was always a lovely place to go. Not challenging.
J: Yes, I loved it too. And besides that every Easter we had the wonderful Jason Monet of course. We must mention Jason who came to the island I think in the late 1970s. He came as Artist-in-residence for I think for Wonthaggi Burrough at the time. So he settled on the island with his young family and kept on doing his marvellous work, and he used to have Easter shows every Easter. That was the only really contemporary, different art activity at the time.

C: What was the venue for that?
J: He just had it in his home. He had a wonderful space at his home that all opened up.

C: At Sunderland Bay?
J: Yes. At life drawing it came up that we should do an exhibition and we'd all put in money for it. Russell and I said we would both go away and we'd actually do the costing. I suppose we just naturally from experience at the Anchorage Store, myself through my teaching and the different things we had a nouse about how to go about planning something, we had also done an exhibition at Findlay House with Russell's work and two ceramic artists.
So we got all our quotes and worked it all out and did a timeline and went back and told everyone about the costs and they all baulked at it. These were all people who were all semi-retired and who had plenty. And we thought "Oh, come on!"

We were in our late twenties, so what we did was say "Well, we want to do this. Would you mind if we took a commission and we'll put it on ourselves?" Everyone thought that was great – they didn't have to do anything.

So we did that. We went to the bank. We had no money (laughs). I think at the time I was working in hospitality again. Russell was working at the 'servo' (Ed: David Cook's garage, Thompson Ave Cowes) part time. We both purposely worked part time so we could do our art. We went to the bank with our two part time jobs and they gave us a card, which was our very first card which was a Bankcard. I think it had about $600 (ed: credit amount limit) on it. We thought "We'll use this to fund our exhibition". So that's what we did. $600 was a lot in 1986.

C: What was your commission?
J: It was 30%. We set it up in the Heritage Centre meeting room and Russell came up with the name 'Island Influence' and that's stuck and it's still going. We set it up there and used to have to pack it up for one of the churches then set it all up again. But it was a good little venue. We had abstracts. We started inviting artists to come in. Not just opening it up, but actually curating it.

Exhibition at Findlay House 1985 (mock up photo for the local paper). Leela Maki, Anne Farvis, Josephine and Russell Kent, Rob Jenkins and Greg Price. Photo: Josephine's own collection

C: How long did that go for?
J: I think it was 2 or 3 years. (Ed: Josephine checked later: 1986-1989) We did these one-off exhibitions at Easter. Purposely at Easter with Jason's agreement, so that we'd could network. We would advertise each other's exhibitions because that was something a bit different. Would you believe? Contemporary modern art? Not so different now but back then it was. We were thought to be very brave. I didn't think we were being brave. But we used to sell really well! Those were the days.

C: Where were people getting their work framed back then Josephine?
J: Good question. All sorts of different places. Russell and I used to just get it all cut up in Melbourne and bring it down and 2 weeks before an exhibition our house would turn into a framing place. He'd cut the mounts and I'd put them all together. But after a while we just used a framer, there was one at Dalyston. When we used to do life drawing at Dalyston. We also did an exhibition in Melbourne. Took a group to Melbourne. At Waverley Gallery. It wasn't just island artists – that's why we called it 'island influence'. We had a couple of Wonthaggi artists. That actually came about because the life drawing class moved from Jan's to Cowes Primary School. Which was quite weird to have it at a school.

C: What area of the school? You would have to black everything out for the life model.
J: I know. It was quite a business but I think they had venetian blinds. And one day we had them the wrong way around and we heard all these boys tittering on the other side, so I went up and quickly closed them the other way and they all fell off the bikes they were standing on! (both laugh)

Anyway, we then moved into the old Shire rooms at Dalyston which used to be the Timber Treat place, which is now something else opposite the pub. So we moved into that room. We'd go and have lunch at the pub then go and do an afternoon's session. So that picked up artists from Wonthaggi, all around the island. It really grew the network I think.

C: Basically it just got too big for you to keep doing the little meeting room one?

J: No, we were happy with that. But we did some different ones with different people.

C: All the time you were getting commission and selling your own work there?
J: Yes, that's always a bonus if you sell your own. The first time I exhibited I sold most of them! It was so exciting.

Island Influence Art Exhibition poster 1987. Photo: Josephine's own collection

C: Josephine, how did you actually learn the skills involved? Was it because you were going to a lot of galleries and seeing how other people were doing it?
J: Yes, probably. They didn't teach it at art school. They did have Art Appreciation where we had to go to galleries. But they didn't do as they do now, as in Arts Business or Arts Development or Marketing or anything like that.

C: But also just in terms of the infrastructure required just to hang things…
J: Yeah well we, and I forgot about this, we went around looking at various sorts of exhibitions and what sorts of screens they had and asked questions, and did our own research basically. Because Russell when he did anything, he was like a scientist, he had to go back. He would do all that and I would do the upfront, personality stuff. I hope I did it well

It was a while before we went into (ed: their own) galleries because also at the time, the most wonderful thing happened on Phillip Island for the arts was the Phillip Island Arts Council. That started I think it was 1986/7, a year after we had Island Influence.

C: That was Reg George, Tony Hart, Eric Sumner..
J: And Eric Juckert. Anne Davie. It actually started because of Greg Price - he was the councillor at the time. The youngest councillor ever – I think he was 21 or 22 wasn't he? Anyway he went to a Regional Arts conference, I think it had a different name. And he came back and said "That's what we need on Phillip Island". He got together with Tony Hart and Eric and Russell and a few other people and they started an interim Arts Council. Russell was the first treasurer actually.

C: So the whole thing came from Greg Price moving it?
J: Yes, amazingly really the different way that it happened. Well Greg spent a lot of time at our house too. We used to have a few parties at that old house.
That (ed: PI Arts Council) began and went for 10 years I believe and it was known as one of the most successful Art Councils in Victoria. Which of course for people these days the Arts Council is now Regional Arts Victoria. Same body, different name.
They used to do a fantastic exhibition every year which of course was accepting new and fresher different sorts of works, so it gathered more artists. Out of the tea tree they came. They'd do that every June.

C: What was the venue for that?
J: The Parish Hall again. The Parish Hall was a good venue for art. Just for the lighting.

C: An incredible community facility over the years.
J: Yes, and still doing it. There were then 4 exhibitions a year by the end of the 1980s. Our opportunities in the area were getting bigger. We were also attempting to exhibit elsewhere and exhibit into other types of markets as well. Mainly after our little one-off exhibitions we were just concentrating on just furthering our own market.

C: How was that done? Did you just ring galleries up, or send them photos of your work? What were the logistics there?
J: Well, yes. A phone call to find out what you need to do. Still applies I think although these days probably an email. They'd indicate what they want and you'd supply them slides back then. You used to have to have slides of all your art. You'd send off a few and see if you could get an appointment.

There were also lots of group exhibitions. Russell was into taking his art into lots of different places…in the time he was doing that, he won quite a few prizes. I haven't got his resumé in front of me. One of them was delivered by William Dargie. Russell got second and Dargie came up and said "I would have made your first". (laughs) Russell was quite chuffed.
But we were so ignorant back then of the art scene. We didn't really know how important it is to appear when you win a prize. The first one…Burke Hall I think at Xavier College - he won, they rang us up to tell us the good news – and I think it was worth $1000, which was quite a lot then – and we went: "Oh, we're going out tonight. We can't come." (laughs).

C: Did you go out?
J: Yes! You live and learn! We made sure we went to the next one even though he didn't win anything. And we definitely went to the next one which is when he got the second prize with William Dargie. So we learnt our lesson – if you win a prize, make sure you're there as much as possible. It does look good. You learn in many different ways, don't you?

In 1994 we registered our name – Island Influence. Took us a while, didn't it? And in 1995 we rented our first space. That was in Dunsmore Road Cowes with two other people. We shared a factory. We shared with Bonza Bags, making calico, environmentally friendly bags, and a dressmaker.

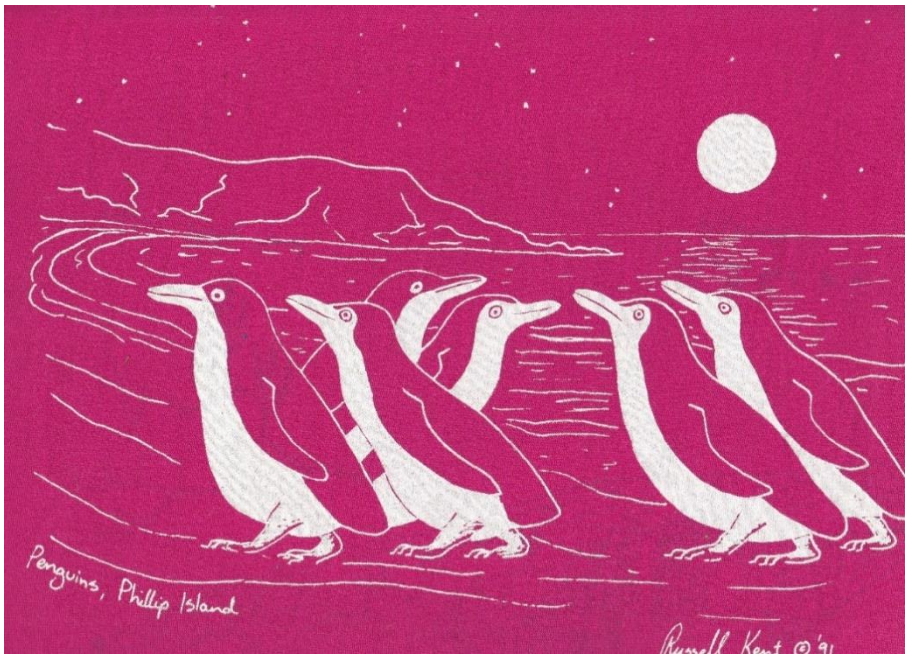
Also in the meantime – I skipped a few years. We realised that we were really going to have to branch out from just fine art and make art products. It was all good practice so you weren't 'selling out'. There was this silly elite idea that it was a sell-out, but it's actually a really great way to learn so many different skills. Russell then learnt to screen print and do all the graphic arts.

C: Russell was producing tee shirts, so he would have had to approach the Phillip Island Nature Parks, or if before them the Penguin Reserve Committee of Management.

J: Yes. Shops. He started just hand-painting tees, and got into one of the shops, Pedro's, (ed: Pedro Camelleri) and I think from talking with him about screen-printing. Again, Russell looked into it, taught himself how to do it.

C: Pedro would have wanted the Phillip Island style. He is very astute.

J: Oh yeah, he was a great encourager. Russell's first design was the 'Moon Penguins', which sold for years and years.



Russell Kent, Island Influence: 'Moon Penguins', screen print design for tee shirts. Photo: Josephine's own collection

C: It was very popular. Do you still have any?

J: Oh yes I have a little case of 'specials'. Russell started to go to different shops, but he had to be careful to look after his patrons, his distributors. Then we both went to places like the Penguin Parade; made an appointment. Also the Bass Coast Shire Council for the Information Centres. We had actually regular orders with both of them which filled and kept us going for 10 to 12 years I think.

C: A lot of work though.
J: Yes, but it was fun. We wanted to make it Australian made tees, cotton. We were making money because we were doing our own designs, and didn't have to pay designers. But it was just getting too expensive. The prices of the tees were going up and we just couldn't move them. Russell decides, "Well, let's make them." (laughs) His friend who was making the calico bags, the Bonza Bags, Rod Spottiswood, used to cut the material. We got someone to design the tees and make the patterns and then we went up and would buy all the rolls of material, all the different colours. I can't remember where it was, but Russell would go up and come back with a carload of material. That would be laid out and cut and then we found that in Wonthaggi they used to have – was it Pelaco?
C: You mean upstairs in the old theatre in Graham Street?
J: Yes, down near where IGA is. Well, they closed but the ladies still had a little sewing group who used to do it as a home business. There were about 5 of them out in a garage. We'd take them over to them and they'd sew them up for us. We got labels made: "Made on Phillip Island", "An Island Influence Product". Yes, they went well.
And then we extended our market because we LOVED going to Tasmania. Then we had the "Lost in Tasmania" with the (ed: Tasmanian) Tiger on it, and that sold really well in Tassie. That kept us going for a long time.

Russell Kent, Island Influence 'Lost in Tasmania' screen print tee shirt design.
Photo: Josephine's own collection

C: You must have been full-time at that. It sounds huge. Did you consider at that time, "Well, this is our art practice now and we'll put everything else on hold," or were you still tinkering away at your own art late at night?
J: No, we always did our own art work. But it was all art, and also manufacture. I always kept something going. Russell did too. There was always something happening. Because we were going for exhibitions, so we had to keep it going. But we didn't have children, so like a lot of people in our situation, it opens up a bit of time. We did want them, but they didn't come. We had lots of 'creative babies'. They were our projects, that what we put all our energy into. It wasn't hard. It was actually exciting!

C: How many would they produce a week?
J: We'd have them done in lots of 300, whenever we'd be about to run out. Because we'd get orders for 100 or so. You weren't selling 4 or 5, it was bulk tourist stuff.

C: Did they see you through to the end when you stopped doing that?
J: Unfortunately they closed before we ended up. But we had enough tees, and also Russell was finding he was starting to have trouble with his hands from screen-printing. We had to look at a different way of doing things. It just slowly faded away. But he also used to just screen-print for other people. He used to do the Channel Challenge (ed: San Remo biathlon) before anybody else by screen-printing all the tees, just by all the strokes needed to operate the machine! (laughs)

C: I remember his screen-printing setup alongside Jean's house and I used to think that looked like pretty hard work.
J: While he was doing that – I had actually an allergy to the inks and stuff, so I couldn't help him. And that's when I started developing the gallery at Dunsmore Road, where we shared with Rod and Helen, and we put on a couple of one-off exhibitions there. We did the first "Body Works", which was all life drawings. And because we were involved with the Offshore Theatre Company we borrowed their flats and made a room within our third of the factory and just put life drawings up on the walls. It was part of a Fiesta for the Phillip Island Arts Council, which were very exciting times and there's a whole story in that.

That started me thinking. So we started opening it up for people to come for invitation appointments, then we started having hours, and I thought "I want people to come to a real venue". I did a business plan because I'd learnt the business planning when we were looking at 65 Chapel Street for the Art Council. The council said to us: "We need a plan". We had someone come in and teach us how to do a business plan.

Island Influence at Dunsmore Rd 1995. Photo: Josephine's own collection

C: That house-gallery went for a few years, didn't it?
J: I can't quite remember. They were very successful.

C: Was that all volunteers looking after that when it was open?
J: Yes, it was all volunteers. It was a community arts space and the business plan was for that. Because it had several rooms we could have different 'feelings' in different rooms. You could

have print area, painting area, craft area. We had an area we could meet. Any arts groups could meet there. It was quite exciting really.
But then the Arts Council started to flounder, as committees do.

C: Well, they weren't chickens, and I suppose Eric Juckert died at that stage.
J: Yes, he did die. But these things happen. Things change. So they passed it on to the Artists Society of Phillip Island, ASPI. They'd been in existence for a while, and used to do their own shows as well. The council promised everyone they'd give us a really nice gallery at Cowes Cultural Centre. That's how ASPI came to have it.

Then in 1994 with shire amalgamations they redid the Cultural Centre and made it. They'd promised 65 Chapel Street that we'd get this really beautiful gallery and we got this room. That changed its whole feature really, from being a real community hub, an arts hub. That was a bit sad. But the gallery is still alive, so that's fantastic! Now it's at PICAL (Ed: Phillip Island Community and Learning Centre) while we wait for our new building.

C: So you had a history with that, and you also had a history with ASPI too.
J: Not so much. That happened more after the Arts Council. I came in (ed: to ASPI) later on when John Adam was president. I joined the committee there. But I have got a Life Membership! I was honoured. But it was a bit odd. It was for all the arts activities not just for what I did with the Society.

Becoming Gallery owners

J: And then of course when we moved to Settlement Road, which was the major gallery we had, which was 1998 – 2001. We were in there for 3 years and that was great because it was a factory and the front room was really classy. It's where the take away shop is now on the corner. That was Island Influence Art.

The shop was the front area, then you'd go into the back which was the factory area, which was our studio space. That was the best time of all. I loved being there. We really built it up to a regular stable of about 15 artists and then we'd have 2 or 3 exhibitions a year.

C: I think you were open about 3 hours a day, about 3 days a week weren't you?
J: It was seasonal. In summer it was basically 6 days a week. I took one day off. You could guarantee you'd get a phone call that day! Actually during the very peak season, the 3 weeks, I worked 7 days a week. And then the holiday season. Other times, yeah, 3 days, 4 days. It depended on what was going on.

C: Back in the 1990s the rent wouldn't be anything like it is now.
J: It was still hard. It was very hard to make that rent.

C: You were a bit out of the way there.
J: Well, yes, we had to be very canny with our promotions and marketing.

Josephine with Phillip Island artist John Adam with his work in the Island Influence gallery in Settlement Road. Photo: Josephine's own collection

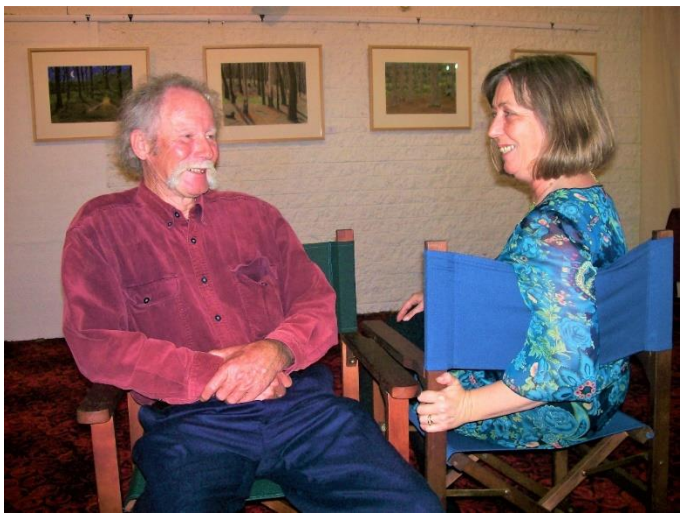
.

C: How did that happen? What did you use?

J: We went to the bank and got a loan. I wrote a business plan. (laughs) Another one for this particular building, with graphs and predictions and all sorts of things. The bank manager was very impressed. We got a loan and were able to buy equipment. We were able to buy a hanging system, lighting, I think it was a word processor at the time. Later moved to a computer. Yes, generally to set up and to use it for promotion. We got signage done – signage on the building, signage outside, sandwich boards, without permits which you didn't need then I don't think. And also an advertising budget. Every week it was in the Advertiser (Ed: Phillip Island & San Remo Advertiser local newspaper) and other arts periodicals.
With our exhibitions we'd had over the years we had created a mailing list. I would take down anyone's names and addresses whenever they came so our list ended up being quite extensive. That was our greatest seller I'd say. That's the most valuable tool a business can have.
Yes -- just through all those means, and the Information Centre. There was a membership and we had brochures there.

C: What about Phillip Island Tourism or the Promotion Association? Were you involved in that?

J: No, we never got involved in any associations. We really liked being independent because Russell was still doing screen-printing and it was a great outlet for selling tees and stuff, and taking on commissions. I created a silk scarf label too – 'Natural in Nature'. I used to sell a lot of those products.



Russell and Josephine at an exhibition opening in the Island Influence gallery at Settlement Road.
Photo: Josephine's own collection.

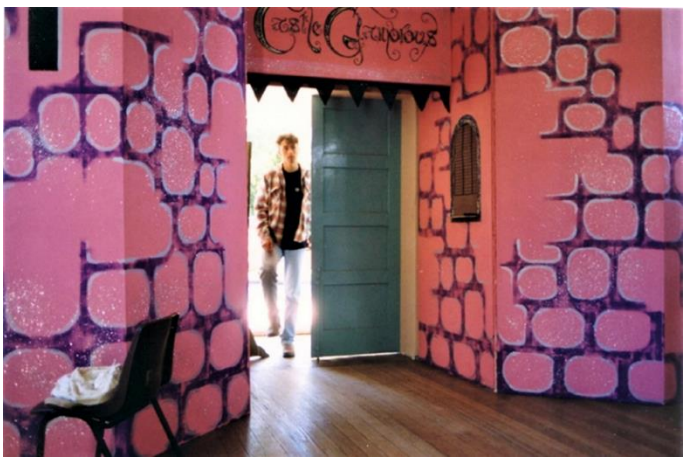
C: What sort of images did you have on the scarves?
J: Oh seals and…I stayed away from penguins because Russell had the penguins. But I had the seals and rocks and trees. Anything Phillip Island inspired of course. They were square. I used to buy them all beautifully sewed around the edges. They did OK but I think the tees did better.
The most money would be made from the sale of paintings and sculpture. But we also used to do holiday art activities in the back area. We could have up to 16 kids and families there and they'd make products. The first thing we ever did with them was painting on the plain Bonza Bags, so they'd be able to walk out with this product. I loved that. Summer was pretty busy! Because we did it over a number years, and even in the next venue I continued it, we'd have them coming back and the kids would be growing up. It was just lovely to have that sort of return as well as new ones.

C: You used your teaching training after all Josephine.
J: I did! I also did teach some art at PICAL on occasions. I had private tutoring in the gallery as well. You do everything you can. If you've got a space you've got to fill it. The other thing I really liked doing was that Offshore Theatre would sometimes use it as a little rehearsal venue for a pittance of a fee (laughs).

C: What about painting props and backdrops?
J: Yes, we did sets for Cinderella in Dunsmore Road. That was the first pantomime that Offshore Theatre did. So we did all the scenery and had volunteers in. There was a few of them happening. That moved into Settlement Road as well. There was a lot of activity.
(Ed: From Offshore Theatre FB page About section:

> On a rainy night in winter Offshore Theatre Inc. was formed in the winter of 1995, when six friends, unanimous that Phillip Island was in need of its own theatre company, met on a rainy night in winter. It was decided there and then that a theatre company on the island was not only viable but necessary. The group included Amanda Price, Anne Davie, Michael Cleeland, Sue Pearce and Sharon Davie. From that night the theatre came into being. It was agreed that the new company was to produce a Pantomime or Melodrama the following summer. Thus a play was chosen, an enthusiastic group of players cast and Cinderella became the first production staged by the burgeoning company….Cinderella was a huge success and set up the company financially, allowing it to produce more shows.

.



Offshore Theatre: Pantomime Cinderella's 'Castle Glamorous' - sets by Island Influence. Photo: Josephine's own collection

Children's holiday art session at the back of the Island Influence gallery at Settlement Road. Photo: Photo: Josephine's own collection

We made banners! Lots of banners. We've lost them all, I don't know where they are. There was one: 'Hands off the Prom', that got paraded down the main street (ed: of Melbourne). One of the stories was that someone outside of Chloe's Hotel (Young and Jacksons) said "That's the best banner I've ever seen". Because it was a picture of the lighthouse area with the words "Let it Be!". Then there was one of Jeff Kennett (Victorian Premier) eating the Nobbies.

C: That would have been a good one. Where did you show that one?
J: That was NAG's one (ed: Nobbies Action Group). There was another one. We'd make them out of the calico. Calico was our soul material.

C: Was that displayed when Kennett came down?
J: No, when Kennett first came down, that was the launch. I did go to the launch. I led his car in my little Corona. They landed him at the Penguin Parade, or maybe they drove him there, but I saw him coming out of the Penguin Parade car park. I just got in front and slowed down to about 20 ks (both laugh)

I also made that poster 'Taste of Conservation' with Kennett in it too, which had Port Campbell and all sorts of places. I got the ideas from my head.

C: And what about in terms of banner making? I mean it is a huge tradition in Australia. Did you have any background in that tradition?
J: No. We had people like Rod who would sew them up for us and then we would just put any paint on it. White paint, then paint on top of that. It doesn't matter because a banner is not meant to last. It's there for a short term. We did a few for Susan Davie too when she was working to be elected. Yeah, there were a number of banners over the years.

C: How were they held in place?

J: Different ways, different places.

C: They don't do banners like that anymore. They just do it all on the computer and just print it out.
J: Yes, I know. On canvas, or plastic. But they're so much fun, using all the old paints. Usually there'd be a few people involved. I don't think we have any photographs of the banners, which is pretty sad.

C: No photos of events with them in the background?
J: Maybe someone has, but the memory's good. We do have photographs of making props and scenery. Yeah, there's lots of images.

The other thing I used to do was get paid to hang the Arts Council show. I directed the 1996 one. That was before having Settlement Road gallery, so it gave me a taste of curation. That taught me how to do the forms and talk to artists. I think I knew how to talk to artists, but you know…(laughs)

Putting the final touches on the banners for the Phillip Island Arts Council Exhibition 1996 at Dunsmore Road to go on the outside of the Anglican Hall. Photo: Josephine's own collection

C: Were you being mentored in some way when you were doing those Arts Council exhibitions? Or did you just go by gut instinct, or by going around and seeing how the other galleries did it?
J: Yeah, yeah, and just having an aesthetic sense, and wanting it to look better. I didn't want young people to be walking in and saying "Oh, this is old hat." I wanted to make it different. I had a few tussles.

C: With the committee that didn't agree with your approach?
J: Yes, but they let us go, which was great.

C: How did you overcome that, because people on committees can often have very set ideas, and someone coming in with new ideas can be a bit of a challenge.
J: I think the proof of the pudding was the sales! (laughs) I mean there was a lot of "We'll wait and see. We'll give you a go, but we'll wait and see." They were a good committee. They wanted arts to be fostered. And you could see over the years – well, we've done a couple of decades now haven't we – the growth, the amount of artists who came here and their quality. I'm really digging seeing what's happening now. It's really good. I'm really glad I don't

have to be so involved now. (laughs).

C: Do you have anything else to tell us about the Settlement Road gallery, because you did a number of things down there I didn't realise.
J: After that the rent went up and I still had to maintain a hospitality job 2 days a week just to be sure.

C: Where were you working?
J: Conti. (Ed: Continental Hotel, Esplanade, Cowes). Where all good people go! Worked – everyone worked at the Conti. It was a great place to work, with the family, the Jobes and everything. It was just a safety net. It really just supplied me with petrol actually and some personal things which women need, those sorts of products weren't cheap. But for everything else we lived off the gallery and the screen-printing.
There were times I would look in the mirror and think I was going grey wondering how we were going to pay the bills. I wouldn't know because it's such an unusual income that you have to be brave enough to have enough faith that somehow it would come in. And it would always be when I'd think "Well, we're going to have to close the doors. We can't do this anymore. We just can't " Then someone would come in and we'd make a really big sale. I always paid the artist first, then paid us.

Arts Council Exhibition 1996. Photo: Josephine's own collection

C: You did that for 3 years.
J: I did it for more than 3 years, but 3 years there, that's right. Than we moved to the Flower Farm (Ed: Newhaven) and were there for 3 years. Six years we did it and more with Dunsmore road.

C: I was curious to know how that came about?
J: The rent went up (ed: at Settlement Road), we realised we needed a new venue. Synchronicity. The people who owned the Flower Farm came in and said "We'd love some art work on our walls. Can you help us out?" I said, "Well, I'll come and have a look first." We were just talking and I could see all this space. At that time they weren't using all those little sets. I thought "this could be exciting!" We all got excited. So we made an arrangement – a contract between us, an agreement – that I'd look after the art. And that's how it came about.

The timing of it was good. I was so sad to lose Settlement Road but I couldn't have done the rent. You had to promote as well.
The Flower Farm was interesting because a lot more people got to see the art. The exposure of art was increased greatly.
The group of artists involved in the "Body Works" life drawing exhibition held at the Flower farm gallery. was Russell at left in green shirt, and Josephine in top row in blue top. L to R: Mike Doyle, Russell Kent, Graeme Henry, Bill Binks, Josephine Allen, Jo Jo Spook, Camille Monet, Trudy Barclay, Jonathan Hannon, John Adam, Paul Satchell and Dennis Leversaha. At front: Lesley Miles, Janice Orchard.
But when people came to Island Influence at Settlement Road they came to see art.
C: To see art, not to look at the flowers.

J: Yes. The actual money had been slowly going up over the years and it didn't change its pattern at all. So it was still people coming to find art to buy. I found that interesting. But I kept thinking that I was exposing so many more people to artists like Bruce Tozer who are super-surrealistic sort of black.

C: it was very brave of you to hang that work; that very contemporary art.
J: Well if you love art, that's what you do. I never felt brave. I just felt energised. I loved it. I hated the stress of not knowing where your next buck was going to come from, but I loved the actual process.

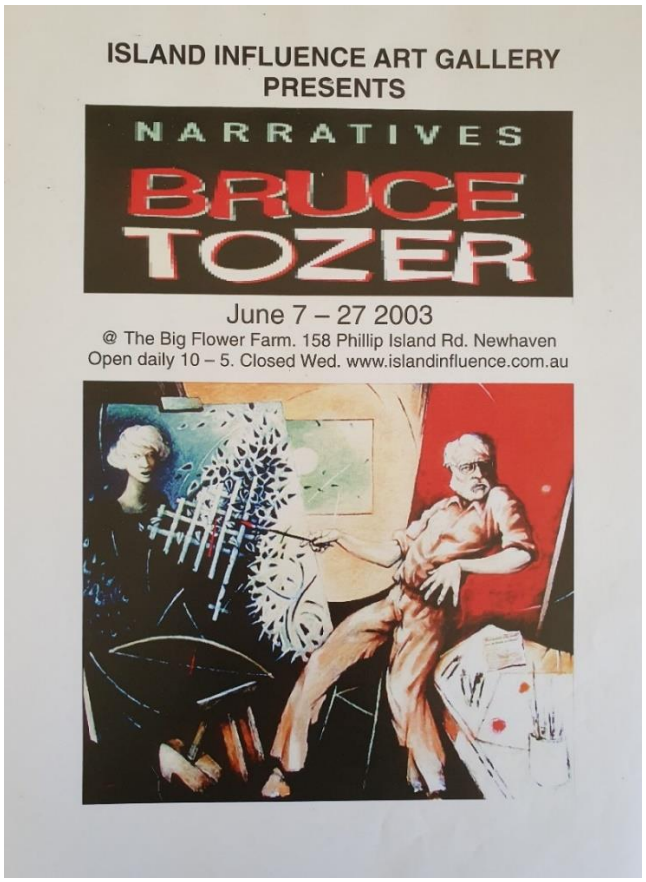
C: How did that go with the gallery space when they put in that sort of avenue of old shop fronts.
J: That was there when I got there. They started off with that so I utilised them as art alcoves. Then I got that lovely room in the middle as well.

C: It was a really good space with good lighting in there.
J: Yes, it was good lighting. I would say my most favourite exhibition was the Bruce Tozer 'Narratives'. That was a retrospective. For me that was probably the top exhibition I've ever done. I think I've got about 30, or 40 under my belt or something. Yes, it's just a 'tiny' list. Including the work I did at Council. I just liked curating.
The other thing that happened when we were at Settlement Road was that Bruce unfortunately died. He was a dear friend and I had some of his work. His wife asked if we could keep it there. We made storage racks, boxes for it, and she paid us to do that. We also sold quite well because – well, people love a dead artist. Sad. But what it taught me was about curating and Excel sheets and keeping all that database. Also cleaning. I did the research. Russell did all the storage stuff. He did the physical stuff. Those boxes were great that we made. Damned heavy though – you'd need a forklift to lift them. But it was like having everything in a room.

But the other thing I discovered was that people loved buying from racks. You can have the works beautifully displayed on a wall, but they see these racks and say "Oh, can I have a look in?" It's like a bargain basement, but you sell them for the same price. We stored the paintings vertical, but we had some horizontal shelving for drawings as well.

C: Also with the vertical racks people love when you pull the works out and they're gradually revealed as they slide out.

J: Yes. We also had the racks lined with carpet so the works easily slid out and slid back. It was quite fun. You sort of "Ta da!" (laughs)
Then because I discovered that I really liked dealing with collections, and I loved that whole process, we then looked into Fred Coventry, who was a very well-known artist. He was part of the Eltham milieu back in the 1950s and 1960s. The family came on board and we did the same thing with them. Starting at Settlement Road and then moving them to the Flower Farm. When we went to the Flower Farm we actually got a storage unit. I didn't want to leave the boxes there. That was pretty exciting. We had the holiday art activities there as well.



Poster for 'Narratives' exhibition of work by Bruce Tozer 2003.
Photo: Josephine's own collection

C: That would have gone well there because it was a popular place.
J: It went very well! In fact it went so well that I found it hard to sell paintings because I was caught up with the kids. But that's ok, I loved that.
So that's how I learnt. I learnt by reading, and experiencing and doing. And I joined memberships, another thing that's helpful for young artists, the Arts Law, Arts Hub, various bodies that would help me deal with commissions. For a long time I sent invitations to openings to the National Gallery. There may be some archives hidden in a box somewhere – 'Island Influence, Phillip Island' (laughs)

C: Did anybody ever come from the NGV?
J: No! They always sent beautiful letters: 'Thank you so much. We'll try and get there if we can'. I did that later on myself In my position with the council.

C: There must have been an awful lot of them you could not attend.
J: You had to select. I used to think I can go to just so many things a week. Otherwise it eats into your spare time as well.

Fred Coventry: 'Still Life', Oil on Canvas 1000 x1170 1969. Photo: Josephine's own collection

Visitors to Fred Coventry exhibition at Island Influence, Settlement Road.
Photo: Josephine's own collection

Community arts projects was another work area. Murals, different things like that. Mainly, when I was in Settlement Road. Such as the CFA mural in Dunsmore Road. When they were celebrating their something or other anniversary, 50th maybe? They asked me if I would do it, but it was painted by 30 people and I just co-ordinated it. It was like paint-by-numbers. Now

it has been painted over and when it was ready to be repainted, I tried to encourage them to get a young artist. But I didn't succeed. They got a signwriter to sort of copy it. But ours was there for years, and so many people worked on it and were so proud of it.

C: We've covered a lot of the questions. You've done so many things Josephine.
J: Well, I am 66 years old! A life of art.

Bass Coast Shire Arts Officer

C: We are up to your work with Bass Coast Shire Council. What was your position there and what were your main roles? I know you were dealing with heritage as well.
J: My position was Arts Officer initially and later Arts and Cultural Officer. It was at first 2 days a week, which had been upped from 10 hours, so that was pretty cool. My position covered all arts and heritage and culture.

CFA Community Mural volunteers in action at Island Influence, Settlement Road. L to R: Danny, Louise Champion, Cora Elise, Susan Pearse, Sharny Taylor, Ray Champion. Photo: Josephine's own collection

C: All that in 2 days a week!
J: Yes, of *course* I could do that! But I mean you didn't do it all at once. You did bits and pieces initially. At first it was mainly project-based. I did an exhibition a year. We did a heritage project with sporting images. *Celebrating our Sporting Past* in 2004.

C: I remember going through the Phillip Island Historical Society's photos to help work out what to contribute.
J: Yes, the previous Arts Officer had started the project. It was a good way to get to know people and I loved the heritage groups. I loved working with all the groups, all across the arts: visual, performing, music, writing, heritage. It did grow to 3 days the following year and then later 4. Then in 2018 they went to full-time arts and cultural team leader. I didn't want to work full time, so my time ended at Council and I became full time artist. I had a choice a few times along the way to do full time administration, but Russell and I made a decision in our 20s that if we wanted to be artists we could not work full time. And we kept that, and that's

why we've been able to achieve what we did.

C: That's amazing that you worked at all of those extra things and were still able to keep our own art practice going.
J: Oh, there were times when we were frustrated. There always is. It's time poor. That's what most artists are – they're time poor. Now I'm so-called retired, but not. But now I can do it all the time. (laughs) I do take consultancy jobs from time to time, commissions and things when they come along.

C: Consultancies of what nature? Exhibitions and things like that?
J: Yes, all the areas of my arts expertise, but Covid has put a stop to that.
Another area at Council that l loved was the Public Art program. And that was really exciting, because people started saying "If we can see public art around the place we feel a lot better".

At the time we had a strategy but no funding. We had a fantastic council at the time, a couple of people there who really wanted it. So we managed some funding which is still existing. It's pretty exciting.

C: You mean it's ongoing in the budget?
J: Yes, sorry, I'm talking bureaucracy now. We started with very little budget, and by the end of my 15 years the budget was substantial. I think that shows in itself just the growth of arts, the natural growth of arts. As an Arts Officer you're there to facilitate it, promote it, encourage it. To help it. But you're not there to make any creative decisions. (laughs) That was a challenge for me! That was a real challenge at the beginning.

C: Were you dealing with amateurs and professionals?
J: Yes, dealing with all the artists and all the community was my favourite part of course, and a big part. One big thing that happened over the years was the slow development of getting the Robert Smith Art Collection. That started from a community group who came to council, and of course went to the arts people.

C: Which community group? Did it have a name or was it just a bunch of people who got together for that reason?
J: A bunch of people, led by Wendy Crellin.

C: Were they Wonthaggi-based because of the mining art works?
J: Yes, Wonthaggi-based because of the Counihan's connection. That actually started during my time with council. It was a very long process.

C: Was he alive when that was happening?
J: Not Counihan, but Robert Smith was alive even when I left. He died last year.

C: He actually donated the collection before he died?
J: Yes. It was all done while he was in fit mind because he was 90 something. A good age. But he'd been a fabulous collector – around 600 pieces of amazing Australian, mainly works on paper. I was involved in the early stages of the collating.

The Miner, 1947, by Noel Counihan, from the Robert Smith Collection.
See images of the collection [*https://victoriancollections.net.au/organisations/bass-coast-shire-council*](https://victoriancollections.net.au/organisations/bass-coast-shire-council)

Josephine opening the Artists Society of Phillip Island exhibition, 2011.
Photograph by Robert McKay, from Josephine's own collection

C: We were talking about the Robert Smith Collection. You actually started digitising that, did you Josephine?
J: Yes. We actually employed people to take photographs and employed…I mean that's what you do, you facilitate; you bring in your specialists. I'll simplify it.

C: That would have been a fairly big budget. Where was it being stored at the time?

J: Yes, When it was with Robert it was stored in his house. But we had a room in the art centre that we did up. We also made a film.

C: Oh, is that available somewhere?
J: It was on the Bass Coast website.
(ed: 'Speaking of Art – the Bob Smith collection':
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=va3i7exK5NA)
It's 2 years since I was there and things change. Very quickly. So that was pretty exciting to be part of that process.
C: Did you get to meet Robert?
J: Oh yeah, I had a great time with Robert! With Mr Green we made the movie where Robert told his stories. I was the interviewer and got to hear all his marvellous stories. He was a very theatrical man. He loved to do poetry and read Shakespeare, and he had the greatest stories about Noel Counihan and all the other various artists he had in his collection. He also worked with Regional galleries. The council has that film. It's part of the collection now. That was pretty exciting. To be doing that interviewing. So again that bit of the director. That's why I don't have a regret! (Laughs)

There were many, many things in the job. It's amorphous and it keeps changing and I love what they're doing at the moment. A lot of things I wanted to see happen are happening at the moment in Council. And I think that's great.

C: What sort of things Josephine?
J: Oh just the budget, having someone full-time, not so tight... A bit more creative.

C: I mean on the ground. What sorts of things do you see there?
J: I have no idea not being there. And even when I was there it was always a little bit of a surprise. (Laughs) Let's wait and find out.

C: Can I ask you about the exhibitions of the various winners of the art shows? The council has quite a collection of all that.
J: Yes well the council started collecting before they were amalgamated so the collection sort of came across to Bass Coast from the 3...

C: Was that from Phillip Island too?
J: No, Phillip Island didn't collect actually! From Bass and the Wonthaggi Borough. It started from there. Initially they were just giving prize money and an acquisitive prize for each of the community groups a year. But it was getting unwieldy. I think we had about 88 pieces. No one was curating it of course. They were just hanging on walls. Part of my job was to create a database for them, curating them and we got someone in to do an audit.

The old cry that many councillors do about art is: "We need a regional gallery!" But you can't have a regional gallery unless you have a collection. With the audit all these pieces that had been acquired from various art shows over the years showed us that we had maybe 10% of a collection that had some worthiness. So that's again an issue. But at the same time the Robert Smith collection was happening and that's another impetus.
C: And there's a lot of things in that collection.

J: The Robert Smith? Yes something like 600 pieces.

C: You've suddenly got a regional gallery collection…
J: Exactly. And that was a donation from Robert Smith. He was amazing and he wanted it for the Wonthaggi people because of Counihan's part. He came to live with the miners and did this series of the linocuts called 'The Miners', and which are probably some of his most famous pieces.

C: If that's the case Josephine, according to Robert's wishes if there was to be a Bass Coast regional gallery it would be better in Wonthaggi. But as far as visitation is concerned and things like parking where would you put it?
J: Well there's the now empty school there. (ed: Wonthaggi Secondary College McBride Campus)

C: Yes but it's not owned by the council.
J: No, but again I don't have to worry about that. Somebody else has got to worry about that.

C: Yes but I am interested to know your thoughts about that?
J: Oh my thoughts? Well, I always thought that would be a good spot.

Former Wonthaggi Technical School/ McBride Senior Secondary College, mooted as a possible arts and culture hub. Image: Bass Coast Post.
Read the article here: https://www.basscoastpost.com/arts

C: Parking would be a problem. You would have to take up most of the quadrangle area with parking.
J: There are always a lot of problems there. There has always been a vision of it being an arts precinct with workshops, with regional, Robert Smith gallery. That sort of thing. So hopefully, it will happen. It's exciting. All these visions that you have way back. You just have to be a little bit patient and know that it takes time.

I don't know. Again it was just so hard working on council and knowing there was a Phillip Island passion for that new cultural centre. And not been directly involved with the project. But I had to remember "Just remember what you're here for". Promotion of the arts.

Online presence

C: Can we talk about that move online because you have had that website for a long time.
J: Yes it was one of the earlier ones. My lovely 11 year old niece showed me how to do that. And now she's n her 30s!

C: That is a long time to have had a website!
J: It was when we were at Settlement Road. Actually, the website was a Bass Coast funded program. They asked fledgling businesses if they would like to come along and learn how to do a website and Internet marketing. Russell and I went to that and part of it was that they set up your website at a very cheap level. It was pretty exciting and a good thing that the council did. I think it was through the Economic Department.

C: They were having to recognise you as artists and a business.
J: Well we *had* a business. We were registered, its online, with the Taxation Department and all the rest of it. That was nice and that started the website. It's moved in many, many different manifestations over the years. Pretty static at the moment. To tell you the truth I've never sold much from the website but it has been a fantastic promotional tool.
But of course what that has morphed into these days is the online art galleries. Which I am on one. I should be on another one because you can be on several. Also Covid has escalated that. That's a whole different way of buying and selling art. It's no longer that sort of being in a gallery, having a stable. It's no longer that pocketed thing. It's now broadened. People aren't so afraid to buy from the websites.

Header of home page of Island Influence website: islandinfluence.com.au

C: Why do you think that is? Is it because people are just so used to buying online now?
J: I think so. People are used to shopping online. It's also Covid. People sitting around in their houses wondering about that blank wall (laughs). We have white walls; so we can put our paintings up. Yes well, that was Russell. He wanted white walls so we could just fill them all up with paintings. The website is interesting but I still haven't sold much from it. But you've just got to be really active with your social media and your sharing.

C: It takes a lot of your time. Social media is like a black hole.
J: It can be. I have to do a bit more work on that one but I try and update our website now and then. We used to have to get someone else to do it and that was hard, we were always paying someone to do it. But now I can do it myself because it's just a click and drag

situation. It makes it easy; I'm almost there.

C: What did you think about ASPI and their online exhibition last year? It seemed to be quite successful.
J: Yeah! I thought that was good, it was great. And it solved that issue, the Covid issue. I don't think I had any feedback about that myself.
But also one of the other things I've done over the years is judge art shows.

C: Is that paid work?
J: Sometimes, sometimes not.

C: Is that something you got through your work with Bass Coast?
J: No it happened before that, doing exhibitions and things like that. That's been going for a long time.

C: That must be very challenging.
J: I love it!

C: Yes, but gosh there's been some controversial decisions over the years. I mean just about every decision in an art exhibition is controversial. So it's a hard thing to do.
J: Maybe. I have ways of thinking about it. I don't like the word 'judge'. I shouldn't have used it. I think you're 'selecting' and because you have a bit of experience I go in with a criteria in mind and I always speak to it at the opening, not beforehand. Because you don't want everyone painting to them. Or working to them in whatever way. There will be criteria and it could be something as simple as "I want something to make me feel happy" or "I want something that shows me it's got outstanding compositional elements". So I'm selecting.
My hardest thing is because I know so many artists over the years - is falling in love (Ed: with a piece of art) and thinking: "are you falling in love because you like that person or because you like that piece of art?"

it's also quite common in all types of selecting prizes. I think if you're going to go into them you've just got to go in with open eyes and understand that it really is the luck of the draw. I don't have to look at someone's signature to know someone's style. But last year I was asked to select the Kernot Art Show and they did that online for the first time. 500 pieces or more! I had to do it all online on my laptop. I realised what I knew – but I love it when you have a greater realisation of something you know – that seeing a piece of art in the flesh will give you an experience that you don't have when you look at it as an image.

C: It's a flat image on the screen, and all the pixels and variations in the computers colours from the actual work.
J: And the texture. I had to work out a whole new way of finding the criteria.

C: You can to a certain extent, get some idea of the texture online by enlarging the image.
J: Oh I did all that. But sometimes it's even the smell. It's a 'tactile-ness'.
C: And with the objects, the 3D art. That's hard.
J: Yeah.

C: I was going to ask you about commissions. Last year you did those 2 significant commissions for Phyllis Papps. Would you like to do more commissions?
J: I love commission work! I've always enjoyed commission works. There's something about me that's a bit different from other artists. How much creative control an artist has with commissions depends on the person. It's a brief. They give you a brief and they have an expectation. I think the challenge as an artist is to try and try to visualise what their expectation is. And can you meet it? Sometimes I will turn a commission down because I know I'm not going to meet it.

C: Do you ever say to those people "Are you interested to see what I would do with this?" Or are they just too fixed?
J: Sometimes you just can't work with people. (Both laugh). Russell didn't like commissions.

C: I think Russell was rather anti-authoritarian and would have seen commissions as a form of authority.
J: Yes. He was an absolutely fantastic portrait artist but he found it very hard when people were sitting there to do that. Even with me. And I'd say "You live with me you bugger!' But anyway, we are all different. But I don't mind that challenge of trying to meet those expectations. You get wonderful experiences like that last year, doing those commissions with Phyllis and Francesca – 'The Landscape of our Lives' and also later a realistic portrait. She just kept saying "I want you to just be totally creative". That's such an honour! That was a wonderful time.

Phyllis Papps with the two paintings she commissioned from Josephine.
Photo: Josephine's own collection.

C: You both know each other so well, she trusted you with the process.
J: Yes. I mean I did try to get things out of her and I pulled it out – it wasn't that hard actually. (Laughs) That was a wonderful experience. I'm so glad I did it actually.
And of course Russell passed away 2 years ago and that's been, it's put me in a whole different space. For a start I suddenly did not want to do any more of the community art stuff again. And I think those days have maybe finished for me. I'm going to be selfish. I'm going to

do my own art. I'll take on commissions of course because I love them. Who knows? I might do anything.

Next phases

C: Josephine it must be very hard because you don't have Russell to bounce things off now.
J: We were each other's Muses. People may not have realised because we seemed to have very separate lives. But we really were each other's Muses. I do miss that. It's really hard. But I want to do a retrospective of his work. That's all. That's the future.

C: We've spoken a lot about memorable times for you in art. Is there anything else you want to add?
J: About art? I'd say exhibition management. Yeah I've always loved that.

C: It must be nice when the red dots start appearing.
J: Yes, I love a red dot experience!

C: Not just for your paintings but for other people you've curated the exhibition for.
J: Oh yes. Well if you are running a gallery you've got to make money. You do like your red dots! (laughs) You do have to cover your costs. Which is basically it. I don't think we ever made a real profit, we just covered costs. The business paid for certain things. It paid for your car expenses and various other things so it was offset. It made a living. But I think if we were in a different place, not Phillip Island, I think we could have made a lot more.

Portrait of Dick Anderson, by Russell Kent (Print) Photo: Josephine's own collection

C: You mean in Melbourne? Or in Sydney?

J: Yes. It depends. I probably would have shifted into videos and things, multimedia.

C: But there are all sorts of ways of doing that online now.
J: Yes, it's exciting! It is an amazing age. Actually in just talking today, to see how it's changed from that very traditional view of "We must have an exhibition" to "how can I share this work and still make a living?" (Both laugh) Because there is still the question of making a living. And now crowdfunding. I would have loved that to have been around in the 1990s! That would have been fabulous!

C: It's much better for people because you're not subjected to that sort of barrage of haters that are on certain platforms, ads imposing on the work and that sort of thing.
J: Yes and that happens with some online galleries to. So artists – read the small print. Just read it. You might hate it, but you've got to do it.

C: Well that's fantastic Josephine. We've covered so much. We've covered the last decades of Phillip Island art history. Thank you very much.

POSTSCRIPT:
Added by Josephine, 24.1.2022:
You talked of highlights before and I have thinking about a balmy evening in February in 1995. Standing outside the waterfall doors of the National Gallery awaiting with a mob of Phillip Island artists, artisans, their friends and family for entry to the opening of Postcards and Souvenirs. I flashed back to a time as an art student, standing almost on the same spot waiting to enter the gallery and thinking I doubt I will ever be shown here. Yet my work was inside, as was Russell's, along with 27 other artists in the Access Gallery of the National Gallery of Victoria. Thanks to Barbara Pratt and John Bligh's vision and sponsorship with Australia Post. (Josephine 24 01 2022)

Josephine and Russell in front of her artwork in the 'Postcards and Souvenirs' NGV exhibition, 1995. Photo: Josephine's own collection.

Bob & Anne Davie
Farming & Community

Interview conducted by Dr Andrea Cleland with Bob and Anne Davie, 7 December 2021 at *Bimbadeen*, their 340-acre farm, located on Phillip Island in Victoria.

A: Andrea Cleland, interviewer
Anne: Anne Davie, interviewee
Bob: Bob Davie, interviewee

Anne and Bob: Hello Andrea
Bob: Thank you Andrea

A: Hi, lovely to be here and thank you. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself, where and when you were born and about your family?
Anne: Ok Andrea, well I will start first and then Bob can follow. About myself, well both of us are going to be particularly talking about Phillip Island, but I will tell you about where I was born. I was born in Elsternwick in a private hospital, there in Caulfield, where I spent all my life, until we were married when we were 20. We [Anne and her family] lived in the suburb of Caulfield. I have one brother.

I attended Methodist Ladies College for my secondary year schooling and that was one of the best decisions my parents ever made I think. I loved school and I learned a lot, but I also learnt about life and what one could expect in life, and what one could contribute. And as I say, that had a really powerful impact upon myself.
Bob: I was born in East Melbourne on the 11th of November, 1935. My father was Stanley William Dawson Davie, and my mother was Clarice Ina Davie. They owned and ran a guest house at Phillip Island called "Erehwon" and I came down here as a young child of about seven or eight years of age, with my grandfather and father to the guesthouse on visits and we used to live in Middle Brighton and before that we lived in Caulfield.

A: Great thank you and can you tell us about when you first came to Phillip Island, your first thoughts perhaps about the island and why you came to Phillip Island?
Anne: I first came here probably about 1943. We were very fortunate because my uncle knew somebody who was involved in Scotch College and they had a school camp on Lover's Walk. So, it was a great time to come because everyone was so anxious about the war and we were lucky to be able to leave the city for a while. And my first impression of Phillip Island: well I fell in love with it straight away. You know the beaches, we used to run along the beach, and there was hardly anybody in sight. And, actually, another story is how my family came to Phillip Island. My mother was brought to Phillip Island when she was six, in 1912, so the passion and love of Phillip Island has gone back for three generations, and I still love the place today.

Bob: As I mentioned before I came down here as a young child, with my mother and father when they were running the guest house Erehwon. My first impressions of that were possibly with my grandfather bringing me down in a Packard car and travelling over the Gurdies, up near Lang Lang. Whenever we got to there, the Packard used to go up and down, and we'd hit our heads on the roof of the car and that would be the most exciting part of the trip coming down!

But, as Anne mentioned, those days, were very precious. After that, I came down here when I was 15, having had an accident at school. I was at boarding school and had an accident and had a brain haemorrhage and came down here to work on a dairy farm when I was 15, and we started to run our own farm. My brother purchased an 80-acre farm with our father's help, and that was all paid back. Anne and I eventually bought that farm where we were, starting off our farming career. So, I had an early start to farming.

A: Can you tell me a little bit about how you met?
Anne: It was an interesting because my parents having had that lovely holiday at the public school camp on the beach, they decided after the war that we would go as a family and we stayed at Yackatoon Guest House for two or three years and then we decided we would go to Erehwon, which of course is on Erehwon Point, and owned by Bob's parents – at that stage. It was interesting because my mother actually knew Bob's father, so it was just one of those things. I mean a lot of people don't believe it, but it really was love at first sight. We shared so many things in common and we had a lot of fun and the friendship – well of course – ended up in marriage, and a very good one at that.
A: How many children do you have?

Anne: We have four children. We have three sons and a daughter. We're fortunate because three of the children live on the island with their families. Some of our family now live in Queensland, and so now have 10 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren.

A: Wonderful. Were you married on Philip Island?
Anne: No. We were married in Melbourne, Wesley College Chapel in Melbourne.
Soon we will have two great-great grandchildren.
Bob: Anne and I met when we were fourteen at the guest house and it was love at first sight. I offered her some bubble gum and we had a dance in the ballroom at Erehwon. And we played tennis the next morning and we were virtually never apart since then. We were married at 20 and came to live here in this house in *Bimbadeen*, which my father and I built in 1955
Anne: And the rest is history.
A: Wonderful.
Anne: We were not able to see a lot of each other. I had always wanted to do medicine and realised I was probably going to come and live at Phillip Island, so I chose to do physiotherapy. I used to live in Melbourne and study during the year and work as a waitress at the guest house over the Christmas holidays so that was when we saw a lot of each other. I can remember in those days if you wanted to make a phone call even, you'd have to say to your parents: "would it be alright if I made a phone call tonight to Bob?" It's nothing like the social media that's out there now or mobile phones.
Bob: We used to write practically every day to each other.
Anne: Yes, lots of letters.

A: So you would be waiting for the postman to deliver them?
Anne: That's right. Twice a day the postman came in those days.
Bob: Especially in the early days because I was a boarder at Wesley and I used to go out to Anne's mother and father's place in Caulfield of a weekend occasionally. We used to go for drives and things like that. That was good just to get away from the boarding school.

A: Was Erehwon a big guest house?
Bob: It had about 120 guests. It was very famous because it was well known for its hospitality, excellent meals and its concerts and games and ballroom events and hobby horses. In those days, male and female leg shows, and all sorts of things.
Anne: When the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester came and visited Erehwon, and from then on, it sort of had a vice-regal patronage. It was lovely, it had beautiful gardens, and as Bob said, there was a ballroom and just across the road was the beach. In those days – my mother used to love to come – because it meant that she didn't have to cook meals for two weeks and she used to sit with her friends under the trees and we'd go down the beach. They were beautifully happy times after the war. Very special.
Bob: We used to lay out on the beach and get brown and today we're sorry for that [laughs]. But we didn't have sun creams and things like that in those days.

Erehwon Guest House, approx 1930s. Phillip Island & District Historical Society Inc

Farming

A: We'll talk a little about the farming practices on Phillip Island. Can you tell us about your family property at Bimbadeen? It's obviously a very special place to you. Can you tell us some of the focus of your farming activities from dairy to cattle and also, I believe free range chickens and bees?
Bob: My brother Bill and I started off on the original farm which was 80 acres called 'Meeking's farm' and we were dairying. In 1956 when we were married we borrowed from the bank with my Father as guarantor and bought Bimbadeen, which is another 120 acres. We milked on here from the time we were married until 1967. During those years, just after that, we purchased two more adjoining blocks which were what we call "Rhys's" from Rhys and Daisy Jones and "Hurricane Hill" which we bought from the Byron-Moore's.

They were both 80 acres and they're all adjoining and all close to each other. It made a good property, but it was very saline, there was a lot of salt on the property and for about 15 years we concentrated on salinity and fixing salinity and today we don't worry about salinity.
Anne: Perhaps Bob you could say when we were married, we were advised by the Department to clear melaleuca.

Bob: I knew nothing about farming, because none of my family had anything to do with farming so I asked the Department of Agricultural what to do about farming, how do you farm, and that [there] was a lot of melaleuca on the property and the first thing they said was to plough it all in. And that we'd make wonderful humus to grow grasses and then when you grow your grasses then you're right. Well I said, when we grow our grasses what do we do then? They said, "oh you can put cattle on or you can put sheep on", and I can distinctly remember saying "well I'm sorry we can't do that", and they asked why. "Well I said because we haven't got any fences, we haven't got any boundary fences".

That's how we started, we didn't have any fences, we had very little. We started to grow grass and then we put up a boundary fence eventually. We started milking cows. At one stage we supplied milk to the local dairy in Cowes. We supplied the milk for Phillip Island, and we also supplied the milk and cream for the guesthouses. We used to take milk and cream into the guesthouses, and we'd pick up all the scraps from the guesthouses and bring them back and feed them to the pigs…
Anne: We used to supply them with pork, didn't we supply the pork?
Bob: …and chooks. We used to supply pork, we used to supply poultry.
Anne: We used to throw them on the back of the ute.
Bob: We used to have guests from the guesthouse come out and help us clean the hair off the pigs, scrape the hair off and they used to love it, amazingly enough! We had a wire fly proof safe, and it was all kept in the wire fly proof safe and then it was wrapped up in a big sheet and brought back into the guesthouse and used in the guesthouse, and nobody ever got sick to my knowledge, But if you did it today, you would be in jail!

Another time, which is quite interesting, is that we bought a lot of turkeys for Christmas dinner. We had them on the farm and fattened them up, all ready for Christmas dinner. And about 10 days before Christmas, a fox got in and bit the heads off every single turkey we had.
Anne: So, the guesthouses thought they would have to take the turkey off the menu.
Bob: We did process them all and they were eaten for Christmas Dinner!

A: What year was the Year of the Turkey?
Anne: That would have been about 1957.
Bob: They took it off the menu, but they put it back on because all the turkeys ended up in the guest house. We actually cleaned all the turkeys. It was the same as chopping their heads off because that's what the fox did, just bit the heads off and didn't do anything else. So, all of those turkeys ended up as Christmas dinner. We couldn't afford for that not to happen.
Anne: Before Bob goes on from dairy farming to cattle, it's interesting to note that in 1956 when we came as family, we were married, there were 45 dairy farms on Phillip Island.

A: Yes, I was going to ask you.

Anne: It's extraordinary. Most families were of four children. There would be the mother, father and four children. They would just work so hard and it was a very, very hard life, I mean you never went for holidays or anything like that. It was a very active dairying industry and dairying community.
Bob: And chicory…
Anne: Yes, that's right and chicory was very hard work, wasn't it?

A: Was it quite structured in terms of the work women did and men did, or did everybody pitch in?
Anne: Everyone pitched in, and the children. Everyone.
Bob: Everybody had to help virtually. It was the only way of getting anywhere really. It was very rare for someone to have enough money to pay a wage.
Anne: So, in 1968, or 1967, it was difficult because the only secondary school was Wonthaggi High School. It really wasn't a good situation…young people really weren't encouraged to have a good education. But Bob and I knew, or felt, it was important that the children just didn't just see a future on the farm, they could come back to the farm, but they would need to have a good education to make a decision. That then meant of course we had to send them to boarding school, which meant then that we needed to be able to take them up and then bring them down for weekends (which was difficult with dairy cows to milk). So, then we decided to go into beef, so Bob can talk about the beef in 1967.

A: Were there primary schools on the island, did your children go to them?
Anne: Yes. Stephen our eldest attended Ventnor State School before it closed. He then went to Cowes Primary with his younger brothers and sister.

A: And Phillip Island itself, was it mainly farmland and tourism?
Anne: Yes, and tourism was sort of from Christmas to March, but it was only a short, short period. It was nothing like the big tourist industry it is today. It was all about guesthouses.
Bob: Just guesthouses during the summer period mainly, and very interactive between the guesthouses. They used to have competitions between all the guesthouses, sporting competitions, and the same people would come down in the same fortnight every year. So, they were like extended families meeting up again every year. It was quite amazing!
Anne: Like extended families.

A: You obviously got to know them?
Bob: Oh, yes.
Anne: Heavens yes and still know some of them.
Bob: We still know a number of those people today.

A: That's wonderful.
Anne: So Bob, you can tell Andrea about from them on when we went into beef from 1967.
Bob: 1967 I decided to do something a bit out of the ordinary in that we brought Brahmans down to Phillip Island because I wanted to start a Brahman herd.

A lot of the people at that stage wanted to lock me up because they thought I was quite deranged! But it proved to be a very good exercise in that we bred a Brangus animal which is a percentage of 3/8 Brahman and 5/8 Angus. That proved to be a very exciting animal in that it was virtually a hybrid, but it coped extremely well with the weather conditions. It coped

with everything we had down here, the type of feed we had and everything else. As the weather was getting warmer and warmer and warmer, the Brahman influence helped the cattle production a great deal.

We started going in carcass competitions all over Australia. And a percentage of 3/8-5/8 came up with the best carcass results, the best growth results and most of the competitions were a combination of growth and carcass. We did extremely well there. We bred up a very, very good herd. We started selling the bulls to the Australian Agricultural Company and National Mutual Rural.

We later started a genetic company called Ultimate Genetics. We brought out the top veterinarian technician in embryo transfer in Texas from USA. We brought him out here and we started a company called Ultimate Genetics. And then the herd increased dramatically because we used the top animals for embryo transfer and we selected those with the best bulls that we could find in artificial insemination. And so therefore the top cows, say the top ten cows were being joined to the best bulls, and then using embryo transfer, we used all the rest of the herd as recipients. So, all the recipients were having the best calves as well at the top calves. That's how we built up the herd.

Bimbadeen Brangus bull

Anne: Probably then we were going to be talking about how we've moved on to chooks and bees. One of our sons Richard and his wife Sharon and their family lived down the road at a property called 'Karool'. Richard runs cattle as well, and we would not have been able to keep the farm going without him. He's been the mainstay of our labour and our inspiration. As the years went by, it was obvious that Bob and I couldn't be doing any more physical work and Richard too was starting to wear out a bit, so our eldest son Stephen, who's actually an accountant, and the rest of the family thought that they would try something different. So I guess in a way this is our succession plan.

So that's why three farm retreats were built on Bimbadeen, so we have people coming. Well we *were* having a lot of people from Asia, from China and Singapore, which stopped of course with COVID. But now we've got lots of Australian families coming here. But then the family thought about doing the free-range eggs, so we've got 2,000 24/7 free range chooks that live in caravans down in those paddocks which you just can barely see for the trees.

A: What do the caravans look like?

Bob: Caravans [laughs]

A: So they are actual caravans?
Anne: Yes, they are, they are.
Bob: But they've got big doors and they've got roosting parts and then they've got a nesting period, a section in the middle, in which all the eggs roll down onto a big conveyor belt then you wind a handle and all the eggs come out the end and they are packed into containers and then they come up to the grading room and the cleaning room. They are all packed and ready for delivery.
Anne: We supply businesses in Melbourne too, don't we, and across the island.
Bob: Canning's [Free Range] Butchers in Melbourne.

Free range chooks at Bimbadeen, with visitors. From bimbadeenphillipisland.com.qu

Anne: There's quite a big demand.

A: They are the best eggs, I have to say.
Anne: Everyone seems to like them. And then there's somebody who comes and does the bees, a separate thing. We don't manage the bees.

It's an interesting story about the chooks. Our son Richard with help [was doing the eggs]. Now Elizabeth, her husband Mark and their son Blake and Stan, a friend, do the eggs. Richard was getting tired of it. Our daughter Elizabeth was running the Going Places Travel in Cowes. The travel industry was smashed after COVID hit, so Elizabeth put her hand up and said she'd run the chooks and the eggs. It's amazing! So instead of sipping champagne on the Riviera she is cleaning chook shit out of a caravan. We're delighted, I would never have thought it would happen. **But** as just as we said before, COVID has changed things. Elizabeth is very happy.
Bob: She's very happy.
Anne: She's loving it too and her son too is enjoying it.
Bob: Her son Blake.

Anne: He was going to be doing first year uni so he put that off and thought he'd have a gap year and he started to be interested in the farm. It's really quite exciting, the journey of Bimbadeen – we're loving it.

A: Wonderful. With the Brahmans and the Brangus, what gave you the idea to go into that particular type of cattle?
Anne: You went to Queensland, didn't you?
Bob: I saw some cattle that were joined to both Angus and Brahman. Some Angus cattle and the calves from the Brahman were just so much better than the straight Angus, that I decided, wow, I'm going to do that. I'm going to breed a herd. Originally, I was going to breed a herd of all Brahmans because the Brahmans did really well but along the way we discovered that the percentage of 3/8-5/8 was the best percentage.

We didn't know it at the time, but we had a friend that went to America on a holiday and got in touch with me and said, "you won't believe this", he said – because there was no communication in those days, very little communication – "you're breeding exactly what the United States breed as the international Brangus which is 3/8 5/8". So accidently, we hit upon the right percentage that was where all the semen came from, all came from 3/8-5/8 cattle. Fortunately, we just hit upon that so then we started getting semen from overseas.

We had a little bit of a problem with selling bulls, because the sheath in the bulls was too droopy so they used to prolapse. We fixed that up with one bull from artificial insemination from the States. And then we were selling bulls. We couldn't breed enough bulls we were selling them so quickly! That was all really good, really good.

A: Was Bimbadeen quite well known in the farming community?
Bob: Yes. We have lots of semen and embryos stored in liquid nitrogen, just in case. We could start up another herd tomorrow if we wanted to.

A: Can you describe the most memorable changes in farming since you first moved to Phillip Island, and what you think have been the biggest challenges and your greatest achievements?
Anne: Of course, there are far less farms since 1956. Some of the holdings are larger, but in numbers of the population of the farming community, it's certainly been reduced. So it really has gone through a transition of being quite a large population of farmers to a small number. But I think the ones who continue to farm are still quite passionate. And I think more than ever, the people appreciate the landscape of the farms because of the development in the subdivisions. I believe people have a greater wish for the farming to survive.

But the challenges have always been the years of drought, and the uncertain markets. One year the beef prices are fantastic, and then they can crash because of some trade deal or something. You have to be an optimist to be a farmer. You can't be a pessimist because you're always thinking *well next year is going to be better.* But we wouldn't change it for anything. The uncertainty is the biggest challenge, I think, for people who go on the land. And if you can't ride through those challenges, you're not going to survive. In many ways, you have to diversify and think of different things to do and I think we have sort of done that along the way.

A: Is there a degree of planning versus seeing what life throws at you?
Anne: Exactly and be sort of mindful what's out there, what are people thinking, what are they wanting.
Bob: Salinity was a big challenge in the early years so we had to think of ways of how we could combat that. We came up with an idea of hump and hollow drainage which is called raised bed farming today. The idea of that is when it rained it would wash the salt out of the soil and washed it into the drains, and then it washed it away. So the salt would gradually get out of the land. And then we used to feed hay and run stock on that land and that built up the grasses until we eventually were rid of most of the salt. So today, salinity is not a problem to us because we have now covered virtually all of the land with grasses so we can run cattle on it.

A: By grasses, do you mean native grasses to Phillip Island?
Bob: Yeah, and clovers, rye grasses. [We still have some original native grasses]. Today we're doing crops, we're doing all sorts. We're doing about 12 different species in sowing down because they have different root levels, which collect moisture at the different levels.

A: What has the farming community on Phillip Island meant to you?
Anne: It has meant a lot to us. As I said before, there's not a whole lot of farmers here but the comradeship and the fellowship, and the love of the land, exists as strongly as it did when we first came here; and for me that's really important. I think farming communities are important as part of the social fabric of the community, and it's always been a very important thing to me. I know that often at the time, if there was a hayshed caught on fire, or something or other happened or a farmer had an accident, or somebody's wife was unwell, you'd tear around with some food. Or ask: "what can I do?" Or if you needed to get to the hospital, there would be somebody to do the milking. There was always that attitude.
Bob: Always back-up. Always willing to help.
Anne: Always that expectation, so it's always been a very close community and continues today.

A: Is there anything you miss from the old days, or were there any events?
Anne: We used to have (agricultural) shows and things, didn't we? I guess life has changed a lot. We probably do miss that intimacy of the smaller farming community. It's been a number of years now since that happened. Certainly, the comradeship is still there.
Bob: We used to have meetings in the local Ventnor Hall, which does not exist now. I remember at a meeting telling an elderly farmer that he need not be frightened of the Electricity that was coming. There would be 30 or 40 Young Farmers. That doesn't exist anymore. We used to have dances at the Ventnor Hall. There's nothing there now.

A: Where was this?
Anne: At the Ventnor Hall, we don't have them anymore [corner Nobbies Cowes Road and Ventnor Beach Road]. It was a good meeting place.
Bob: They used to have dances on the occasion, birthdays and whether we'd get the power or not in the early meetings. Because when we first came here, we had to make a decision about the old house down on Troutman's; an old concrete house that a German during the war built, which has a gun turret in it, because he was wary of people, because he was German. At that stage he was pretty well ostracised.

We had to decide whether we would build a house or change that into a house. We had a bit of discussion with my father and Anne, and family, and we decided we would build a house up here because we thought one day the power might come along and they would seal the road up here. When we first started we had a kerosene fridge and a generator and a bucket in the coke shed for a toilet. It was pretty primitive. Fortunately, the power did come along this top road and so we built a new dairy up near here later on – a herringbone dairy – and that's where we started our milking virtually here before we were married: down in the old dairy.

A: That milking would have been quite different from practices now I imagine?
Bob: Our new dairy was a herringbone, an eight-a-side herringbone, which was one of the very early herringbone dairies. Our old machine was just four cows at a time and not very good because the engine used to stop at a certain time and all the cups would drop off. We found out much later that it was because of an incorrect dipstick in the engine which made the engine get hot and stop. They were pretty trying days in the early days of the milking.
Anne: **But** modern dairy farms, I mean they milk so many cows: two or three hundred! They are much bigger enterprises. It would be hard to survive at 80 cows…you couldn't survive.
Bob: 70 or 80 we were milking.

Anne: We'd separate the cream and the cream would go to Archie's Creek Butter Factory and we'd feed our pigs with the skimmed milk.

A: So the power and the road make a big difference?
Anne: It did yes.
Bob: The fridge used to blow up regularly and which led to a black ceiling, so that disappeared once we got the power,
Anne: Great thing when the power came on. And the telephone too.
Bob: In 1956 it was black and white television and the Olympic Games so that was the year we got married. We actually had a black and white television.

A: It's amazing where you have come to! The next thing I was going to ask you was about your journey with carbon farming and what benefits that has brought to Bimbadeen and practices on the island?
Bob: Do you want to…?
Anne: No, that's Bob's baby the carbon farming. Can you see the question?
Bob: Yes. Carbon farming is just something I took up and was very passionate about because I knew that climate change was here. Several years ago, we brought down northern grasses and crops to trial here because of the different weather pattern. I had very early awareness of climate change. We started to do carbon farming and just to know that as you build up your carbon, you are pulling a huge amount of CO2 out of the atmosphere, which is helping in climate change, and it is also assisting your land in that it makes the land much more productive. A one per cent increase in carbon in your soil can increase your moisture content holding from between 120 and 150 thousand litres per hectare. So that's a win-win situation. Everything about carbon farming is a win-win situation.

I then started to market the carbon in that we could inset. We started with Totally Renewable Phillip Island TRPI. We donated – 367 tonnes of CO2 equivalent to them which they sold at an auction in Cowes to raise money which gave five other farmers the

opportunity to start carbon farming by paying for their carbon tests and their audits. Everything was going along well at that stage, and then I started trading carbon and we had insetting, because Moragh Mackay started an insetting scheme with Totally Renewable Phillip Island and we started to trade that as insets certificates. Bimbadeen has offset from small ones of six tonnes, eight tonnes; we have donated for the local CWA to be the first in Australia. We have offset environmental companies. We've done large companies like Dineamic Australia Proprietary Limited which was 1227 tonnes, which is a lot of CO2 emissions. But they have increased their business so much that we started off with them with about 60 tonnes and then it went up to about 300 tonnes, and now 1200 tonnes so we have been with them for about three or four years. So that's where we were heading.

Then we started to advertise it. We built and put up a new website called Carbon Neutral Online and started promoting it through the site. We had people coming on board and enquiries and questions, which sadly is what is really needed in Australia, because farmers do not realise what value they have and what carbon they have because they don't actually test for carbon to determine what they have in their soil. And if they only knew it, they'd have another income that stays in the soil the whole time, not like if you're cutting hay or cutting silage and removing it from the farm. You're actually getting an income from it, and it's not leaving the farm, you're just building it up. But a short period ago, the family had a meeting and decided that they did not wish to trade carbon anymore and so that side of the carbon business has stopped; it's finished.
Anne: We're still carbon farming, we're not trading.
Bob: Well, we won't be carbon farming as much, no.

A: In terms of your professional development, what are the sort of things you have undertaken, and what do you offer at Bimbadeen?
Anne: It's interesting because when I sold my physiotherapy practice in 1996, having looked after people's health for a while, I decided I'd like to be involved in the land, so I actually did a couple of courses. I did a course with Chisholm TAFE in the Certificate of Natural Resource Management. We also did an environmental management system for Bimbadeen Farm, which meant that everything that happened on the farm was documented. We became 14001 compliant, ISO 14001 compliant.

Image of Bimbadeen showing numbered carbon sequestration paddocks.
From carbonneutralonline.com.au

It was good because we documented everything we did, and it meant that we could be accountable. So that was an interesting time because we started to form a group of people who were also involved and committed to sustainable farming. We developed a product called *Enviromeat* which we sold to restaurants in Melbourne. But it was about that time about 2005, 2007 when everyone was getting really anxious about climate change and having to do something. But it all just fizzled with the Kevin Rudd thing, it all just dissipated. And all the enthusiasm and the excitement of that just dissipated, didn't it Bob? But now it would probably take off like a bullet. But people just turned away. People weren't prepared to pay a little bit extra.
Bob: People weren't prepared to pay 10 cents a kilo [higher] for beef with all the credentials of what we had.
Anne: It didn't actually happen.

A: So you were a bit ahead of your time?
Anne: I think that's exactly what it is.
Bob: Unfortunately, we have been right along, which is quite a problem.
Anne: So what do we offer at Bimbadeen in terms of (the environment) Well for years we had visitation, didn't we, from international volunteers - young people who used to stay and work on the farm. And we've had a number of farm field days. We've had one about the carbon farming, we've had one about the EMS, we've had all sorts of things. People often come to Bimbadeen to learn about things, which we really enjoy.
Bob: Schools and colleges.
Anne: Young people from RMIT, Melbourne and local schools, local volunteers, Landcare and our family have planted 45,000 trees!
Bob: Groups and companies come down and spend a day planting trees, bring their own porta-loo and don't use it [laughs]. When they come up to the house for lunch, they flooded the place out by blocking up our toilet.
Anne: They use this toilet. (advanced from the bucket in the coke shed)
Bob: We've had some funny incidents.
Anne: We really enjoy when people come and ask if they can see our farm and have a chat about it. That's sort of ongoing.

A: Do you have a lot of exchange of your information and knowledge with overseas?
Anne: Oh yes, very much.
Bob: We've had visits from Japanese people, we've had people from China, we've had a group from the United States, and China just six months ago.

A: What do you think they think when they see Bimbadeen, is it very different to what they normally know?
Bob: It is. I think they appreciate that like on a small farm it's fairly productive, and most of those people at that stage, we were talking about carbon farming, and they thought that was a marvellous idea and it wasn't really happening where they were. They were looking at some sort of an understanding between us and them about carbon and trading and all that sort of thing. So, yeah when we pointed out what could be done with carbon, they were pretty interested in all of that.

A: So you spoke a little bit before about the wonderful accommodation that you have near the café which obviously is not operating at the moment during COVID. Can you tell us

about how you decided to introduce and approach farm tourism? I think your children had some interest in that.
Anne: Yes, it was the children really. It was the children. Richard is not only a farmer, he is also a qualified builder, so he was able to give advice about the retreats and our son being an accountant, could work out the pros and cons of all these things. It was really the next generation that started to look at farm tourism and we were more than happy to go along with it because it meant that the family was still going to be a part of Bimbadeen. Clearly, with such a high tourist visitation to the island, it made a lot of sense that there was a market there straight away, particularly with being on the road to the Penguin Parade. It's been great with some of the families, hasn't it Bob, like from Singapore.

Bob: Singapore has been marvellous, I would say possibly 70 per cent of the people staying there would have been from Singapore.
Anne: They were so friendly; they will probably come back. The word spreads when they go home.
Bob: The families come and it's quite amazing, the kids get out and run around. They just can't believe the space, you know. They sort of say, "well do you own to the fence there?" and we say, "well yes actually, we own to down there and up there", and they can't believe it. They say, "but how can you own that land? Do you lease it off the government?" They are very surprised at the space and the fresh air which we possibly take a bit for granted.

Bimbadeen accommodation unit. From: bimbadeenphillipisland.com.au

A: Do you have any issues or concerns around biosecurity with people coming onto the farm?
Bob: We're pretty careful with biosecurity, we don't let any vehicles. There's notices up everywhere that vehicles can't go travelling around the place, and they usually get boots from over at the egg grading room, to walk around and see what's going on. I think Richard and Stephen are on to the biosecurity pretty carefully. I don't think it's at the stage where everybody has to sign a declaration or anything like that, but they're well aware of it.

A: Have you participated in the Royal Melbourne Show or other shows, and can you describe your most memorable experiences?
Bob: We've done very well in shows….

Anne: Steer competitions
Bob: In live cattle we won Champion Brangus Bull and Female at the Sydney [Royal Easter] Show and we've won at [Royal] Melbourne Show and we don't like – it's a little bit difficult to say – but we don't like leading animals and then having them killed in a carcass competition, and so we never went in a led carcass competition. We'd put animals in that were processed directly and we had a lot of success in those awards for carcass competitions, which helped us sell a lot of bulls after that because people knew what the bulls could produce. And for instance we won the Safeway Award which is the top steer in the show for the Safeway Award, Domestic. And just a couple of years ago we were in the top 100 MSA breeders in Victoria. So MSA is a Meat Standards Australia grading system. For cattle it goes through they are the top cattle and we were lucky enough to be in the first 100 breeders in Victoria.

A: And what years were the wins at the Melbourne and Sydney shows if you recall? What year did you win?
Bob: [1992 Royal Sydney Show. All awards are on our web site www.bullsemen.com.au].

A: Are there any tensions between your farming activities with the environment and wildlife on the island, which has been steadily increasing over the last couple of years?
Anne: Yes, it's interesting. I've been a member of the Phillip Island Conservation Society ever since it was formed, and I was president for seven or eight years, so in many ways I'm a very different farmer from a lot of other farmers because we're very keen environmentalists. It is an interesting situation now with the Wildlife Plan (being developed) because with the number of the Cape Barren Geese affecting the growth of crops and planning and management of the farm, it's having a serious impact. I think like most farmers we feel these things have to be managed.

With the Cape Barren Geese, I know they were introduced to the island, they weren't always here. We've not had Cape Barren Geese for years and years. And the possums are clearly doing an enormous amount of damage. They are difficult issues, but they are doing a lot of damage to existing trees. And also, with the wallabies – we were fortunate because most of the tree planting lines that we did, we didn't have the wallabies – but the wallabies stop all the regeneration. Usually after a bit or rain or in spring, you'll start to see the melaleuca come back or other plants and trees, and they just get nibbled away so it's an issue that has to be resolved if people want to keep the farming landscape, the farming community, I do think the wildlife has to be managed.

It's going to be a difficult one but I think it's very important for the future of the island because if people can't farm, then the next thing would be that people would walk off their farms or potentially walk off their farms, and that's only going to create a greater problem with the wildlife but it will also mean that the land will then probably be subject to the pressure of subdivision. It's certainly a very current issue.

Bob: The farm land will gradually disappear.

A: In terms of resolving those tensions, do you have input? We're going to talk about Landcare in a few questions
Anne: Individually, we'll be submitting yes.

A: In terms of animals, or even vegetation, what things have you noticed have disappeared or have grown over the last 50 years?
Anne: There'd certainly be more weeds. As I was saying it's a lot to do with the health of some of the trees that are being been chewed away by possums. Yes, possums are having…

Bob: Possums will just kill trees. In the wildlife corridor there's trees that have just been completely eaten out by possums and they are just dead.
Anne: Stripped.
Bob: I'm sure it's not just a farming problem, I'm sure there's plenty of residential places in Cowes that have their gardens eaten out by possums. It is a problem, it's a big problem, that and Cape Barren Geese. They'd be nothing to see 40 or 50 Cape Barren Geese on a small one hectare or two-hectare paddock. There's literally thousands of geese on this property at any one time during the breeding season.
Anne: We were thinking about growing some Indigenous plants to be produced to have at the café or the store, but it became impossible because they were just being eaten out.
Bob: They come to fresh crops, fresh grass, and eat it out. There's one paddock I had for carbon which was a two-hectare paddock and that was just covered with birds, when I first planted it, absolutely covered with geese and magpies, you name it, it was there. We bought some bird scarers…
Anne: That's right; from Kogan.
Bob: …To scare them off the paddock. We had three bird scarers going then as something approached it let out sirens and ambulance calls and God knows what to keep them away, and that worked for a while. And then I had to fire shots down the paddock to scare them off, so they went on to another paddock somewhere else which wasn't as important as the carbon paddock at the time. And then I trained an eagle from the top of Hurricane Hill which lives on top of the hill there.

We used to put dead rabbits and hares along the paddocks and work the eagles down towards that paddock, and actually succeeded in having the eagles scare off the birds from that paddock. There's a bit of everything that went into that and not a lot of people would be pleased with how it was done but it was very effective, and it worked without doing any harm to anything. I daresay you could call that managing; managing the problem.

A: And in terms of Bimbadeen's future, obviously your children are a big part. But have you put in place succession plans?
Anne: Not really, we've just let it evolve, haven't we?
Bob: We know where it is going. We know that they will all end up with a portion of the farm, and I think they know that too, and virtually which portions they will be getting. It's up to them what happens with it eventually.

A: Do you hope they will continue?
Anne: Very much, yes.
Bob: I hope so. I don't know whether that will be the case, but I think some would like to keep farming it, but I think others may not.

Community involvement

A: Thank you. We're going to talk a little bit about your involvement in the community and some of your reflections and memories. Is there something you wanted to say about that?
Bob: Speak to Anne [laughs]. I was on hospital committees and school committees.

A: Can you tell us about your participation in the Phillip Island community, I understand that you were the founding members of Landcare?
Anne: That's right yes. The whole of the Phillip Island community? I don't suppose you know, I mean you don't, that I have an Order of Australia…

A: Oh, no I don't…
Anne: Yes. For my contribution to the environmental, social and cultural life of Gippsland which of course included Phillip Island. Oh gosh, a long history of community involvement because I…Well, it was a bit about during the war too. After the war was over they showed the films of the Belsen concentration camp and the parents and children had to leave the cinema and I crawled up and looked to see what had happened in the concentration camp and I think it affected me all my life.

I could not believe people could do that to each other so if you kept people *together*, it couldn't happen, and so that was my pathway. But I was in an interesting situation because I'd been fortunate to be educated and I had a really wonderful childhood. I then came across in my work, women who had so much potential and really had never had the opportunity to have education or social experiences.

I was very mindful that they could have a very different life but were destined to be on the journey they were on. In 1973, it was when the Whitlam Government came into power, I saw an advertisement for a Community Development Officer. I applied for that job, and I became a Community Development Officer across Bass, Wonthaggi and Phillip Island. It was an interesting job because you didn't really have to be accountable to the council, you were accountable to the Australian Assistance Plan, and so I was able to start things like playgroups and do recreation centres and all sort of groups, teenage groups. Bob often came with me. I was able to improve library services and in one special case, the closure of a substandard nursing home.

It was an amazing time of my life, and I've got the telegram from [Prime Minister] Gough Whitlam that when he was defeated, I said to him "thank you for the opportunity" and he said, Anne "It's people like you have made it so worthwhile!" I really continued to do that. I've been on dozens and dozens of committees, had community days. Then I was on the council. I was Deputy Shire President [Shire of Phillip Island] and we used to have community days because I don't think people realised what an amazing community they lived in. Because Phillip Island, being an island, had always had to entertain itself and do things together, so we used to have exhibitions in the rec centre. Every group did something or other. We did those for years and years.

In 1992, when I was on the council, I moved a motion that the council investigate having a community and arts centre in Cowes and I remember when they voted, by one vote, that they would go ahead, I stood up and said, "Hallelujah!" Well, can you imagine how I feel now in 2021, we have been through seven plans and we're nearly there.

A: It's an amazingly long time.
Anne: It is an amazingly long time and I want to live long enough to walk in that door in 2022! It is a remarkable community. It copes with people, tens of thousands of people coming to the Grand Prix; it looks after penguins, it looks after hooded plovers; it's a very dynamic, clever community. I don't think people realise how smart they are.

A: Do you see your identity primarily as a Phillip Islander, or a Victorian?
Anne: Probably very much a Phillip Islander now. We were amongst the first people to be members of Landcare. The island, the farmers wouldn't be anything without Landcare. Very active group isn't it, Phillip Island Landcare, and we've won awards, we've won a state Landcare award.

A: Joan Kirner had a lot to do with it from what I understand.
Anne: Yes, a lot to do with it. It was amazing because a Labor person and Heather Mitchell from the Victorian Farmers' Federation, they achieved it. But to think it's still going strong. It's been a great organisation, we're still members and in fact we've got the AGM, we're Life Members I think, on Saturday.

Bob and Anne hold photos of their farm

A: What's inspired you about the landscape of Phillip Island and its preservation?
Anne: I suppose, I think the very fact that we live on an island. I mean how many live on an island? And the variety of the beaches and the landscape is exciting, but also its Indigenous history. Bob and I used to own the property called "McHaffie's" down on the Western Port side, next to "Trenavin Park".
Bob: McHaffie's Lagoon.
Anne: That was just gorgeous, a beautiful property, and we restored the lagoon. The people who owned the property before us let their cattle go through the farm, over the sand dunes, and almost walk to the Nobbies.
Bob: The cattle would go down the beach and walk right along and the owners had fish nets along to try and stop them getting through fences.
Anne: We'd go down in the early morning and I'd sit in the sand dune and look across Western Port and I'd think what it must have been like for Mrs McHaffie to be here from the

other side of the world. There are many Aboriginal middens in the dunes. There is much Aboriginal history about Phillip Island.
Bob: There was a bare patch of part of the headlands, or part of the sand dunes, and I was taking an Indigenous person up there one day and about 80 metres from it, he started to tremble and shake, and he said, "Bob, I don't like this, has something happened here?" And I explained that there was a bare patch of ground, and he said, "It's a slaughter site, there's been killing there, and people have been taken." Looking back on it, that's exactly what could have happened in the early days. I understand the sealers came and shot people.
Anne: They took the women to the Bass Strait islands.
Bob: I firmly believe that he [sensed] something, he just knew something had happened in that area. It was a pretty powerful experience.
Anne: That *was* a powerful experience.
Bob: Just to see him start shaking and shaking.

When Anne was talking about the vegetation, I think a lot of our vegetation is because of what happened in our very early days when we were told to plough everything in. We weren't told to keep strips of trees for shelter or anything, we were just told…
Anne: …to knock it over.
Bob…and that's what we did and so we've been trying to restore the tree growth and now about 18, possibly close to 20 per cent of the farm is treed so every paddock is lined with trees or got trees somewhere. We've put in about 45,000 plus, possibly near 50,000 trees now and a lot of those trees are *melaleuca ericifolia* and they sucker so they travel along and come up again. There would be a large increase in vegetation now.
A: Was there anything else you would like to add around that question, Anne?
Anne: No, I don't think so, thank you.
Bob: If we could just say quickly, we didn't know which trees to plant and the old-timers at that time told us to plant Cypress, which aren't a good thing today, but we have a row of Cypress out there and we've Cypress along the front. Fortunately, we bought the variety of *Horizontalis* Cypress so they seemed to have been a much better variety than the *macrocarpa* so they're growing well. So fortunately, crossed fingers, they haven't died out like a lot of other Cypresses in a lot of other areas.

Changes on Phillip Island

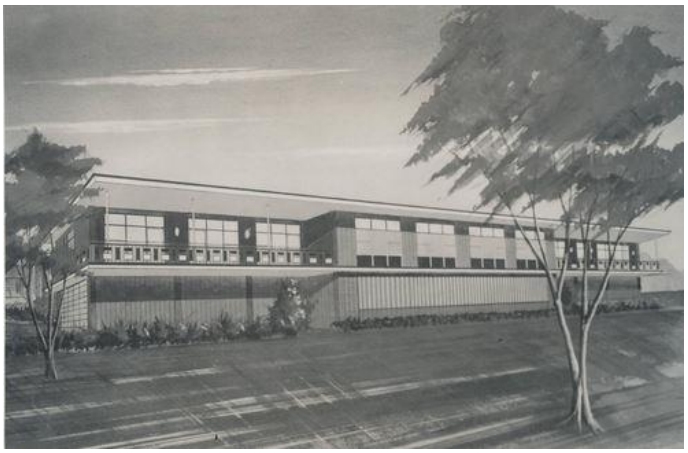
A: Can you describe the biggest changes that you have seen on Phillip Island over the past sixty years?
Anne: Of course, the subdivision of farms into housing estates. I think it's been particularly tragic that a lot of trees have been felled. Why we didn't retain some of those precious trees that were habitat! But still whether or not now, whether people are going to be more conscious of it? I'd like to think so. But then, when I look at the new houses being built at San Remo, they've virtually have no trees or anything around them; so I think it's going to take a while.

It's interesting, because everything changes of course. Sometimes people say to me, it must have been different when there were less people here. But many of the people who have come to live here are very environmentally conscious. You know, they've become members of the hooded plover, or they're Friends of Churchill Island Society, or they've started U3A, so they have made a contribution to a richer community. I have no regrets about that, that's

been a good outcome. It's really opened up Phillip Island. But I am concerned about the volume of day-trippers and the people pouring over the sand dunes and perhaps not having the same respect and understanding about these precious assets that we've enjoyed on Phillip Island. So, I think that the biggest challenge is the visitation numbers, and I guess that's been the changes I've seen in the day-trippers. There's just so many more. We're so close to Melbourne now with the highway; they come down in great numbers.
Bob: And we can't see any reason for a double highway through the island for such a short period to such a small destination. You have a single-lane bridge anyway. They're taking farmland to do that, which I think, you know is unreasonable really because it's not going to prove advantageous for anything. The speed limit over large parts of is 60 [km/h] now so I think it should control itself. There's only very few occasions like the Grand Prix, (when travelling on the island) takes longer of course because of the volume of traffic. You know, it's only a few times a year, if people can organise themselves for these events.

A: Do you have a favorite memory or story that you like to tell about Phillip Island?
Anne: Yes, I have lots of wonderful memories and stories. I used to really love it when we had the Warley Hospital in Cowes because it was the centre of activity. We used to have a garden party every year and everyone dressed up in their finery and everyone made plates of cakes and sandwiches, and you just looked forward to it every year. The exciting part about Warley was every baby that was born, was born in Warley Hospital. When the baby was born, the kids used to run down from the school and run into the nursery and look at the baby. I mean as if you would be able to do that now! And when you had the baby, you stayed in hospital for two weeks. You had a cooked breakfast, lunch and dinner, morning, afternoon tea and supper. Everyone came in to see you. There was just this amazing amount of excitement and joy when a baby was born!

When we lost somebody, when somebody died, everyone would come to the funeral. The sandwiches and cakes would come out and there would be lots of memories, lots of tears, and lots of laughter. It was the smallness and the closeness of the community that I connected with which is a beautiful memory that is lingering, everlasting. A lovely time it was when we were a small community.
Bob: We used to have at the guest house - Erehwon Guest House - competitions and concerts to raise money for the Warley Hospital. There used to be lots of events and concerts and passing the hat around, and just solely to raise money to keep Warley going.



Artists' impression of the Warley Hospital design, 1962

Anne: And the car raffle. We sat outside Gulliver's, which used to be a garage. Someone would bring the car out every day during Christmas holidays and people would buy a ticket to keep the hospital going.

Bob: My father had Surf Beach Estate and he offered a block of land for the raffle, for the hospital, so that went on for many, many years. My memories of a younger boy were that I loved swimming. I loved swimming at the back beaches and I loved running across the rocks, never thinking you would slip or fall, which I never did. I wouldn't like to try it today! [laughs]. And as Anne said, the people and the small community, and the meetings and the arguments about whether you would get electric power or not and things like that.
Anne: It was very important at the time.
Bob: Important at the time, but you know people were afraid. I can remember arguing with somebody, a very old-time farmer, about electricity, and he didn't want electricity because he was scared of it. We had an argument at the meeting, but electricity eventually came.

A: What are your hopes and concerns for the future going forward for Phillip Island?
Anne: I'm an optimist. I believe Phillip Island is highly regarded, at the State Government level. I think it's loved by a lot of people who know it's quite unique, that its assets are precious, and I'd like to think that there will always be a voice to preserve that which is precious.
Bob: Look, I just hope that sensibility prevails with the landscape and with the development and with the roads. It's going to be a very hard thing I think because it's going to become more popular as a destination from Melbourne. There's going to be volumes of people coming down here and I think it's a pretty delicate balance as to what's going to happen. I really don't know what the future will be, but I hope it remains the beautiful place that it is today.

A: Thank you. Did you have anything else that you would like to share?
Anne: I think that's about it. Very comprehensive.

A:Thank you very much for today, Bob and Anne Davie at Bimbadeen Farm.
Anne: Thank you Andrea, we really enjoyed it.
Thank you.

Keith and Rhonda Jobe
The Continental Hotel & Tourism

Essay based on Interview conducted by Dr Andrea Cleland on 29 April 2021

Introduction

The site of the original 'Continental' was Phillip Island's first livery stable, owned by Mr A. Findlay. There were two huts and on old stable lined along the four boundaries with very tall pine trees. With the decision to build a modern guesthouse in the area, a syndicate was formed to purchase the land with The Continental built in 1923 as a one storey-building containing 42 bedrooms and a 100-foot-long veranda in front. Its official opening on Saturday 8th December 1923 occurred on the same day that Warley Hospital also opened for the Phillip Island Community.

Original Continental Guest House, 1929
Phillip Island and District Historical Society collection

The guesthouse was close to Cowes jetty and the beautiful Cowes foreshore, with several features of Indian and American bungalow adopted in its construction. When The Continental at Cowes came on the market, a wonderful opportunity presented itself to the Jobe family when Keith's parents, Harry and Kitty Jobe, purchased the hotel in 1957.

Earlier in the 1940s, Harry Jobe was forced to leave his job at Foy and Gibsons in Collingwood due to failing eyesight caused by the chemical used in the dyeing of cloth. Subsequently, Harry's poor eyesight made him ineligible for military service. To support themselves, the family took in lodgers from Hong Kong who were fleeing the war. The additional money received from the Nelson family allowed Harry and Kitty to repay the mortgage early on their home in Willoughby Street, Reservoir and to start a business, Willoughby Catering, from their home.

As Willoughby Catering steadily and successfully grew, the Jobe family were able to purchase an old federation style house on a large block of land in Bell Street Preston. Here they built *Willoughby Hall* and it included a number of features that were new in Melbourne for that time, including a foyer for greeting guests and a changing room for brides.

The 1950s and a holiday connection to Phillip Island becomes permanent

The Jobe family developed a connection to Phillip Island, as Keith put it 'purely by coming down on holiday first of all'. Keith recalled his first trip to Phillip Island, which was a camping trip:

> We were camping on a block that dad got permission to do. We had an outside toilet. I was sitting on the outside toilet and this snake came up and I asked my brother to do something about it and he was standing behind me laughing, holding a shot gun (laughs). Finally, I was safe. We then purchased a holiday house in Church Street in Cowes. This brought back lovely memories and we would come down from Melbourne and have the odd weekend, generally very late at night, because my parents worked seven days a week in Melbourne, with their catering business.

It was 1957 and Keith who was 17 had just finished year 9 at school when the Continental Hotel was purchased 'on a handshake' by his father. Keith recalled:

> We were having a picnic on the front lawns and my dad was talking to someone, and they said: 'The Continental was for sale'. Dad went up the street – and I think it was Miss Smith, who was the real estate agent. He asked if he could buy it, and within a week it was done. Very simple. We went and saw Arthur Jones. He was the owner of the Continental at the time, and on a handshake, it was done.

Keith stayed on the island over winter and was looked after by the Purcell family. Meanwhile, Harry and Kitty, together with their elder son Ron, stayed in Reservoir running Willoughby Catering. Affectionately known as 'the Conti', Rhonda described what the Continental Hotel looked like:

> It was a weatherboard guest house that accommodated 60 rooms. It was the only purpose-built guest house, in that most other guest houses were homes that had been adapted. The building structure was brought over from Tasmania. It landed on the front beach and was then taken up and assembled. It had beautiful lead lights and there was a lot of brass in it.

The hotel required a lot of maintenance and as Keith had been to technical school, he had felt comfortable doing all sorts of jobs. Keith reflected on his first job at the Conti that involved soldering pipes:

> My first job was crawling under the Continental to wrap up pipes with bandages because we didn't have a lot of money to replace the pipes. Water was a bit critical on Phillip Island when we took over.

The Continental Hotel, c. 1950. Philip Island & District Historical Society collection

Although essential services on Phillip Island could be considered rudimentary at the time, a hot water service had been installed in 1923 at the Continental. Guests could have their showers and baths hot or (cold, if preferred) available at all times of the day. Harry and Kitty had purchased a farm on the corner of Dunsmore and Settlement Roads in Cowes in the 1950s. Keith set about constructing two dams and drilled bores on the farm to supply the Conti with a reliable source of water. Keith reflected:

> We had large concrete tanks which held about 160,000 gallons of fresh water and then we had bores. Later, on we built dams. We bought a farm in Dunsmore Road, where the Penguin Resort is, and we put in large dams and piped water up to the Conti from there.
>
> It was quite funny because most of the locals used to tap into this pipeline. We'd been wondering where our water was going. One of them was our shire engineer, Jock McKechnie (laughs). It was a lovely time on Phillip Island.

Gradually, the shape and design of the original guesthouse changed. The old weatherboard guest house rooms were progressively replaced with new two-storey brick accommodation featuring private ensuites. The two-storey brick Continental also included a TV lounge and games area overlooking the bay. The original weatherboard structure on the Esplanade was relocated to four blocks of land on the east side of Findlay Street. Two of the original weatherboard structures were also donated to become the club houses for the Phillip Island Lawn Bowls Club. The sport was a passion of Harry and Kitty, and these club houses still stand today off Dunsmore Road in Cowes.

The 1960s and the social years at the Continental

From its early days, features for hotel guests at the Continental included a croquet lawn, bowling green and tennis courts through to later additions such as a squash court, sauna, heated pool, garden spa and volleyball area. Activities such as billiards, backgammon, cards or snooker were also on offer. Social events and developing connections between guests were at the heart of holidays at the Continental. Rhonda explained:

> In those days, the guest house environment was different. It meant that there were three meals a day as part of your accommodation package, and there were shared bathrooms and because everyone knew each other, they were all friends. That added to that social connection. It had people who came for about two weeks at a time and it was the same group of people. So that was the comradery, and it was the people who organised the social events like the table tennis competition, the billiards competition and all sorts of things.

Other social events would be at the request made by guests, such as the opportunity to dress up in fancy dress. Over the years, dances and themed nights would take place at the Continental. Keith recalled how much fun was had at the Conti, and Rhonda said:

> With the themed nights, sometimes there was a 'swapped gender night'. And there's a prominent Melbourne man with a couple of oranges in his wife's bra, dressed up to the hilt.
>
> With the 'bad taste night', the staff used to get into that too. You had black stockings with ladders, blacked out teeth, a few scar marks on your face and do everything that was absolutely horrible and it was fun.

Keith also described how the same guests would come in every year in the same fortnight, and as Keith put it: 'They would leave, put down a deposit, and see you next year.' Indeed, routine was very much a way of life at the Conti and Rhonda explained:

> There were three meals a day and you would also have a high tea on Sunday. You would have supper. After dinner you would have the 'porto' [portable] tray on wheels that you would push out along the rubbers. Everyone had their coffee outside in the lounge room and then someone would play the piano and you'd have a dance. The young guys on the island used to come to the Conti to check out the talent. And initially, you were only supposed to wear dresses.

As Keith put it, his father had 'felt that girls should not wear slacks' as part of the dress code for ladies, although 'the boys could get away with anything'. Keith said:

> He would come down. The trouble was that generally the most attractive girls came in wearing slacks and I'd be caught dancing with the girls. Luckily, dad's eyesight wasn't that good.

In fact, Keith met Rhonda at the Continental in 1965 and they were later married in 1968 in Preston. Rhonda reflected:

> I came down in '65 and worked as a waitress and watched Keith go out with all the girls. And then at the end when he ran out of girls to go out with (all laugh), he asked me if I'd like to have a game of table tennis and the rest is history.

Many of the regular guests who holidayed at the Continental attended their wedding as deep friendships developed over time. Keith reflected:

> The guest houses would have dances where the locals would come, and many locals met their partner at places like ours or Erehwon. Anne Oswin was one who met her partner at our place, and it's just lovely.

After Keith and Rhonda were married in 1968, they moved into a little flat. Keith recalled what the street the Conti was situated on in Cowes looked like in the 1960s:

> There was a lot of open land, just a couple of homes. The homes there on Phillip Island were on large blocks of land because land was very cheap at the time. If you had a block of land, it would be an acre at least. We purchased a property opposite in Findlay Street and used it as staff quarters. Later on, we built apartments there.

Rhonda described how people knew each other within the community:

> It was a very strong community. We didn't have the numbers; the population was quite low, and everyone knew each other. There were a lot of the old families and a lot of newer people coming.

Keith reflected further on the rural nature of the island and his strong memory of the generator in Cowes that powered Phillip Island being switched off:

> Phillip Island was extremely rural when we came. It was only farms – they were the main businesses. Because the guest houses only operated over a short period of time, it didn't have a great effect on the island.
>
> When I first came to the island, I was walking into Cowes and there was a lot of people at this old building. And they were turning off the generator that looked after all the power for Phillip Island. It's quite a memory (laughs).

The roads to the island were not in good condition and Keith would journey to the island via Dandenong and a gravel road from Anderson. Although it felt like a 'long trip down' for Keith he reflected that in reality: 'We would come down in about two and a half hours because there was no traffic on the roads.'

Rhonda recalled that the single lane road on the highway wasn't very wide:

> *The cars were different as they didn't have high acceleration performance. If you get* stuck behind something in the Gurdies, you knew that was going to hold you up. And you mostly stopped at Tooradin and had a cheese sandwich or something to break the trip up.

Rhonda also described how navigating the old suspension bridge onto Phillip Island was tricky:

> I was learning to drive and going over the bridge, your tyres would catch a groove. It was like being on tram tracks and it would move. Keith has got a story about that.

The first Phillip Island bridge, showing the 'tram track' effect of the roadway planked surface
Phillip Island and District Historical Society collection

Keith shared his story:

> I was driving over in a truck that I had for my brickworks and a bus come the other direction and it was scary. In the truck, you couldn't see the side of the bridge. It would be nerve-wracking. But the bridge wasn't a problem for us because any holiday time we were at the hotel. We were busy, so we didn't even have the thought of driving off the island at any of those times.

The original suspension bridge hindered development on the island due to the load limits that made transporting bricks onto the island difficult. To address this issue Keith started his first business venture in his own right earlier during the 1950s. He set up a brick works on the farm purchased by Harry and Kitty on the corner of Dunsmore and Settlement Roads in Cowes. Keith recalled they used about 200,000 bricks at the Conti from their Brick Works, and Rhonda said:

> It (the first bridge) did limit development, initially. For example, I think it was a 6 tonne load limit on the bridge. That meant for bringing over things like bricks or construction materials, it was an issue. It was for that reason, that Keith started a little company, which was the Brick Works. They made bricks and they were used when the Conti was slowly renovated.

Bricks were also made for Harry and Kitty's house which Keith and their foreman built.

The discussion about the rural nature of Phillip Island prompted Rhonda and Keith to share a funny memory about their cattle escaping from the farm. Rhonda said:

> We had cattle. One day, it was a Christmas I think, the cattle got out and they went down what's now a sealed, beautiful road in Dunsmore Road and headed off. We had to get the staff out and round up cattle, but these things happened. It was very different.

Keith added:

> Once a bull escaped from our farm. We got our chef, and a couple of kitchen hands and ourselves, we went hunting for our bull. Hours later we got our bull back but when we were sitting down congratulating ourselves, the local farmers – Trafford Morgan-Payler and his dad – come in looking extremely upset. We'd rustled their Hereford prized bull (laughs). They were not impressed, and we weren't either because we had to go back out to find where our bull was. We finally found it. That brings a smile back to my face.

At the close of the decade in 1969, Keith and Rhonda continued to develop the Conti, building ten new rooms in a two-storey wing with views of the bay. These rooms increased the hotel's income from accommodation, especially during periods outside of school holidays and helped to turn declining profits around. The first conference room was also added at the Conti, allowing the business to now cater for conferences.

Commemorative menu for the opening of the expanded Continental Hotel, 1976

The 1970s and the start of international tourism, raising a family and rebuilding

In 1971, Keith and Rhonda purchased the Conti from Harry and Kitty and established a new company – The Continental (Cowes). As Phillip Island became more widely known overseas for its penguins, the first international tourists began arriving in coaches to view the Penguin Parade. Keith remembered the funny start that coincided with hosting international guests:

> Our introduction to international tourism started on a bad taste theme night. Our waitress saw a couple coming into the lounge and she walked up to see if she could help them. She had her teeth blackened, stockings with holes in it [laughs]. She looked atrocious, and the American couple were a little bit put out. But then the wife actually glanced into the dining room and saw everyone having lots of fun and realised what was happening. They joined us that night and they said that was the best night they had anywhere in Australia.

In addition to running and developing their business, Keith and Rhonda had started their own family. Rhonda described how intrinsically family life was linked to running the Conti:

> Life really revolved around the Conti. You didn't get out and about much. As the Conti changed and developed, what you did changed and developed. As it did when you had your family.
>
> We had our kids at the old (Warley) hospital, and we had a strong connection with the hospital. For our 75th anniversary for the Conti we had a joint celebration with the hospital. There's always been a strong link with Warley.

Tickets to 75th anniversary joint Warley Hospital - Continental Hotel celebration, 1999. Phillip Island and District Historical Society collection

Keith and Rhonda's son David was born in 1970 and daughter Jeni was born in 1972 at Warley Hospital. There was only one doctor at the time who serviced the whole island. In fact, David was the first baby that Dr Ben Weiss delivered on the island. After David was born, Rhonda stayed in hospital for 'only a couple of days' as 'it was out as soon as you could and back to work' and Rhonda was looked after by Meg, the matron at Warley Hospital. Rhonda described the birth of her second child, Jeni, after going into labour whilst working:

> My mum had come over from Perth. I was in the kitchen and I could feel things happening in the afternoon but I wanted to get the dinner finished. And I said, 'I better go'. I went up to the hospital at 7.30 at night after tea, and I had her at 11 o'clock at night. You did that, your whole focus was on looking after people and running a business. It was full of challenges because it was a seasonal business to start with.

Rhonda further described the seasonal nature of running a hotel and shared stories about the brass gong that was used to wake the guests up and at mealtimes.

> Arthur Jones used to run it over Christmas holidays and Easter. Later on, we had the Young Liberals come in and they would take sole occupancy for the June long weekend. Lots of funny stories about that.
>
> We used to have a gong and you'd ring the gong to say 'wake up' and at mealtimes. In the guest house, they walked around with a brass gong, and that's 'get up', or that's 'breakfast is served'. Well, there used to be three gongs.

The first gong Keith remembered was: 'Back to your room'. The second gong Rhonda remembered with laughter was: 'Back to your *own* room!', with the third gong being: 'Now get up' as the 'breakfast' gong. Rhonda further explained how integral the gong was to life at the Conti:

> The gong was a huge part of the Conti and it was out the front in the lounge room. The leadlight doors divided the lounge from the dining room and there were rubbers – we called them – runners that ran up the old dining room which had beautiful dark timber. The staff used to have to scrub the rubbers twice a week and polish all the brass, the old-fashioned brass fire extinguishers. It was a beautiful world.

However, disaster was to strike in 1974 when a fire engulfed the hotel. Rhonda described her memories about the tragedy of the fire:

> There was a fire in 1974, just after we had done a lot of renovations and put in a restaurant. We'd picked out the tiles and had everything organised. It was going to look beautiful; it had a mezzanine floor. Snow Lacco from Newhaven was building a scale model of a lobster boat to go in there. In November 1974 we lost the central part of the Conti in the fire unfortunately.

Rhonda explained how the previous trauma of fire experienced by one of the guests had been triggered by the smell of smoke:

> A Greek couple who were regular guests, the wife Mrs Raftopoulous, sent her husband up to our door and started banging on it and said, 'My wife can smell smoke'. She'd had a trauma as a child and was very sensitive to smoke. And thanks to Mrs Raftopoulos, I got out of bed and rushed downstairs and found the kitchen on fire. It was an electrical fault, but poor Mr Raftopoulos was coming in to see how things were and went into the wrong door of the kitchen. He came in the 'out' door and I smacked him in the nose with the door unwittingly on the way to ring the fire brigade. Well, that fire was a very traumatic experience because it was an old guest house, timber, and the flame went across the top in the void of the ceiling, and our little flat was built into it, as part of it.
>
> My daughter Jeni, her cot was right next to that wall. I rang the fire brigade, rushed upstairs, tried to stir Keith. He's out of bed, sitting on David's bed, talking to him and I'm saying, 'the place is on fire!' I grab Jeni out the cot, the power's gone off, rushed out, got both kids, went downstairs, stood out the front of the Conti. Flames everywhere. Very traumatic. And Keith got into it when the fire brigade came, he was involved helping with the fire. Brian Brady from the pub came out and saw me with a

> child on each hip, and said, 'look come up to our place'. So that was good, spent the night up there and Keith was able to get his emotions out by firefighting, which was good.

Keith described how his 'whole world' disappeared:

> *I went down to have a look at the fire and I saw nearly 44-foot flames and I was* standing there holding a little fire extinguisher. You can just imagine your whole world disappearing and you couldn't do anything. There was nothing I could have done at that stage. I was thrown, I really was. It must have been a total state of shock. I sat with David, telling him it's ok and he's safe.

Rhonda recalled how this took place for Keith 'while the place was burning around him', and then reflected on how everyone 'rallied' to help them after the day after the fire:

> It was interesting because it was a small community, prior to that the Lion's Club had started – and that's another story. We did the Lion's Club Charter Dinner and that was a fabulous time. And the start of the club, and going to meetings, everyone was supportive so the next Lion's Club meeting, the day after the fire, everyone had turned up with clothes for us because everything was gone or ruined.

> Keith went to that meeting with someone's underwear, pants, shirt, tie, top and everyone rallied. And later on, our chef and best friends got together and rescued all the crockery out of our little flat and scrubbed it up. And then invited us, 'come around' and there were your kitchen things they had cleaned up – the crockery – there were broken bits but it didn't burn, it's been fired. And there were wonderful stories. Chris Shaw gave me a set of placemats from the prints of Churchill Island and we had those for about 30 years before they wore out. And the tablecloth I still have it. She knew it was important to me – dressing tables and making things look good. Their kindness, it was incredible, and the support that we had.

In the aftermath, Rhonda described how they continued to run their business, including hosting the Lion's district convention:

> We had the little apartments across the road, so we moved into one of those. But we lost the whole centre of the Conti and in the meanwhile, since having purchased it originally, we had built units on the west and a wing on the east. And that was brick so that didn't burn, but all the old original timber did. I was really cheesed off because

> we had put so much effort into the décor of this little restaurant we were building and all that went up in smoke.
>
> We had to move the Conti office over to one of the motel units. Our fabulous receptionist, Kay Brewer, would put her gumboots on and show people around because we could still let out the side accommodation once it was all cleaned up.
>
> We'd also had a booking for the Lion's district convention but didn't have a building to have it in. The kitchen was relocated to a storeroom in the brick section, and we set up across the road, but it was winter and muddy. They set up big long boards for people to walk on, set the tables in a marquee, and they brought over steaming hot pots of food.

Determined to keep going, Keith outlined the dangers but remembered how wonderful the night turned out:

> As a caterer, it was hard and dangerous. You could imagine the amount of hot food you would need for hundreds of people, and we had to walk over planks in a muddy area. It was just the most wonderful night. Seeing the ladies in their beautiful dresses, with their gumboots on (laughs).

The memory of the ladies wearing skirts with gumboots also stayed with Rhonda and that added to the fun experienced on the night. Rhonda said:

> We had long skirts on with gumboots underneath, but it was voted the most fun convention. And I think when there is an adversity like that, everyone contributes to make it work, so there was so much fun and laugher and cooperation. The success of that function was incredible.

A remarkable resilience was evident in moving forward with business. Rhonda said:

> You have to. What choice do you have? You have to get in and do what's needed because there is no choice. You had to meet demand or miss business. We had started building the motel units because socially, accommodation was changing in that people no longer wanted to have that group factor. They wanted their own private facilities, which you didn't have in a guest house.

Rhonda and Keith further described how changing expectations by guests contributed to social changes within the hotel environment. Keith said:

> Tea-making facilities was the worst thing we ever put into rooms because all of a sudden you would invite friends to go to your room instead of being in the lounge by the fire. To me, as a host, that made such a big difference.

Rhonda described how guests had more discretion in terms of where they wanted to stay as both the economy and social factors were changing. This shaped expectations for the hotel industry, as well as signalling a loss in the desire for collective guest activities. Rhonda said:

> The economy was changing a little in that people had more discretion where they went. Instead of staying for a fortnight, as was the norm in a guest house, or a week because you paid weekly, people only wanted a couple of nights. They didn't want to have three meals a day, so it became bed and breakfast that was 'in vogue' and the start of the motel era. Expectations changed, and I can remember a sign we put up out the front and it was lunch for $1.25 and dinner was $2.50.
>
> Things did change rapidly; expectations, standard of accommodation. The facilities; being more autonomous; and not relying on the guest house atmosphere. But prior to that, what we had lost, was things like the New Year's parade and all the inter-guest house competitions. You would have your table tennis players and they would go and compete with Yackatoon's table tennis players or someone else's. There were little shields and what have you. The social factor changed enormously.

Rhonda reflected on what had changed for guests in the move from guest house to motel style accommodation:

> Mostly it was their expectations on standard of accommodation. The old guest house rooms just didn't cut it.

Rhonda and Keith explained how the tourism focus was initially on the local and domestic market. Yet this changed when Keith read an article about residential conferences and recognised the unique opportunities this presented. Keith said:

> I was reading an article about residential conferences. I thought this would be great, because they come down weekdays, and if I could get them coming, it means I had empty rooms I could use. I actually made an appointment with the CEO of the Department of Labour and Industry in Melbourne, and I went and chatted with him. I must have picked a good day because he had a lot of time. He wrote down all the things I needed to do to set up a residential conference centre.
>
> I went back, and I said, well that looks good and then I did to the inch what he asked for. A few months later I went back and made another appointment and I said, 'look that's all done'. He couldn't believe it, he said 'no one's ever done what I told them to do before' [laughs]. He said I've got to come down and see what you've done. I said 'why don't you bring your family down one weekend and have a chance to see, not only what our conference room is, but the natural environment, that wraps our conference room?'

Rhonda described how beautiful the vista of the hotel was in terms of its position, yet that it was being under-utilised:

> We had a big sun lounge up top because the façade of the old building had been replaced. There were units with private facilities at each end, with a large sun lounge overlooking Western Port. Imagine facing north. Beautiful! But it was under-utilised. It was used a lot by kids and things like the Lions Ladies Apron Parade and fundraising events.

> It's very rare to have a north-facing beach like that in Victoria. The sun streams in and it's a beautiful environment. The palm trees. The lawn. The water.

Keith added how the natural beauty of Phillip Island soon became evident in the conference potential for the Conti:

> We took the family of the CEO from the government department to Seal Rocks. Kevin Shaw had a lovely boat, and we went out to the Nobbies. They were just taken away. He'd heard of Cowes; he'd heard of Phillip Island. But to see how beautiful the nature was down here, he was rapt. The amount of work from the government that we got was huge. We had many conferences for 30 people for Monday to Friday. You sell breakfast, morning teas, lunch, everything. It made such a difference to our place.

View from the window of the new Continental. Jobe family collection

Indeed, this became a significant turning point for the Conti as Rhonda noted that: 'It was no longer just the Christmas, Easter period. It became more of a 12 months of the year business.' This led to the ability to employ people for longer periods, rather than just seasonally and being able to enhance the quality of their service to guests. Keith said:

> We could employ people year-round then, instead of only for Christmas or Easter. That made a big difference to the quality of our service because the team would know what was happening and you would build up some really good team leaders.

Rhonda reflected on the ability to provide a relaxed sitting within a natural environment for guests:

> One of the aspects of the selling point for conferences at the Conti was that you could turn off your phone, well we didn't have mobile phones, but you were less likely to have phone call interruptions unless it was really important. And then someone would contact you, but it gave people more of a relaxed environment, so they could

> take in what they were meant to take in from the conference. And the different styles of conferences. There were grid conferences that were formalised, and there were more relaxed ones like the Fisheries and Wildlife.

As a family affair, things didn't always go quite to plan. A story Keith and Rhonda shared was the time their son David who was two years old at the time unexpectedly interrupted the special address being given by the top person at the AMP National Conference. Rhonda said:

> When we were rebuilding another section – we had to relocate our family from the flat that was being demolished to the other end of the building. And, I had a newborn, bathing her, when the two-year-old decided he'd had his bath, he was naked, and it was warm, and he's walking around and somehow got into the conference room and sat in the front row. I got him back.

It also highlighted the stressful environment that the family faced and how support was given by the Conti team that included Joy Niven, as well as the extended family. Rhonda said:

> There were stressful times with it because we were making do in very limited quarters looking after the kids. Also cooking, preparing and doing a whole range of things. It wore me out. It was quite a situation looking after kids. Feeding my baby as well, and in the kitchen and what have you.
>
> I got crook. I had a knee issue and went up to the doctor's and Ben said, 'well you'd better pack a bag and come up to hospital'. It wasn't very good for a little while. Got over that and got back to work. I was one of the team. It was a matter of bringing in the sister-in-law to look after kids while I wasn't there. You had business support and Keith's parents were there so everything flowed. No one can be indispensable. It all worked out.

Rhonda described the cooperation offered between the businesses in Cowes:

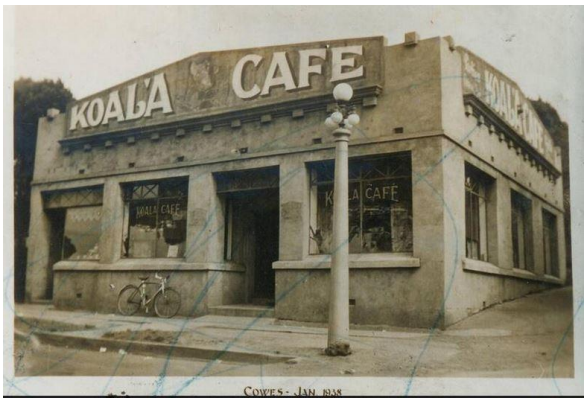
> If you needed some glasses when you had a huge function, you could get them from the pub. We used to have overflow accommodation to the adjacent properties like Erehwon and Yackatoon which we eventually took over.

Initially there were two main restaurants in Cowes, with the Italian restaurants following as post-war migration from Italy to Australia increased. Rhonda reflected:

> The boys at Isola Di Capri were probably the first ones I remember. They went back to Italy and came back with wives. There were more families coming to the island, your staff numbers settling down. People who had been your guests, loving the island, buying land, and building homes. The island started to kick along very well.

Keith added how he felt the responsibility to provide a dining option for guests:

> There were two main restaurants there. There was the Koala Café and the Mint Tulip which was up where the chemist was now or close to it.



Koala Cafe, 1938. Cnr Esplanade and Thompson Ave, Cowes.
Phillip Island and District Historical Society

> That's all there was. There weren't many places you could eat, which put a huge responsibility on us. We felt we needed to be open if we were going to have a guest sleeping in our hotel.

Keith and Rhonda also described the services in Cowes which included the National Bank. Rhonda said:

> It was basically the main street, a few commercial properties in Chapel Street. The town has spread out a lot. At the same time, the social expectations develop, the discretionary spending is more readily there. So as more people came, you got more services, but originally, the old Co-Op was where you went to do your grocery shopping for the island. And they had the hardware store. But now look at it, we've got four supermarkets and in those days, it was the Shire of Phillip Island and it was totally different.

Aerial photo of Cowes CBD c.1970s. Jobe family collection

Fundraising for the community also reflected a time when life was much simpler in arranging events. Rhonda said:

> The Lion's Club were a huge aspect of the island and fundraising was too. I became president of the Lions Ladies' Auxiliary the day after I had my son in 1970 and finished after I had my daughter two years later. The fundraising covered a myriad of exercises. One of which was when we decided to have a bonfire on the beach outside the Conti. You couldn't do that these days! We had Arty Murdoch from the fire brigade; we had Jock McKechnie the Shire engineer and everyone else. They built the bonfire. It sat there for a while and we had this great big family night. It wasn't just for the Lion's Club people; it was for everyone. We had the community bonfire. Can you imagine doing that now?

Keith added his memory of the night:

> Fireworks on New Year's Eve were set off by the local water ski club. Setting off these bazookas and wondering what was going to happen. I only did it once and it was scary, it really was.

The 1970s saw many changes for Keith and Rhonda including the rebuild of the main building during 1975-1976, with over 2,000 square metres of space and a licence to seat 880 guests. More broadly, the Australian economy also experienced record inflation with record interest rates to follow in the late 1980s.

The 1980s and the rapid growth of international and conference markets

Changes in overseas tourism markets

In the early 1980s, Keith took some of the first marketing trips to promote Phillip Island to Japan and the United States. These efforts were to receive recognition in the Victorian Economic Development Corporation awards. Rhonda reflected:

> Gradually into the 1970s and then into the 1980s was probably the main point of our overseas tourism where we were starting to do the lobster meals. Particularly for American and Japanese people. Working with the Phillip Island Nature Parks for promotion and prior to that, Keith went to Japan.

Keith described how marketing became targeted to the Japanese market:

> We started doing Japanese tours and we got to talk with the Japanese inbound tour operators' people in Melbourne and Sydney who sent them down, and they advised me to go to Japan and talk to the outbound tour operators.

The driving interest of the international market was the Little Penguins of Phillip Island at the Penguin Parade. As Rhonda reflected: 'It was all about the penguins'. The Phillip Island Penguin Reserve Committee of Management was formed in 1984, and the current Phillip Island Nature Parks was created in 1996. Keith described how the Conti adapted their business model to support Japanese tourism and how a trip to Japan helped their approach:

> Japanese people would do anything to see a penguin and eat a lobster salad. Later on, we then established lobster sashimi dishes, which was huge. They would pay $60 per

person for a lobster sashimi. Now this was a long time ago. It made such a difference to our business. What was surprising to me was when I went to Japan – well, I was terrified when I was doing it because I'm not a salesman. Sitting in the jumbo jet on the start of the trip, looking out and seeing the wing going up and down, and I ordered a little bottle of scotch. And I thought, 'I need this'.

Japan was just wonderful. The knowledge of the operators there of the Penguin Parade was unbelievable. They had more knowledge than our local council, the Victorian Government and the Australian Government. They knew everything about it, and they were just happy now to actually have a face or someone they could write to. We often hosted really important people when they came down. It was great and we really enjoyed that.

That set off business where sometimes we would look after 600 people in a night, buy lobster by the tonne. We had to relate to seasons, because we could only hold lobster for a little while. Firstly we would use it when we needed fresh lobster, so we're dealing with Victoria. When that season would close, it would be Tasmania, then South Australia, Western Australia and sometimes you would go up to get your tonne of lobster and find out it wasn't there because someone talked to the guy on the boat and he got a better price.

That was really an interesting time in business, it really was.

Rhonda spoke about the development of their restaurant the 'Lobster Pot' at the Conti and how it was officially opened by Sir Phillip Reginald Lynch (Member for Flinders and deputy leader of the Liberal Party from 1972 to 1982).

Rhonda and Keith Jobe alongside the 'Lobster Pot' restaurant sign. Jobe family collection

After the fire, we had to rebuild obviously, and it was in 1976 that it was opened by Phillip Lynch. With the new set up, we designed it so that there was a huge main dining room which is basically the shape that it is now [at the North Pier Hotel] but it has been altered. You had the restaurant, the Lobster Pot, and that was the one that housed the lobster tank. People could actually come and say, 'I'll have that lobster'.

Serving lobster was at times a challenge for staff, and for Rhonda who is a vegetarian. Keith reflected how 'the lobsters would be dead, but the nervous system was working' and Rhonda recalled:

> There were stories. For example, sashimi which is raw lobster, and the girls having to serve. That was quite challenging if you're not a hardened meat eater.

The staff at the Conti were wonderful and Rhonda said:

> We had fabulous staff, local names like Joy Niven, Pat Jeffery, Mel Marks. These wonderful, wonderful women, and a whole lot of others, who were able to relate with people and look after them to a high standard. They were the making of our business. And when you needed a lot of people, that was interesting too because you would have the people coming down, the backpackers, you had your uni students, you had a great mix of staff.

Yet there were many challenges in being able to adequately staff the Conti to meet peak demands and this had a flow-on effect to the desired standard of service that Keith wanted to maintain. He said:

> We never had enough staff when we were busy, ever. It was what made it hard to give the service I wanted. I'd go up the street in the morning to do the banking or just to have a walk out on the street, and I'd see all these young people getting ready to go surfing, and I'd get so wild. To be honest, I was feeling quite buggered going up the stairs. To see them so suntanned, happy and not a care in the world.

Rhonda further explained their service ethos:

> But I think it also reflects our ethos with serving people and looking after them. As international tourism grew – and for us it was at its peak in the 1980s, particularly the late 80s. There was big business for the city hotels too, because there were busloads of people, coachloads coming down. Sometimes these city hotels who were accommodating them, wouldn't open their restaurants at a peak time like Christmas day, because of the inflated staffing costs. The tourists frequently came down, unexpected, and they would land at the Conti knowing they would be least likely turned away from there.
>
> We had people sitting around table tennis tables, we'd put a board on the billiard table, we had them sitting out beside the pool, we had lots of people. In the 80s, it was nothing to have up to 20 coachloads of people coming to have dinner and go to the penguins or depending on the time of the year, go to the penguins and come back and have tea.

Keith and Rhonda spoke about some of the cultural challenges faced in serving a 'big mixture' of international visitors. Rhonda described the difference in attitudes at the lobster dinners:

> America was a big part of the market. The Japanese people were different in that they were very well organised, and they paid a premium price for premium quality. The American people had a slightly different attitude and sometimes because their meals weren't pre-ordered – they weren't having lobster – they would get cheesed off when the very well-organised Japanese people came in, had their lobster, and left. Whereas the Americans would be up at the bar, having their pre-dinner drinks…

A function with guests seated around the pool. Jobe family collection

Keith remembered the Americans saying: '…I'll have a Manhattan thanks…' and Rhonda recalled they would be:

> …taking their time, and then go crook because they weren't out as fast as the Japanese. There may have been some resentment culturally, Americans to Japanese.

Keith added:

> That was a bit challenging, you couldn't do a thing about it. It was the 80s and the main tourists then were quite elderly, so there would have been more time experiences. When we sat groups, we really had to think about that.

As Rhonda put it, this included the dynamics and the seating arrangements so that everybody would feel good during their visit. Rhonda said:

> *We had a Japanese lass who was our interpreter who was going out with one of the* surfie boys on the island and we're still in contact with them. They are now in Queensland. Toki interpreted the orders for us and helped in the bar. Mick got into photography and took local photos, he spread them out in the foyer and was selling them to the Japanese people or any other overseas tourists. There was a lot of enterprise there too.

Keith and Rhonda's children also took the opportunity to be part of the business. Keith said:

> Once our daughter stood at the entrance with flowers to sell to the tourists going past. But Rhonda spoilt that business and killed it [laughs]. Jeni was very heartbroken. She was making good money.

This was due to Rhonda's approach that guests were welcomed into the hotel and therefore: 'You give flowers, you don't sell flowers.'

David was 12 years old and at first reluctant to be of service in the hotel. Rhonda described how David first helped out in the reception:

> We were very busy and tried to press everybody into service in a way, and that included our son David. He was asked by Keith, 'would you like to help out in the reception?' 'No not really.' 'Well, someone didn't come in today and guess who's doing it.' David learnt very early on the plug-in phones.
>
> We had that for a long time and he managed that, and he was really good at speaking with people and doing the accounts. As he got older, he got even better and unfortunately went off to the Air Force, but he did come back a few years later. He has been an integral part of the business and has changed the direction of the business.

In catering to the Japanese market, Keith highlighted how the tour guides supported the way the Conti interacted with the visiting groups and helped with any language barriers. Keith said:

> The main thing you had to watch was the tour guides and they were brilliant. The body language. If they needed attention, our team had to know that and go straight to that person, but they were marvellous. The tour guides supported the business, they helped us enormously, but you had to do it their way. And that was fine, they used common sense.

Rhonda reflected how deep friendships often formed:

> They helped you because if you had a big group and you couldn't get to everyone, or Toki couldn't, with the language barrier, they would do drink orders with you. They would help. We had a very good friend who was an inbound Japanese tour manager, and he invited us to his wedding in Sydney. You become good friends with these people.

Keith recalled how the Japanese tour manager shared his knowledge with him:

> He invited me to Sydney and taught me all about lobster sashimi. It made a big difference. I didn't realise because I didn't eat shellfish and there was this big serve of raw lobster in front of me and I had to eat it (laughs). You would have lost face. Honestly, you could talk about this for weeks.

Reflections about the Conti

When asked to reflect about the key moments and whether one period was more memorable another, Keith answered:

> It's a bit like turning the page, and you see a little photo and that brings back so many memories. We lived this business for 50 years and so many changes happened.

Rhonda described how the changes at the Conti were also happening across the country:

> I think the changes have happened with the country too, like the development and things like expectations, that guest houses were no longer enough to meet people's demands. That meant you had to build the right accommodation to get that occupancy and then broadening it with the conferences; using the facilities you've got plus refining or adding to them.
>
> In the days just before the fire I think we had a few groups, but we didn't have a large licence. The kids were very little, that must have been at the time, roughly when David went naked into the conference. It was that era, and we waltzed around with the children, to entertain the older people, the Americans. Grandmas missing grandkids. That would fill in 10 minutes while we were serving their meals.
>
> We used to focus on things like roast lamb and mint sauce and apple pie, and these were big hits with the Americans because it was easy for us to do, and it satisfied their thinking this was typical Australian food. It was relaxed, you had kids there, and you were doing everything. Or someone would hold your child for you while you did that. Or with the conferences, in the morning I'm doing the accounts for the salesmen, and there's Jeni sitting on the bench and the salesman threading her arms into the cardigan. They were family men, and it was a different time. You might think twice about that now, but you never did then. It was totally different and that's what I meant about the social shift. You were trying to do your best. People helped you on the way because you were genuine, you were doing your best to help them and that was reciprocated.

Keith added how they looked after the same companies for many years:

> The international groups we used to do the roast lamb and apple pie for, later progressed to having steaks and grilled lobsters and we looked after those same companies for 25 to 30 years. It gives you a nice feeling when you deal with companies for that long.

1990s and rebuilding the business

Rhonda described how their business reached a peak and that it was time to lease the business. However, it was impacted by a significant decline in international tourism in 1989. Rhonda said:

If you look at how things have changed in that time. In the 80s, that was the peak time then you got all those coaches coming down. How many were there? I'm thinking 20, possibly more, and they would be head to tail up the Esplanade, up Findlay Street and Bass Avenue. And the business really developed well.

We got to the point in 1989 when we thought Ok, it's very viable, we've got the domestic market, we've got the conference market, we've got the overseas visitors and the juggling that went with that to manage that all, so we thought we'd sell it. We'd had enough, and we leased it in 1989. The trouble was there was a pilot strike in '89 just after that was a big crash in tourism.

Sharp decline in tourists feared

By TOM CONNORS

Is the party over for Australian tourist operators catering for Japanese visitors? According to David Jacobs, an Australian consultant specialising in Japanese issues, visa statistics being issued in Japan indicate that a sharp decline in visitors is imminent.

In a report issued yesterday, Mr Jacobs said some Australians have believed, based on the sharp increase in Japanese visitors in 1988 of 63 per cent to 352,000, that such a growth would continue. In doing so, they were ignoring the significance of the bicentennial celebrations and Brisbane's Expo 88.

Japanese visitors for 1989 are now expected to show virtually no growth over 1988 with visa statistics suggesting a sharp drop over the coming few months. Mr Jacobs warns that although Japanese arrivals held up better in the early stages of the pilots' strike than for other nationalities, he expected Japanese travel wholesalers would opt for "safer" destinations in their 1990 program.

He said that, in the face of the post-1988 slow down, there was already a need for more active promotion in Japan of Australia as a destination but the pilots' strike had made that all the more urgent.

Resort investment, development and specialised retail would be hard hit, he said, as a result of the bicentennial-Expo "overshoot", increasing Japanese dissatisfaction resulting from the strains on tourist facilities in 1988 and rising costs in Australia relative to other destinations.

The surge in Japanese travellers going abroad began in 1983, the result of a strong yen, higher Japanese living standards and the growth of the Japanese tourist industry. The Japanese travel wholesalers, according to Mr Jacobs, were on the lookout for a new "product" that would captivate the well-known faddishness of the Japanese consumer and Australia filled the bill.

As a result, there was a strong growth in Japanese visitors to Australia, reaching its peak in 1988. The trade was spurred on by successful promotions in Japan.

The Australian tourist industry reacted with a flurry of much-needed investment, but some segments of the industry mistakenly assumed that the high growth rates in visitors would continue. However, between February and August this year the growth in Japanese visitors over the corresponding period of last year was a mere 1.6 per cent.

The Canberra-based Bureau of Tourism Research's international visitor survey found increasing Japanese dissatisfaction with Australia and Mr Jacobs said that this could be the result of factors such as the over-popularity of Australia, a shortage of hotel rooms on trunk routes that forced up tariffs, airport congestion and the prices charged in duty free shops.

Australia was having to face heavier promotion of European destinations in Japan and very price-competitive package tours to Hawaii and the West Coast of the United States.

Mr Jacobs expects to see marginal tourist facility operators in Australia feel the pinch as the market growth evaporates but operators skilled at meeting Japanese demands could strengthen their share of the market.

He expects a downturn in resort development due to the fall in visitor growth rates and high interest rates, and a shake-out in the duty-free industry, especially shops operating in high cost areas such as Sydney airport.

Article from The Canberra Times, Thursday 26 October 1989 re downturn in Japanese tourist market. trove.nla.gov.au

Keith spoke about the damage sustained to the company after many hard years of work:

It damaged the company and we found ourselves having to go back which was really hard. I went to a conference, and the Japanese Travel Bureau, which is THE travel bureau as you could imagine, the government department in Japan, and they used the Continental as an example of what shouldn't be done to look after the Japanese market.

That was a hell of a start over, after having such a fantastic relationship. But if you're selling your place, you've sold it. You can't do much about it.

Rhonda reflected that they had in fact leased out the business but, 'they went bust and we had to go back in.' Rhonda and Keith returned to the business in 1991 and Keith remembered:

> I went to a conference with no business card, not knowing what we were going to call our place, because we were known as the other people.
>
> The inbound operators that I knew were there and extremely supportive and that was the start back.

It also meant Rhonda now had to juggle motherhood and study, with a return to the business environment:

> I'd started uni at Monash and that meant a bit more juggling because I had to go back into the business as well as do that and be a mum. Well, that was interesting! A lot of cleaning up and cleaning out went on at the business and getting things slowly back on track. And regaining the confidence that had been lost.

Whilst Keith tried to refocus on international markets, these markets faced financial constraints. However, a focus on the Singapore market emerged in the 2000s:

> We did but at that stage, it had been damaged with the airline strikes and the Japanese market was changing. The financial GFC. China was starting to become a new source of tourists, but it was very young, very amateurish. It just wasn't organised and that's when I started to lose interest because it was not as viable. The inbound tourism was really nothing like it was in the '80s. It was good, but we were spoilt, I think.
>
> Our residential conferences were our main focus. With our improved accommodation we started to market to individual international tourists and groups from Singapore. We actively worked with the Penguin Parade and from that we did a joint marketing trip to Singapore.
>
> I'm talking now about the later part. We found Singapore a good tourist market.

Keith described the earlier main tourism markets in the 90s, with a focus on visiting the penguins:

> For us, it was Japan, Japan, Japan and America. Americans really didn't get down to Victoria a lot. They mainly went to Sydney and Sydney Harbour and Queensland.
>
> The only reason they came down I think was the penguins. They did like Melbourne, they liked the city of Melbourne, they liked the shopping.

Rhonda described how opal shopping was also popular:

> They liked the opals too. The opals were quite a drawcard and that was very highly organised among their community where they would have little buses go to different opal shops.

Keith added further details about the coach tours:

> If you wonder why there's a lot of small coaches that run around with tourists, it's because you can't take a big coach to an opal shop. You have to have an amount of people on your coach that can actually fit into a shop. It's well organised.

Keith and Rhonda returned to the discussion on how they re-established their business to have it running well, before they leased it again: Keith said:

> It just wasn't the same, it was really hard afterwards. When we had to go back after the first time, we leased the business to a group of accountants. It was hard because the business was damaged. I was there seven days and seven nights a week and it wasn't fun. It really wasn't.

Keith and Rhonda's son David helped shaped the business direction at the Conti, particularly after he returned from the Air Force and started work at the Conti in 1995. Rhonda said:

> He was in the Air Force and was away for several years, but he always helped a lot in the business. Our daughter with the restaurant, the Lobster Pot, she did the paintings, the murals on big boards that adorned the walls. It was always a family business, but when David left the Air Force and came back here, he changed the direction.

Keith also recalled how a seminar changed the way he approached business and gave him ideas about tools to manage his profits and costs:

> I'd gone up to Sydney. There was a conference on and they were talking about the effect of the jumbo jet on Australia, or any long-distance destination. There was two Americans there from Hawaii presenting there. One from the University of Hawaii, that looked after tourist training and the other was the manager of the Kahala Hilton. It was the best seminar I've ever been too. It was brilliant. They gave us areas that you could look at, and particularly to be able to manage your business by utilising the numbers, the amount of meals, the costs, the accommodation, the percentages, the profit, the whole lot.

Keith in reception at the Continental. Jobe family collection.

> I came home, I started. Got a big piece of cardboard, and drew up all these lines and charts and started filling in this information. Which was good, but it was stationary. You could look at and get a little answer there. We were having a lot of problems because next door, Erehwon, was having it hard too just like we were. Their valuation of their place dropped dramatically. Because that happened, the value of our place, which had steady business, dropped dramatically and it created a lot of problems because I was over-borrowed. At that stage, we were paying 28 per cent interest rates. How we survived, I don't know.
>
> To build the Conti, we had four mortgages. I was having problems; my accountant was arguing with the people that had the first mortgage. We were in deep trouble. David came back from Western Australia, and I shared with him what was happening, and he says, 'oh look you've got the information there' so we had a little Apple computer. My big clumsy chart, he fitted all the figures into a program. All of a sudden, I could say, oh if I lift the cost of my lobster, or my rooms by this amount, this is what would happen. I would just push a button and there was the answer.
>
> I didn't need an accountant to run my business. I needed an accountant to go the Tax Office and all that, but in reference to 'what is happening to your business Keith Jobe?', I could tell them. I could tell them if my business only got to a certain income, what profit I would make. It was brilliant.

As Rhonda noted:

> The bank people acknowledged this computer-driven data, put credence on it and were more cooperative with the borrowings.

Keith described the changes that using data information brought to their business:

> From that time on, everything changed. I was able to do a meeting on my own. If the bank manager asked me a question, I could give an answer. It made such a difference.

Rhonda shared how this brought about changes in comparison to their early days described earlier in the interview:

> I guess that's an example of the changes over the period of time when we were there if you consider that from the 60's.

Favourite memories of the Conti and challenges faced

Keith and Rhonda were asked to reflect on their favourite periods of time at the Conti. Rhonda said:

> They are all different, so you can't compare, but the social time and connection of the 60s….
>
> Before we had conferences, the dances were fun. The Lion's Club particularly was probably my highlight because I was so involved in it, and it was so vibrant. We had

> ‘making lamingtons on Good Friday’ for Easter Saturday morning when the Lion Ladies sold lamingtons. We branched out and included Easter eggs because we knew that Easter Saturday was one of the biggest days in Cowes and everyone sold out of Easter eggs. We had street stalls and fundraisers. I loved that cooperation. I loved how the Lions helped Keith out with clothes, and me too. If I couldn’t go to a meeting, my girlfriend who was also a Lady Lion helped. It was a different time, and every time is different. Almost by the decade. You look at the technology and where it is now.

Keith reflected how Rhonda enjoyed the relaxed conferences with the Department of Agriculture, and also the exhilaration of the racetrack at Phillip Island. Keith said:

> I’m thinking of the racetrack. There was the Armstrong 500 which would be run down here, which was like the Bathurst 500. It was done on the Island, and we would quite often have the teams staying here at our place. I remember these guys – they did everything. They were the owners, mechanics and drivers; they did the lot. We’d do a function and we’d cook the first lot of meals around six o’clock. This was before inbound tourism. Then the next sitting would come in and then at the finish, sometimes around 10 o’clock or 11 o’clock.

Rhonda and Keith remembered how the racing teams would come into the kitchen often in the early hours of the morning. Rhonda said:

> They would come in and they hadn’t eaten, and I would say, ‘have you had anything to eat?’ and: ‘no’. ‘Well, I’m sure we can rustle you something up. So come out to the kitchen’ and you’d make them sandwiches and if they were desperate, they’d have corn flakes because often we’d run out of things too. And that’s when you could go up to Mr Morrison up the street and say could we get another carton of lettuce or whatever you needed, after hours, and he’d open up the shop and you’d go up and bring back the extra goods that you needed to serve that number. That’s what I mean about cooperation and also people helping, because you were helping them.

Keith recalled the focus and professionalism of those in the racing industry:

> One night, after a race, we had all the winners staying with us. And the fun in our lounge. Back then, they would probably go to the Isle of Wight and probably have a beer or perhaps two. But that would be it. These were professional guys. They would come and sit around our lounge, a big open fire. It was just fun, it really was. It was just nice times. We were tired.

Rhonda added how it was an advantage to live in the business, but how the priority was to make sure the staff and good suppliers were always paid first:

> When you are living in a business and operating it 24/7 and only having a short break in winter or in between things, it was different. Your main advantage was that you were living in the business so you had your food, but you didn’t have wages or anything because you couldn’t afford to pay yourself. You had to make sure you paid the people who you got your goods from, and your staff. It was different.

> Our wonderful staff have always been the highlight. We wouldn't have had the Conti or been able to run it without what our team did. The roster worked around their needs too – as when the young single people wanted New Year's Eve off but were ok to work Christmas day, when the family women needed to be home with family, but the family women were ok to balance it and do New Year's Eve.

Family and staff setting up the tables. Jobe family collection

Keith and Rhonda were asked to reflect on the major difficulties they faced. Rhonda spoke about the debt and the fire:

> The debt. The fire was a huge blow and a huge challenge. Maintaining the business with that degree of debt and trying to balance bills and having to run up to Melbourne to get payment from a conference to give to the bank to pay the bills, it was a tough time.

Keith spoke about the difficulty of managing the timing of payments, and how the idea of a 'lobster bank' resolved this dilemma:

> *We had a high interest rate which I mentioned. Also, to buy lobster, you had to pay* cash. The business we did with the Japanese, everyone paid 30 days after the end of a month. And your wages had to be paid, your group tax had to be paid, all these things had to be paid. I came up with this crazy scheme with my banker one day. I said, 'We have to set up a lobster bank'. He said, 'what's a lobster bank?' I said, 'Look, I've got to boil all this lobster, keep it for six weeks before I get actually paid for it, and I have to pay for it when I get it. There's a problem.' He looked at that and he came down and he saw what we were doing, and we had the record of the Japanese tourism companies and those who paid regularly. So, I got an extension on my overdraft for a lobster bank.

Keith and Rhonda had managed to keep the Conti going to some degree after the fire using the side wings of the accommodation. By the time of the opening night, the family had moved to their farmhouse in Cowes.

Development of Seagrove Estate and reflections about community involvement

The interview with Keith and Rhonda took place at their home that sits in Seagrove Estate, but originally it was a 120-acre farm owned by their family. Keith said:

> Bill Papworth had this farm. When we first came to the Island we had about 19 acres on McKenzie Road where we had a poultry farm and also a small dairy farm and a lovely house. It was really well done and we enjoyed it. Bill Papworth thought it was pretty good. He was the shire councillor, shire president. He had this lovely, big farm. He did a deal with my father and he said 'why don't we swap' and that happened with a handshake. That's how things were done on Phillip Island then. They also did a little docket. It was two duty stamps on it. It said, with a modest payment. And that was the deal. Things were done so differently then. Bill had a house way down there, and we built a small house, just in front of that.

When their business was facing difficulties, the bank threatened to take the farm but Keith described how they were able to hang on 'through stubborn, hard work' and Rhonda reflected:

> That of course became susceptible when we were having a hard time financially and the bank threatened to take it. We were very lucky to be able to hang on to things.
>
> That's the flip side of the coin. I'm so glad people love living here and it's a great estate now.

Rhonda described how the estate came about after talking to Grant Hailes, a local surveyor at the time and who is now Managing Director at Beveridge Williams and Greg Price a local real estate agent.

> Grant had just finished working on a new housing development adjacent to the farm and Greg met with us and asked if we had thought about developing the farm? No, we haven't, and it went from there. The outcome of it was that our son and his wife set up Southern Sustainable Developments. Because David is into sustainability, he had it designed to work with the flow of the land. All the streets have gentle curves, which is all about the water flow and drainage, the size of the wetland, and he developed it for us. That was the start of his business because he's doing sustainable development infill properties, doesn't extend town borders, and that's become their main business.

Keith added: 'They've done quite a few in Melbourne now, so he's done very well with that. He's quite bright.'

This prompted further discussion about education on Phillip Island, the development of Newhaven College and memories of how the Continental was often a hub of community activities. Rhonda said:

> Talking about kids and education, we were sitting down in the restaurant in the Lobster Pot after the coaches went one night, when Peter Reith and his wife Julie came in and they were talking about their son and how they were looking at him going to Peninsula Grammar, and they asked us if had we any idea what we were going to do about our kids' schooling. He had come up with the concept of Newhaven College.
>
> This went the next step where a public meeting was called and hosted at the Conti, and it was in the large conference room up top called the Keith Charles room. The other one was called The Phoenix Room after the fire. We had hundreds of people there and explored the opportunity, what support there would be for a Christian Community college. I recall Penny Manning being there and they must have asked if anyone was interested or qualified in teaching, and she put her hand up, and she was one of the mainstay original teachers at the college. The college got off the ground, was supported by the community, and Peter Reith was the guiding light. The finances were supported by the community buying shares in the college, and it's grown from humble beginnings in Boys Home Road to where it is now.

Early Newhaven College in Boys Home Road. From the College Facebook page.

> I remember when I opened the door for Frank Moore when he was applying for the position of the first headmaster. That was lovely, we had a chat, and I put him at ease, [introduced] 'Mr so and so'. The community was different.

Keith spoke about the importance of being the community hub to render assistance when the -Eagle Star ferry sunk in Western Port Bay:

> The Conti was the community. The ferry sunk. Jock or the police, I'm not too sure who, asked if we could open up an area for everyone to go to find out if everyone was still there.

Rhonda recalled:

> The ferry sank in Western Port Bay just off the jetty. The same day our daughter Jeni went missing after Nippers. The Conti became the tactical headquarters. All the luggage that was found floating, on the jetty or wherever, was delivered at the Conti on a truck by the shire. A truckload of stuff and other things kept coming. Thankfully we'd found Jeni who had been in awe of what had happened. There was a lot of confusion.

Eagle Star sinking off Cowes, with people being rescued from the water.
Phillip Island & San Remo Advertiser

Keith said: 'The ferry was sinking and I was looking for my daughter. I didn't worry about it.' Rhonda recalled her memory of the day:

> We had the police and the Emergency Services upstairs organising and coordinating from the Conti. The Shire was always there to help in a practical way to support the Island.

Rhonda described another example of help given by the Shire at Newhaven College:

> When Newhaven College had their first graduation of the Year 12 class, we organised that at Yackatoon, which we also owned. I asked the Shire to bring in mature trees and they were in tubs and we decorated it using these mature trees. The college was a big part of our lives in its early days.

Their children, David and Jeni, both attended Newhaven College, with three of their five grandchildren currently at the school, with David now serving on its board. Rhonda shared how she felt about Newhaven College:

> It's impressive and we have good memories from our involvement with it and it touches on a lot of areas.

Further reflections about the Conti – from opening night after the fire to winning awards and new opportunities

Keith and Rhonda were asked to reflect on the 'opening night' of the Conti on 6 June 1976 after the fire. Rhonda said:

> It was one of our most important and long serving staff member, Hazel's, birthday. We had a plaque in the foyer to mark the opening.
>
> It was in a way a relief that it had actually got to that point. I think because of the political aspect and having people like politicians and Phil Lynch was great, he was our local member. That was good but it wasn't the normal, relaxed tone. It was more formal than was our style.

The idea of having an opening night grew and also became a join celebration with Warley Hospital. Keith said:

> It just sort of grew. We asked Phillip Lynch, our local MP, if he would be able to open the Conti and Phillip was happy to do it. We made it a charity night by sharing the occasion with the hospital which made it more special. Warley, as you would know when you talk to everyone on this island, particularly all us old fogies, you mention Warley you get that reaction. Everyone loved it, it was so important to us. To actively work with Warley with the joint celebration was good.

Rhonda described how it was like 'turning the page to the new times' and said:

> It marked an occasion which was a turning point. Now we had the facilities, that somehow miraculously we had managed to finance at a stretch, but we had those facilities, it was no longer the older set up. It was turning the page to the new times where things changed. You had new staff. You had a year-round business. You employed a lot of people. It was more professional. It had lifted it up a notch because you're providing your facilities and your venue was up there.
>
> We won the award later on for best four-and-a-half-star facility. A lot of that also had to do with David. That was a real feather in our cap.

Keith added his thoughts of how winning the award was 'unbelievable' and one that he 'really appreciated'. Keith also recalled:

> We won a gold and a silver award earlier when I started to market the Conti and Phillip Island to the overseas markets and to develop the conference market. It was good for the business and us to have that recognition.

Keith and Rhonda were asked to reflect on their time at the Conti, and whether there was a point that they felt they wanted to move away from the business. Keith described the challenges, but also the highlights:

> There were lots of hard times and challenges when you think it's too much, you get tired and frustrated. Then new opportunities arise which fire you up and you get going again. It made all the difference when David joined the team.
>
> Probably a highlight would be Hewlett-Packard when we had their top regional conference for Australia and Asia. The quality of it, all the organisers were walking around with microphones and tapes. We closed off the front area of our lounge and they created a snow lodge there. We had to put in three-phased power to be able to do it all. It just went so beautifully. They left and all of a sudden, we had lobster meals coming in that night and guests, we had to go from running a really high-level conference, back to basics nearly overnight.

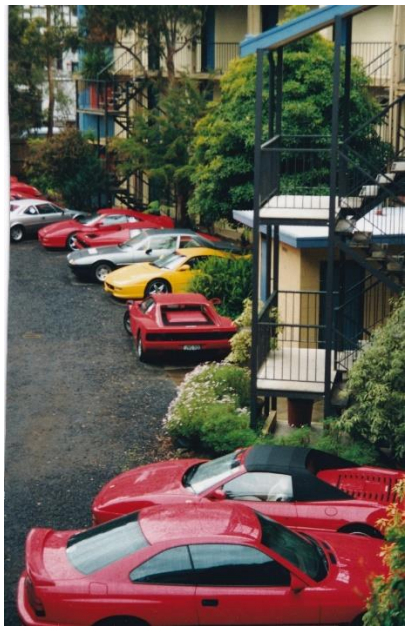
Rhonda described the range of conferences hosted at the Conti:

> There was a range of conferences we catered for. One popular local one, I don't know if it was international, Australian or district, but the Rotary conference. We looked after the meals for the conference people, there were social activities organised for families, and we had accommodation with us booked out and all other Island accommodation was booked out. The shire closed the Esplanade off and stalls and entertainment were set up like a Mardi Gras. It was so good for the island. The expertise of running those international conferences, those high-level ones, meant you had the flexibility to apply to those social style conferences, like Rotary and a few others. We used to also look after different racing clubs and a whole range of groups. They weren't all businesses.

Keith added:

> Ferrari would book out our place for a weekend, as did many other car enthusiast groups like veteran car rallies, and they were good.

Ferrari club awards set up at the conference with the view of Western Port from the window. Jobe family collection



Ferrari weekend at the Continental. Jobe family collection

The interview explored changes in the hotel environment on Phillip Island, including the social change for guests having tea and coffee in the hotel bedrooms, discussed earlier. Rhonda also described other key changes:

> That was a social change. That was part of how society in general has changed. There's less focus on the guest house style because that doesn't suit modern people. I think the other factor is the island developed and our population grew and more facilities came. Not just with the four supermarkets but everything else. The health services, the whole range of things. We lost the hospital but now you don't have one doctor looking after the whole island, you have a team of doctors, or different practices. The scale of it has changed enormously, along with expectations.
>
> The new bridge helped to open it up as did our population growth. There are a lot of units now and many retired people have upgraded their holiday homes to live here permanently. Services on the Island have grown, and technology now enables people to work from home and provides more options. The racetrack has been developed and draws huge crowds and the Penguin Parade has grown and developed other attractions. The promotion of the Island and everything is on a bigger scale.

Keith reflected on the early days:

> It was hard to build on Phillip Island early because of the bridge. Most homes had cement sheets cladding but quite often you would drive down across the island and see a caravan and a little toilet stuck next to it. And people would have plans to build, but once they got going, they thought, 'this is alright' - until the council put a stop to it.

Marketing opportunities and promotion of the Conti and Phillip Island

The discussion further explored marketing opportunities that Keith and Rhonda took to promote the Conti and Phillip Island as a destination. Going back to the 1960s, Keith and Rhonda were involved in the Phillip Island Promotion Association (PIPA).

Rhonda said:

> I did their first brochure. Keith got himself elected as secretary of PIPA, the Phillip Island Promotion Association. This would have been about '67 and Keith wiggled out of being secretary by giving the job to me. He said 'oh you can do that'. The Island didn't have a brochure. There was only an old one from the 40s or 50s. It had a car and a penguin and people, and has since become a poster. So I said, you've got to have a brochure. We came up with a black and white double sided three folded one and most of my text came out of the history of Phillip Island Gliddon book.

ENTRY FORM

Five FREE Fascinating —
— Phillip Island Holidays

1ST PRIZE. One weeks Motel Holiday for a family of (4) with Dinners at the 'Hollyderie' Licensed Restaurant. (Drinks not included.)

2ND PRIZE. One weeks Holiday for a family of (4), at your choice of Motels, 'The Continental', 'Erehwon Point', 'Yackatoon' or the 'Sunseeker Motor Inn'.

3RD PRIZE. One weeks Holiday for a family of (4) at a Holiday Flat. Choose from 'Mariners Lodge', 'Glen Isla', 'Sheerwater' or 'The Island Arcade Apartments'.

4TH PRIZE. One week in a Holiday Home for a family. Courtesy Pitt & Co. The Island's Leading Agents.

5TH PRIZE. Caravan Park Family Holiday. Choose from 'Bayside', 'Beach Park', 'Boomerang', 'Bushy Park' or 'Seaview'.

Major Prizes drawn by Phillip Island's "Miss Australia" Entrant, Barbara Bradley, 6.30 p.m. Friday, 1st September.

Prizes available NOW till 10/12/72 OR 12/3/73 - 12/4/73 OR 23/4/73 - 4/5/73 OR 21/5/73 - 18/8/73.

ENTRY DETAILS
(BLOCK LETTERS PLEASE)

I agree to accept all conditions, and abide by Judges decision.

NAME _____

FULL ADDRESS _____

Winners to produce proof of identity. Decision by Executive of Phillip Island Promotion Association to be final and binding.

Phillip Island Promotion Association flyer, Prizes were accommodation, including one week at the Continental Hotel. 1970s. Phillip Island & District Historical Society Inc

> Another thing we used to do through the Phillip Island Promotion Association: we had these penguin-shaped rubbish bins, and they were black and white and Dave Cook at Cook's garage, which you may have heard of, and his brother Jim, they ran the garage. They had one next to each bowser and you would see them around the island and sometimes they would go for a swim when they would be thrown off the end of the jetty. It was early days and now you look at promotion, different times.

Penguin rubbish bin on the Esplanade Cowes. Jobe family collection.

Keith spoke about key marketing opportunities, trips to America and memories of hosting dinners at their old farmhouse:

> We got our first colour brochure too during PIPA times. We had a meeting at Kevin Shaw's house. A gentleman called John Counsel came across and he produced the brochure for us. But that was probably the first colour brochure and where people on the island contributed to the cost of it. We did little things in Melbourne such as Chadstone and also the Royal Arcade, which was good. Bill Hopkins was actually a contact there. We worked with Destination Phillip Island which was is one of the main island groups now. The race circuit and Phillip Island Nature Parks are really the strong driving forces of that side of things. They do a great job. We did marketing with the Penguin Parade, did joint ones.

Trade show stand, run jointly with Phillip Island Nature Parks.
PINP and PIPA member John Matthews at left. Jobe family collection.

> On my trips to America, I had to get these stuffed penguins which we used for prizes. The Australian Tourist Commission each year would do a seminar in different areas. One year, it was in Los Angeles and Canada and somewhere else close to that. The following year we went down south to Florida. Another time to New York.
>
> I remember going through New York. I had three or four large boxes of stuffed penguins, with Victorians stamps on the side of it, which I got because I thought it would help going through customs. But you can imagine going on your own, through La Guardia Airport in America with all these stuffed penguins plus my luggage which had a lot of paper information in it. Going to Customs and the guy couldn't believe it and he just laughed and he said: 'You've got to be honest. This is stupid'. He just sent me through (which was really interesting), and I got into this cab and the driver didn't get out, he just yelled at me. They are not very polite in New York. There I was in putting everything into the back. I hope he doesn't drive off without me. That was interesting and challenging.
>
> We worked actively with the Penguin Parade. We did a joint trip which I mentioned before to Singapore which was extremely helpful for us in doing marketing. From that, we did seminars at the Conti which we hosted with Melbourne Tourism and Vic Tour. We did marketing in Melbourne with Tourism Vic. There was also the Melbourne Convention Bureau which we worked hard, we got to know their top marketing person very well who we'd invite down to the island every now and then. The feature was this old pot-bellied stove with a sheet of iron on it and we'd cook steaks on that.
>
> I'd have a bottle of Grange Hermitage. We'd drink the Grange Hermitage, sipping it while the steak was cooking, and then going inside where Rhonda was doing everything so beautifully inside.

Promoting the island's wildlife and love of its environment

Keith and Rhonda did much to support organisations across the island, including raising funds for the Rhyll Wildlife Reserve and Rhonda said:

> I remember half writing this article with Kevin Shaw. You have to look after the island. We ride on its back. We say we ride on the penguins' back.

Their love of the island's environment is strong, and Keith reflected:

> I walk around in the morning with Heidi our dog, and the rosellas, the lorikeets, the galahs, the currawongs make it a great start to the day.

Rhonda added:

> David has done a listing of birds that are here now and there are more than was previously recorded. It's our environment – that's why David and Jane are into the sustainability factor – it's important to everyone. Even when we were living at the

> Conti you would see the moon rise from the east over towards Rhyll and come across, shining on the water.

The discussion prompted the memory of koalas being more widespread on the island, and Keith shared:

> It's always been part of the highlight. I remember koalas walking down the passageway of our hotel. Guests hurtling in every direction to get their box brownies out to take a photo. We used to look after a lot of chauffeured cars and we would get to know the drivers. This man was so indignant I don't know if I can say this, he had Asian people with him, and he said 'this koala went right past the Asian people and grabbed my leg and bit me'. He was very indignant. Just little things you remember.
>
> Eric Robertson worked with the Victorian government Tourist Bureau and brought school group here from South Australia. And he was standing under a tree and a koala piddled on him. The smell!

Rhonda said:

> With these school groups, we used to take them out to Vern and Nora Johnson's gardens – Kingston Gardens – and do the barbeque with apple slice and what have you. Using Kevin's boat, we took groups out and catered on the beach at Red Rocks. There were a lot more koalas then. You had them in and out scaring people. A big 'He Man' came running into reception saying, 'I just heard the most horrible sound, someone is murdered'. We settled him down and said 'it was a koala, mate!'

Keith also recalled that: 'We had to put a roof on our dog enclosure to stop koalas climbing in.'

Rhonda also described how tourist buses used to take visitors to spot koalas on their way to the Penguin Parade:

> The tourist buses used to crawl along Ventnor Road to spot the koalas in the trees on their way to the penguins before coming to the Conti to eat. The tourists would get out of the coaches to take photos and would often walk up our long driveway looking for koalas.

Talking about tourists, turned the discussion to marketing brochures used overseas and Keith recalled:

> One of the brochures was the best brochure I ever had. The Victorian Government did a photo and they brought down this model – her name was Karen West – in a bikini and blonde, holding a penguin. It was a brilliant photo. I saw the photo and I went up to Vic Tour, and I said 'Can I use that photo?' And I did, and it was the best brochure. First of all, all the kids would grab it, all the dads would grab it, I don't know about the mums, but it really worked wonderfully for us, it really sold our place. I even took it to Japan and it was popular there. But I fell down in America. In America, most of the operators are elderly ladies and they are generally quite big.

Rhonda clarified that 'They may have been then' and Keith continued to describe the challenges of locating Melbourne as a tourist spot in different overseas markets:

> They're not big now of course. They've all slimmed down. The thought of them handing out this brochure, they would just throw it in the bin. Your market was different too. When you went to Japan, you talked about penguins and they knew exactly where it was in Victoria, Phillip Island, a couple of hours out of Melbourne.
>
> You went to America, to explain where I was, you would first of all say, Australia, Melbourne, Victoria, Phillip Island. It was important in that sequence because if you said Victoria, they would think you were talking about Canada, and this is where marketing in different countries can be so, so different. In Singapore, everybody knew about Phillip Island penguins. America was challenging. All of the brochures I did always featured Melbourne. I've got one here. That was important. And nature. It had to have nature.

Rhonda described how the identity of the island is linked to nature:

> Nature is what the whole island is about when people think island. They love the fact that it is an identity, and they associate the identity with our natural life, the habitat.

Keith returned to the discussion on opportunities for marketing and the help they received:

> With marketing also, the Australian Tourist Commission was a big help for us. They instigated those trips to America where I used these stuffed penguins and also, they would do a trade show in Australia, and they would move from state to state each year. This was a wonderful opportunity to talk to these outbound operators from all over the world. Korea, China, Germany, France. That was people we dealt with to actually get business to us.
>
> Locally, dealing with operators I would go to Sydney, and a little bit in Melbourne, but mainly Sydney, and talk to inbound operators. These are the people in Japan or America or wherever who control the bookings once the tourists are in Australia. I would go and see them every 12 months with prices, and every six months just to say 'hi, how is everything going?' We hosted a lot of VIP people who would come to the hotel. Some very special people, top managers in Japan who we hosted at our house. We did dinner at home. It was really nice.

Keith described their most memorable guests as the airline manager from Japan Airlines, and three Texans who had hosted Keith in America, so in turn, Keith and Rhonda reciprocated the favour at their home.

Current business environment and struggles

Keith and Rhonda felt the current business environment on Phillip Island is very challenging. Rhonda said: 'There are so many different factors, like the reviews on social media. Strewth!',

and Keith added: 'I'd hate to run a business now. It's written and that's what counts.' Rhonda elaborated on the challenges their own business faced:

> Can you imagine all those hard times we went through, when we knew our service wasn't as nice or as good as we'd like it? We're doing our best with what we had – staff wise and everything else – but to cop a review that's negative and to kill your business. There were enough other factors going against you, the financing and trying to find staff. But with the modern challenges that they face now it would be very hard.

Keith talked about how complaints could feel devastating:

> We couldn't do it all properly. It was just too much. We never had enough staff, but we did such huge, huge numbers. And then you would have two people right at the end sit in at a restaurant where everybody has just left, ready to have dinner, and it's so hard. Just every now and then, and if they would complain, it would destroy you and upset you so much.

Rhonda added 'They didn't understand'. Keith also described how they would often juggle the many demands of running a hotel:

> We did a transpersonal conference, a group of well over 100 people, it was huge, huge conference. They were here for the weekend, and it was unbelievable. They set up a tank outside on our lawn – a hot tub – and they were running back and forwards with nothing on. We had a squash court and they were doing rebirthing and screaming. Just imaging the screaming in a squash court, the noise! We did 140, I forget the numbers, but it was a huge conference. There was breakfast, morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner and supper. And in the middle of it we did 300 Japanese meals and public coaches. All at the same time!

Rhonda echoed that: 'It was a real juggle.' Rhonda considered whether Covid has impacted businesses on the island:

> It has. I felt for all those businesses, but I also felt for them for the school holidays when they had a chance to open, but can they get the staff? Because staffing was always an issue for us. We were lucky we had our key women who were brilliant. You need big numbers if you're going to look after people, and that's what we didn't have.

Keith and Rhonda described how they planned the use of space within the Conti after the fire. This helped to alleviate business constraints to 'produce miracles', as Keith said:

We designed our place to be very efficient. All my life was catering and looking after people. We were able to set up a situation with small staff to be able to produce miracles.

Rhonda spoke about the flexibility of the conference rooms:

> I remember sitting in the architect's office when we were doing the original plans for the rebuilding after the fire. Looking at how to divide the space to give us the most

> flexibility and keeping it simple. That's why we had a big conference room, called it after 'His Nibs', the Keith Charles Room, and then a smaller one for the Phoenix Room, rising from the ashes. We had a recreational area with the table tennis tables, billiard tables and the back stairs. There was a little kitchen up there as well as a dumb waiter that you could use to lift up your food, so you could sit people and cater in that large Keith Charles Room.

Keith talked about the challenges of the fragile supply of power on the island and how they designed the kitchen and adapted their service to solve this issue:

> We had walk-in cool rooms for meat, dairy and vegetables so they all needed separate temperatures. This gave us a capacity to look after large numbers. And a large walk-in freezer. The kitchen was designed so half the utility was electric, and the other half was gas. The early days of Phillip Island, the power would go off quite often because there was only one line of power coming across the island and it was really hard. The power would go off and we had lights which we were able to grab and put around the place.

Rhonda recalled the simplicity that candles would bring and a feeling of returning to their earlier days at the Conti:

> There were hurricane lamps and then we had boxes of candles in the cellar. And we'd bring those up and you know as soon as you brought out the candles, and you got people moving around to let someone else have light, that feeling got more back to what it used to be in the old days, and people suddenly weren't expecting to be waited on hand and foot. They were happy to get up and have a go. And everybody helped each other that little bit more and they would always comment, 'that was fun'. They enjoyed it and that brings you back to the early days when it was like that regularly. As soon as you get candles out and the hurricane lamps, everybody is wondering: 'What is happening? Are we going to have dinner before we get to the penguins?'

Keith shared his thoughts at the current time about the challenges and hopes for the island. Keith said:

> My main concern is that on one side of the island we've got a racetrack, which is brilliant, it's of a world standard. We've got Nature Parks and the Penguin Parade, how they do that, how they run it is as good as you can see anywhere. You've got to be so proud of it, you really do. What scares me is if ever a hotel is built on the other side of the island, the structure of tourism would be altered for ever because they would just use that side of the island. To me, that's a big worry until we can get something done with the Isle of Wight site. Cowes to me, the shops in Cowes are great, I love them, I'm so proud of them, but they can only do so much. Because for the Conti to have succeeded we had to do conferences and the conferences gave us continuity of hours to be able to employ people and train them.
>
> The Isle of Wight site, if that was built, hopefully they would do in a sense what we did way back then. It would bring in new people, new experiences and bring people

> down on a Wednesday or a Thursday and walk around the town. The shops up the street need that continuous trade. You can't bring up your staff, you can't go to the bank and do improvements unless you've got that [money] turnover.

Rhonda spoke about the changes to people's expectations:

> The other aspect is that tourism is changing. You have a huge number of beds on the island now. You look at the Airbnb's and all the privately rented accommodation, the number of units which never used to be here, so the number of beds on the island has greatly increased. You can't go back to the old-fashioned style. If something is built on the Isle of Wight site, it will be international standard, because that's what is expected. But I don't think you will ever recapture the days that have gone, and you can't expect to. Because people's expectations are so different, and their experiences are different. And they don't stay two weeks or one week, they come down when they want. That's a total shift in the whole face of tourism.

Keith added:

> Also, with Airbnb's, there's no marketing budgets. They just have a website which when you think of it, that's great for the individual. But for the town, you're not getting that continuous, professional marketing that the town needs. The Penguin Parade is doing it. The racetrack is doing it. But Cowes is just a lovely seaside town. A friend of ours was in America and they went and saw a town called Carmel and this town, people go from miles just to go to this town. It's just so well done, the signage, the theme, the whole theme that goes right through the whole town and it's brilliantly done. Bob Steane, the owner of Erehwon, saw it a long time ago and he said, 'this is what Cowes needs'.

Carmel City Centre. Image: stayhappening.com

Keith and Rhonda reflected in conclusion that times have changed but that the position of the Conti on the Esplanade maximised business opportunities on Phillip Island. Rhonda said:

> If you look at how the times have changed and how that's reflected in what used to be the Conti and is now North Pier. And you see what they have done with it and how

> they have opened it up brilliantly, they're the only ones that never went broke. Everyone else that we sold the business to, or leased the business to, financially couldn't make a go of it. But these people have been brilliant. Their website shows they have got backpacker rooms which were our old staff quarters. They've got a range of accommodation options and they promote it and they're servicing a need and they've brought it up to modern day standards and making the most of that prime location which is what the Conti was all about. That's why Keith's dad, Harry, bought it originally. He saw where it was, he envisaged the potential. You don't have a crystal ball and imagine how things are today from the contrast of those times, but he saw potential and those people running it now are doing a brilliant job, maximising the site and the service and the facilities.

Keith summed it up best when he said:

> Dad said it's got position and it faces north. And you can look at the water. And if you can have the sun coming out at the same time.

Ultimately the instinct of Keith's father, Harry Jobe, and a simple approach to choosing the best location contributed to the success of the Conti. But behind that, has been pure determination to succeed against many challenges the Jobe family has faced and overcome. Reflecting on the interview which covered so much history on the island since the 1950s, felt for Rhonda like it being 'a big jigsaw. We're going backwards, and forwards with different periods, as different memories arise' and for Keith, it brought back 'lovely memories'.

_____

We are very grateful that Keith and Rhonda have shared so beautifully their memories of the eras, changes and the trends of business life at the Conti. They also generously shared their thoughts and feelings about the many challenges faced, all whilst raising their family and showing a deep commitment to their staff and community

Thank you!

Additional reference in opening sections

6 March 1999, 75th Anniversary Celebration of the Continental Phillip Island.
Booklet with text reproduced from 'Guesthouses of Phillip Island' by June Cutter, 1987.

David Jobe
Continental Hotel and development of Seagrove Estate, Cowes

Interview conducted by Dr Andrea Cleland 29 September 2021

A: interviewer

D: interviewee

[The interview was held in a meeting room at PICAL in Cowes due to COVID restrictions].

A : Welcome David

D: Thank you Andrea

A: Just to start, can you just tell me when and where you were born and just a little bit about your early childhood and family?
D: I was born at Warley Hospital in Cowes, in 1970.

Mum and dad were very busy at the time running the Continental. My earliest memories are of living upstairs in the flat. It was a lovely spot upstairs on the Esplanade overlooking the bay. My little sister Jeni was two years younger and the two of us would spend a lot of time up there while mum and dad were working.

Probably the most significant thing that happened to us was in 1974 – mum and dad would have told you about the fire in their interview. My memory is of dad sitting down at the end of my bed and having a good long chat to me about how everything was going to be OK, which I think annoyed mum because she was running around trying to get all their possessions out of the flat. Later I remember standing on the Esplanade with mum and dad watching the flames and the fire fighters silhouetted on the upper level as they tried to put it out. That was a huge setback for the family.

A: Very traumatic. I had the privilege of interviewing your parents, Rhonda and Keith, and yes they spoke very much in the present about that particularly traumatic incident.
D: The smell of smoke still upsets mum.

A: And so you lived at the Conti, did you live elsewhere in Cowes afterwards?
D: After the fire, we moved between a few different places in Cowes until we came back to the flat after it was rebuilt in 1976. I went to Cowes Primary School. As I got older and the end of primary school approached, I remember dad told me he had enrolled me in boarding school, which I wasn't too thrilled about, but Newhaven College opened up in 1980 and I went there in 1982. I started in Year 7. The school was then in Boys Home Road, Newhaven.

A: That would have been amazing to be in a new school.

D: Yes, it's a testament to the community that the school was even there. It was run on a shoestring, little more than a few portables in a muddy paddock. My first classroom was a sixty-year-old portable which had been sourced from another school for the cost of removal.

There were just 180 students. Year 10 had to have their classes in the old Boys' Home chapel because there was no room anywhere else. What it lacked in facilities though it made up for in other ways. At lunch time on hot days, one of our teachers would load as many of us as he could in the back of his brown station wagon and drive us all down the beach at Woolamai.

A: And you are now on the Board at Newhaven College, I believe?
D: Yes. Our children Harry and Kate are there. It's nice how it turns full circle.

A: It's amazing to see how it's grown, even in the time my own child has been there.

So turning to talk more about business on Phillip Island. Can you tell me your memories of first becoming interested in the business community on Phillip Island?

David and sister Jeni check progress with mother Rhonda on the rebuild of the Continental after the fire

D: I really didn't have any choice in the matter. I remember sitting down in the restaurant at the Conti with mum and dad, we were having our dinner. I think the receptionist had quit or something had happened, and mum and dad asked me if I would like to work in reception. I said no, not really, I would rather just concentrate on my homework. I started work that night.

Was it the old plug-in phone, I think your mum mentioned?
D: Yes, the old plug in phone. I can't remember how old I was but we had a Sweda mechanical cash register there. I remember that I wasn't as tall as it, I had to look up to reach the buttons. So, I couldn't have been too old but it was a good experience, even though I wasn't super excited about it at the beginning. I learnt a lot about relating with different people.

A: Did you see any early opportunities in the business with your parents as it was developing in the early days? Or did that come a bit later on?

D: The international tourism market was really beginning to take off and that was mainly group tourism. The coaches would come down every evening to watch the penguins, and that's something that dad had been instrumental in the marketing of. I'm sure he told you lots of stories of that.

A: Including the penguins in New York, that was a great story.
D: That was really a time of change when the Conti was rebuilt after the fire. It was licenced for over 800 people on the two levels and sometimes we got to those numbers, it was a pretty hectic time.

A: You went off to the Air Force and then came back to more of a management role. Is that what happened at the Conti?
D: Yes, before that though I have to say thank you to the Rotary Club of Phillip Island. They sent me to Japan in 1988 on a youth exchange for 12 months which was a life-changing experience. I really appreciate that opportunity and I don't often get to thank the Rotary Club so that was fantastic.


身分証明書 No. 87-1-8
下記の者は、当校の生徒であることを証明する。
所属 全日制 普通科
学年 第 1 学年 (62年度生)
氏名 David Jobe (17才)
生年月日 昭和45年 5月 8日生
住所 千葉県山武郡成東町津辺224
昭和 62 年 4 月 2 日発行
発行者 所在地 千葉県山武郡成東町成東3596
学校名 千葉県立成東高等学校
代表者 氏名 校長 岩上利男

David's Student identity card for Naruto High School in Chiba Prefecture, Japan, 1988
David's own collection

Also, the year prior the Rotary Club sent me off to Canberra to attend what is now called the National Youth Science Forum. That's where I met my wife Jane when we were both 16. So, thank you Rotary.

A: Fantastic. So that helped shaped some of your ideas around business?
D: At that time, Japan's economy was really ascendant and a lot of the group tourism that was coming down to the island was Japanese. They were really well-run, high-quality tours. Culturally, coming from the island, my year in Japan was a real eye-opener for me, in terms of experiencing such a different natural environment and a different way of thinking and doing things.

A: Fantastic. So you went on these trips and into the Air Force and then onto university?
D: In 1989, I joined the RAAF and went to the Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra to study aerospace engineering as well as officer training. ADFA is a campus of the University of NSW and at that stage they didn't offer the final years in aerospace engineering, so in 1991 I went to RAAF College at Point Cook and completed by degree at RMIT. That brought me back closer to the island and I was able to come down and catch up with mum and dad most weekends, so that was a nice time.

David as a Rotary Exchange Student in Japan, 1988
David's own collection

I also had the opportunity to do work experience over two summers at Lockheed (now Lockheed Martin) in Marietta, Georgia. Many years before, the then Charman of the board of Lockheed, Roy A. Anderson, was a guest in the Conti. I would have been about eight or nine at the time and I thought it would be a good idea to draw a picture of a Lockheed aircraft and give it to him. It must have made an impression because years later he remembered me and made my trips to the US possible.

I loved the aircraft and technology at Lockheed but my time in Georgia also made me realise though how lucky I was to be living in Australia.

In 1993, I was posted to RAAF Pearce in Western Australia for pilot training. We flew PC-9As, which were turbine-powered, two-seat aircraft and very nice to fly, and we got to do things like navigating while flying fast and low, formation flying and aerobatics. The course was very challenging, and I loved it, but it was also clear that I wasn't the most naturally gifted pilot. The Chief Flying Instructor told me that he thought I flew like an engineer. I don't believe he meant that as a compliment.

After leaving Western Australia, I spent a short time in Canberra before coming back to the island in 1995 with Jane.

A: Were you married at the point?
D: No.

A: When did you get married?
D: In 2002.

A: And how did you feel coming back to the island after being in the Air Force?

D: At that stage, the business was under stress so we were very busy. I didn't have too much time to reflect. I spent huge number of hours in the business. Poor Jane was left a bit of an orphan sometimes. It was a pretty difficult time but it needed to be done.

David in 2003 as a RAAF pilot, Pearce Base, Western Australia, standing in front of a PC9A aircraft he flew there. David's own collection

A: Your dad and mum spoke about the economic crisis and the amount of debt, and how you helped really turned a lot of that around. Did you want to talk about what you contributed to the Conti at the point?
D: I learnt a lot working with dad and what I did was a continuation of what he was doing. We were working together at the time. I probably brought a bit more focus around the systems for the business and the reporting so we could understand exactly what was happening, and working on controlling costs and getting the business back to being profitable. It was never a highly profitable business; we were always sailing a bit close to the wind. But we always paid our entitlements and all our suppliers were fully paid.

One of the difficult things with running the business – the challenges – was the variation in demand. It was still very seasonal, and it was always very difficult to get enough good staff.

A: What are some of the key things that you did in your time at the Conti? How long were you managing the Conti.
D: From 1995 until we sold the lease in 2003. One of the first things I ended up doing was to manage the design and construction of 15 new four-star guest rooms, overlooking the bay. These rooms replaced ten motel-style rooms mum and dad had built the year after they were married. Mum sees a nice symmetry here as the original ten rooms were critical in improving the business at the time, in response to changes in guest expectations. Now, 25-years later, we were doing the same thing again.

The new rooms increased accommodation income by around 50% the year they opened, mainly from domestic guests who were looking for a higher-end experience. This really improved the profitability of the business, and probably more importantly at that stage, our bank valuation. The banks had been putting enormous pressure on dad, so getting a new bank valuation – it increased around 70% - meant that they were a lot more comfortable. Debt had been a huge issue since rebuilding after the fire, so this was a big step.

One of my other key roles was growing the conference business. We were able to grow that part of the business over 30% a year though the late 1990s. Conferences were much more profitable than serving meals and were really able to utilise the main Conti building to its full potential, which was what mum and dad had planned when they designed it twenty years before.

The Asian economic crisis of 1997 was a real challenge. Our international food and beverage income declined around 30% that year and continued to decline over the following years. The nature of the international group market was changing as well. What used to be a reasonably high-yield business had become more and more competitive and there was less and less margin in it. The strategy of diversifying really became important at that time, with growth in the conference and domestic markets helping to offset what was happening with our international business.

By 1998, we must have been getting better at talking with banks because we were able to secure finance for a more ambitious refurbishment. We upgraded the façade, created an outdoor dining terrace on the Esplanade, expanded the conference centre and built a new upstairs lounge and bar with a fireplace overlooking the bay. We also refurbished most of the remaining guest rooms, which meant that we were also able to increase the Conti's rating, which had been 'two-and-a-half-stars'.

New façade of the Continental Hotel shortly after the refurbishment in 1998. David's sister Jeni's paintings can be seen on the walls of 'Harry's Restaurant'. David's own collection.

Promotional image from 1998 showing a table at 'Harry's Restaurant' at the Continental with the beautiful view facing north across Western Port. David's own collection

At the end in 2001, mum and dad would have told you, we were recognised as the best four-star accommodation at the Victorian Tourism Awards.

A: Yes, they give me a copy of the article and they were very proud to show me their award. Was that a long journey for them to really reach a pinnacle?
D: It was and that was towards the end, two years before we sold the business and it was nice for mum and dad to have that bookend of all the years of work they put into the business.

A: What were some of the trends that you saw? We've spoken a little bit about it, and your parents talked about the earlier days of guests' tea and coffee going into the rooms and instead of that social atmosphere, moving into guests wanting their own space. What were some of the things that you observed in your time around guests?
D: In terms of our domestic business, guest expectations were growing and changing, which was a challenge for us. We had a lot of work to do to bring the business and the guest rooms and the experience up to a point, that matched expectations as best we could. That was the start of the growth of online marketing and the Internet. I was hands-on tinkering and building websites and one of the earliest online booking systems, and that was all brand new and quite niche at that stage and now it's all mainstream. So that was interesting to see where that began.

A: How did you learn about that? Was it trial and error, or was it through networking or through peers?
D: Actually Jane worked at Defence Communications at the time. She helped me code up a website for Netscape Navigator. It was all quite early days.

A: Fantastic. Did you want to talk about any of the international aspects that stood out in terms of engaging with the Penguin Parade or with the Grand Prix or any of that aspect?
D: At that time, the other emerging form of business – which is now quite common – was independent international travellers who would book their own experience. Before then, most of our internationals would come in a group because there was just no way they could book their own experience on Phillip Island from home. But with the rise of the internet, people were doing their own research and travelling independently. That was interesting and that was something that we could cater to.

We would work closely with Phillip Island Nature Parks and other local businesses at international trade shows. We recognised that to be successful we had to sell the island as a destination. Later, I was involved with Phillip Island and Gippsland Discovery Tourism which was created by Tourism Victoria to market the region.

A: Did you manage other hotels at the time or did you have other businesses?
D: I was flat out at the Conti. When we had big conferences, we worked collaboratively with the surrounding hotels. We had just over 50 four-star guest rooms but our conference space could seat more than 300. We would have some of our delegates accommodated in nearby hotels which was terrific for the island. We also worked with other local businesses, like the Grand Prix Circuit for drive day experiences for our corporate clients, and John Dickie at Bay Connections, now Wildlife Coast Cruises. Most of our conferences would end up on one of his boats at some stage.

A: Were there any particular incidents or challenges that stood out for you?

D: Staff was always difficult – to try and find enough motivated staff who were able to work. It was also difficult because a lot of our business was still international, focused on serving meals either before or after the Penguin Parade depending on the time of year. We had to gear up for a very high-level of activity over a short time window each evening. We didn't have the continuity of work so that made it really difficult to give our staff enough hours so they could make a decent living, whilst still looking after our guests, and meeting their expectations, so that was always a challenge.

We also made the decision that we wouldn't have Pokies. It was never questioned. Ethically, it's not something we would do.

A: Do you have any good lobster dinner stories?
D: I can't beat dad.

Asian style food sharing plate

A: Yes [laughs]. Was there anything else you wanted to talk about the Conti?
D: I'm really sure mum and dad have given you much better stories than I could (laughs).

A: Was it good to grow up in that environment looking back?
D: It was a very demanding business, so I probably didn't see as much as mum and dad as perhaps they would have liked, and I would have liked. It was just how it was. It was a huge part of mum and dad's life so I enjoyed working with them when I was older and learned a lot in the process.

Southern Sustainable Developments and Seagrove Estate

A: Moving on to talking about your business that you developed – Southern Sustainable Developments (SSD). Can you tell me more about your business and how that came about including your focus on environmental sustainability?
D: I was working at the Conti and this was when in 1999, the median land value in Cowes was $32,000.

A: I wish it was that now.
D: In 2002, it increased to $75,500. That's when we were approached about developing the farm. The farm was 48 hectares.

A: That's at Seagrove.

D: At Seagrove, yes. It was within the town boundaries. It was zoned residential. So we had Greg Price, a local real estate agent – I work with him on the board now at Newhaven College – and a land development consultant come and sit down and explain how there was an opportunity. I think they were suggesting that perhaps the best way forward for the family was simply to sell the farm because we would have got a good price for it. But Jane and I thought about it a little bit and did some due diligence and reflected on it and thought: well that sounds a lot easier than running a hotel.

So we started a company, SSD. We entered into a development agreement with mum and dad. We borrowed money against our house that we just recently bought in Cowes to finance the company. It took us three years to get the planning permits.

A: Was it the Bass Coast Shire at the time?
D: Yes, it was the Bass Coast Shire.

A: Did you want to talk about that process, or what might have been good or bad points about that process?
D: It took a long time – three years – especially seeing as the land was already zoned residential. Dealing with local government always carries with it a degree of frustration.

A: Was it a relatively new type of project that you were trying to do, in terms of what the council was used to normally?
D: We wanted to, as far as we could, embrace sustainability. That was our goal.

A: And what do you see as the key parts of sustainable development?
D: Everything we did, we just asked ourselves a question: Is there a more sustainable way to do this? We ended up with almost every aspect of that development put together in a way that attempts to be as sustainable as possible. When we started off, we met with the Phillip Island Conservation Society and some other local groups to seek their input. The island is fortunate to have so much environmental knowledge and experience in the community. I thought we could do a better job if we listened to them. And [it's] not typical for a developer to sit down…

A: …To sit down with your Conservation group.
D: I really wanted to get an understanding from their point of view of what we could do. We did that from the outset.

It was often a challenge in terms of getting approvals. For one thing, it took us almost two years to get approval for our street lights – our energy efficient street lighting. These were unheard of back then – now they are commonplace. We were refused by council; we were refused by the electrical network provider. The only way we could get them approved was under a pilot project and I had to sign a 'memorandum of understanding' to get them through both the regulator and council. That was a challenge. There was a lot that we did that was quite different to how things were typically done.

A: Can you talk about some of those key differences?

D: One thing that we've done is partner with Urban Landcare. When a resident settles on their lot, they get a twelve month membership that we'll pay for with Urban Landcare. So that means an Urban Landcare officer will come out to their block, they will talk about how to garden sustainably and they will get a voucher for 30 plants from Barb Martin Bushbank. It's a nice way to make those introductions and if only a proportion of those people go on to continue with their membership, well it's a positive for sustainability on the island.

A: Your mum talked about how the estate was designed with the flow of the land, the streets. Can you talk about that at Seagrove? Were there originally wetlands?
D: There was a farm dam there. At the risk of sounding technical, there is something called 'contour-sensitive urban design' which is a fancy way of saying 'well we'll work with the shape of the land'. That's why when you go up to Seagrove, you'll notice the roads are undulating, they've got some curvature to them. That's also around the aesthetic as well. I guess we were conscious of what we didn't want to build. We didn't want to build a straight up and down, Cranbourne type housing development. We wanted to build something that was sensitive to the character of the area.

Seagrove Estate Master Plan overlaid onto an aerial photograph.
David's own collection

The whole of the site was engineered to follow the contours of the land. On Settlement Road where the old farm dam was, we built a 23 million litre wetland. That was all designed for what's called 'water sensitive urban design'. That's around naturally treating the storm water to remove pollutants before it enters Western Port. There is actually a whole treatment train with multiple steps throughout the estate.

Each home has to have a rainwater tank, so that's the first step.
The second step is what we call 'rain gardens' which are like miniature wetlands integrated into the streetscape landscaping. There are over 90 of these located throughout Seagrove. When it rains, they fill up with water. They might fill up about 10 cm high or so and then they will slowly empty over a period and there's plants in there that have been selected to naturally remove things like nitrogen and phosphorous. That will then connect to the underground stormwater network which will flow into the main wetland.

Around the perimeter of the wetland, there are these very large underground concrete filter structures. They've got removable baskets in them so any large piece of rubbish should be able to be intercepted there and then the wetland plants will naturally remove the finer

pollutants. If you get a big rain event, you will see the wetland fill up and then slowly empty over around 15 hours.

The overall system was modelled using software developed by the Cooperative Research Centre for Catchment Hydrology at Monash University and was designed to ensure stormwater is treated to Best Practice Environmental Management Guidelines developed by CSIRO before it reaches the bay.

Seagrove Wetlands in 2007 before the trees grew and the houses were built.
David's own collection

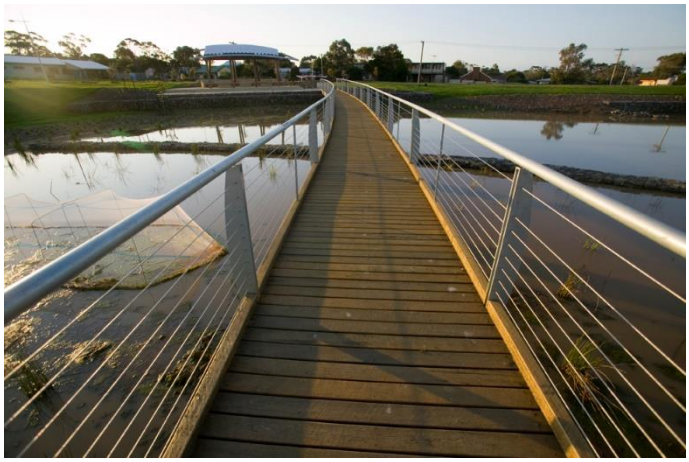
Rain garden on roadside, Seagrove., David's own collection

Seagrove Wetlands in 2007 just after the wetlands plantings.
David's own collection

A: Were there developments like what you wanted to do, previously? Is this how you came about with some of the ideas or was it from your background that you wanted to move into that sustainable model? In other words, were there things that you had seen in other developments that you thought that's really good or that's really bad?
D: I was learning at that stage; this was the first one that we had done. I'd been running the hotel and I'd been in the Air Force. We partnered with a land development consultancy and landscape architects and they brought their ideas and we just asked the question at each stage, what is the best way to achieve a sustainable outcome? At that stage, no there weren't any similar wetlands in the area.

A: There wasn't anything comparable?
D: No. A lot of what we did was a first for the region. The wetland was a first; the street lighting. We replaced 800m of overhead powerlines along Settlement Road with underground power to help improve the views from Seagrove and to provide space for trees.

The underground LPG gas system was another first. At that stage, our power was all being generated by brown coal, so electricity was very greenhouse gas intensive. LPG was therefore a less greenhouse gas intensive way of providing power. These days it isn't anymore. That was 15 years ago.



The pedestrian bridge across the Seagrove Wetlands in 2007, showing the overhead power lines along Settlement Road, which were placed underground as part of the development. David's own collection

A: Was there a focus on solar and orientation of where the housing would eventually be developed?
D: Yes. Part of the urban design was to ensure that all the lots had optimum solar access which means effectively they are aligned either east-west, or north-south. We went a step beyond that with the design guidelines. Again, I think that we were the first to introduce those on the island. We engaged an independent architectural firm and so when you buy a block of land at Seagrove, you have to submit your plan for approval. One of the requirements was a minimum area of glass facing north so homes will be naturally warmed in the cooler months, and an eave to exclude summer sun. So it's all-around solar passive design. But these things really don't cost our purchasers anymore because you have to have windows, you're just putting some thought into which direction they face. It makes homes more comfortable to live in and more energy efficient.

A: Yes I think people were starting to consider a lot more of those elements at the time and I remember some of the first houses being built at Seagrove. It's really lovely the way it slopes up and you've got the wetland area. What are some of your favourite features of the estate?
D: I'm really happy with the amount of revegetation we were able to do, the number of plants we were able to put in and what that's done for the birdlife. So between the wetland, and Seagrove Park where we have got those old trees – and we deliberately put in big gardens around the trees so when they grow old and are full of hollows where birds nest, they can be allowed to remain there safely, as people are kept away from areas where limbs might drop.

The birds are fantastic. Before we started construction, we engaged Biosis to do a survey of our flora and fauna. They came up with 29 different bird species which were on site. We have been monitoring that since – I think we're up to 67 different species; the most recently being a Great Egret which is a species of state conservation significance and also is featured in Seagrove's logo and in two bronze sculptures at the entry to Seagrove Way. If anything, we have improved the outcome for birds so I'm really proud of that.

Great Egret bronze sculpture by Heather Ellis at entry to Seagrove Way
David's own collection

A: Has there been other positives that have come out of the estate?
D: The design guidelines have controls around not being able to plant environmental weeds so there was this whole education aspect to it as well. I think that's been well received by a lot of people.

A: Do you think in the initial stages of when you were selling, that people understood where you wanted to go with it? Did you think people buying into the estate were on board with the goals you of what you wanted to achieve?
D: I think some were and others less so, and that's not surprising. I think some people really appreciated it. We went out of our way. We've got signage in the parks that helps explains why things are designed the way they are, and much more detailed information online. Everything is designed to encourage people to engage around that. Obviously everyone is

different so there are varying degrees of engagement but if we can move that conversation a little bit, I think that's a good outcome.

A: Did you have any key learnings from what you did at that estate to some of the current developments you are working on?
D: A lot of it, yes. We're currently developing a 300-lot project at Officer and a lot of what we did for the first time at Seagrove, we are doing there as well. That's actually the first project we've had independently certified for sustainability. There's a process that looks at sustainability in six different domains and we've been able to be recognised in all six. We're actually the only project in Cardinia Shire that's reached that level of environmental certification, so that's really positive. Many of those ideas are things that started on the island.

A: Wonderful. When you see the estate now, do you have a memory of what was there before?
D: Yes of course.

A: Can you talk a little bit about that if you are happy to? Did you spend some time growing up there?
D: We've lived on the farm since about 1980. Mum and dad are still there. I walk around the wetland. In my head will be the old dam and the paddocks. I used to walk our German Shepherd 'Prince' around there. I remember having my kids up on the big excavator just at the beginning of the construction process. It's been quite a journey.

A: How do you feel about all these people living in that space? I know your mum, is quite proud, I think, that there's houses and people in that space. How do you feel when you see all the houses and how it all comes together?

D: It's nice and I think people appreciate it. It's their home. The farm had some old trees on it which we worked really hard to preserve. There were always birds like rosellas on the farm but now there are a lot more birds. It has a special feel to it.

A: I love the parks there, they are really wonderful.
D: The parks cover 7.5 per cent of the total site. The benchmark is five so that's 50 per cent more open space that you would typically have and that was around protecting those trees.

There was a lot of attention to detail in creating those spaces, with things like elevated boardwalks and the bridge over the wetland, the bronze Egret sculptures at the entry, the architecturally designed shelters and even solar powered barbeques.

A: Did that include the playgrounds or was that something you had to partner in with the council?
D: We built everything at our cost. There is a sign there that says 'Brought to you by the council' but not sure how that works! The playground is really my kids' work. I shouldn't have done that (laughs). "Pick, Harry and Kate. Which slide do you want?" "The biggest one of course!"

Picnic shelter in one of the parks showing rooftop solar panel. David's own collection

A: So they were involved?

D: Yes. That was good and so they had to test it. It's really popular with families and it's nice to see come Halloween, there's a really nice feeling around the wetland.

Seagrove playground. David's own collection

A: Have you been involved in any other businesses on Phillip Island?

D: No, not since the Conti. No, when we started Seagrove I was approached to develop some land at Lyndhurst. The Rise at Lyndhurst. There was a big iconic Moreton Bay Fig. There's a path leading up to it. We designed the whole estate around that Moreton Bay Fig with one of the main roads specially aligned to create a view axis centred on it and terraced landscaping in the foreground. The project was over 300 home sites. I became involved through a recommendation from someone I was working with on Seagrove, so it was all word of mouth. We were introduced to another opportunity later down on the Peninsula at Hastings, and then another one at Narre Warren and now at Officer.

A: And is that through land becoming available that was previously a farm that may be used for residential?

D: Yes, so these are all infill sites. That is, they are not on the urban boundary, they're filling in spaces between areas that have already been developed. And that's important to us. We deliberately avoid contributing to urban sprawl.

(See more about Southern Sustainable Development here: https://www.ssdgroup.com.au)

A: In terms of the current business community, what do you think about some of the challenges they are currently facing?
D: Covid obviously looms large at the moment. That's been very disruptive and difficult. It may also create opportunities with people moving down here from Melbourne and probably a greater appreciation of the ability to work remotely. That may end up becoming a catalyst for change on the island.

A: Do you feel there's opportunities in the current economic climate for your business?
D: Our business is large-scale land development, so I hope not. We have town boundaries. And at some point, the decision has to be made: how much is enough? What we did was develop within existing town boundaries and there are very few opportunities to do that on a significant scale that will allow [developers] to do the things that we do at Seagrove in terms of wetlands and parks and all the infrastructure. That is a challenge for the island to help keep those boundaries where they are and stop further encroachment. I wouldn't want to see the town boundaries moved out. Because once you do that, where do you stop?

A: So you wouldn't want to see any further development?
D: No,

A: Especially on a small island with such incredible wildlife.
D: That's the beauty of the island – its environment and its character, and we want to preserve that.

From a housing perspective, the island is pretty unique in the proportion of private homes which are typically unoccupied – 60% according to the 2016 census, compared with the Victorian regional average of 16%.

What we saw in the late 1990s, early 2000s was the increase in land values provided a catalyst that enabled us to create a higher-quality subdivision at Seagrove.

A: I think the first home buyer grant also came in at that time and started to inflate prices.
D: Now prices have risen to another level, so there is a lot of older housing stock sitting on land which has become quite valuable. Perhaps increasing land values will be a new catalyst for a lot of those older typically unoccupied homes to be re-developed into new permanent homes? Done well, there may be an opportunity for the island to continue to meet demand for housing without outward pressure on town boundaries.

Many of those current unoccupied homes are also now being monetised with online platforms like Airbnb. That's a challenge for neighbourhood amenity – with what amounts to small-scale commercial tourism operations located in residential-zoned areas. It also undermines the business case for new-build high-quality accommodation, which would be a great employer of young people on the island.

Memories and things to love about Phillip Island

A: We might start talking about some of your memories of the island, as we go to the last part of the interview. What do you see as the most memorable changes to Phillip Island over your time living here?
D: When I think about the island, I think about the things that haven't changed. I still enjoy the beach; I still enjoy the environment. Our community is growing. There are more places to go out now. There are more people running businesses that are very professional down here. But the main thing for me is what hasn't changed.

A: What are the things that you love about the island?
D: I can walk out my front door and there will be a wallaby there. And I'll go down the beach and there will be hooded plovers. Every now and then I will see a sea eagle go over. We have a beautiful coastline and I love watching the weather come through and the changes. The banksias near the beach. It's got a beautiful feel to it and you can't help having a sense of connection.

A: Do you have a favourite memory or story that you like to tell people? I'll let you answer and then I've got a question around that.
D: Mum and dad would have done all those.

A: Oh, no no, it's your story too. I guess a lot of your story here is about your family, isn't it and how your grandfather has come and then your parents? Do you see your story tied to your family story here?
D: Our children are growing up here. Harry is in year 12 now and Kate is 16. They've got both sets of their grandparents here and that sense of connection is really important. I reflect on my time in Japan and that sense of family that was very strong that I experienced there, and to come back and have that here on the island makes me feel very lucky.

A: Do you have memories of your own grandparents?
D: Yes, they would tell me about how they started their own business Willoughy Catering from their home, after one of nan's work colleagues at Kodak asked if they could prepare food for an upcoming event. They grew the business, and later they would cater for mayoral and vice-regal balls. Nan enjoyed telling the story of how she would always make a chicken sandwich for the then Victorian governor Sir Dallas Brooks as he was dining out at functions all the time and really just wanted some simple food.

A: Where do you think your grandfather got his drive from? It's an amazing and very resilient story where he seized the opportunities and kept working out any issues and I think maybe your parents are the same.
D: Dad would like to say, "turn a disadvantage into an advantage". My grandfather had to leave his job in the dye mills. His eyesight was failing because of the chemicals they used.

They started a new business from scratch and built it up over time. When they saw opportunities, like the growing need for catered functions in Melbourne – which was in part due to the arrival of post-war migrants from Europe – they worked hard to make the most of them.

Mum and dad had more than their share of adversity, with the fire at the Conti and then record inflation in the mid-1970s just when they were rebuilding – they had to take out four

mortgages to complete it and at one stage were paying 28% interest. But they worked very hard to get through. They also saw new opportunities like international tourism and conferences and had the vision to make them happen.

A: What are your hopes and concerns in terms of the future of Phillip Island?
D: We've talked a little bit about development and pressures on the environment. That's so important. In terms of hope, there are some really positive things that are happening and there is, I think, a sense of importance being placed on sustainability and the environment so we're seeing things like bandicoots being re-introduced. In terms of changes, the absence of foxes is huge and that's really positive. That's something we can all be really proud of. Challenges like climate change is something we will be talking about more and more and seeing the impacts of that on our wildlife and on our beaches so that's a huge challenge.

A: I am going back a little bit, but when you developed Seagrove do you think you were ahead of your time in what you were trying to achieve, or do you think it was the right time for that development?

D: We did receive recognition at the time for many of the sustainability measures we put in place. In 2007, we were recognised in the Urban Development Institute of Australia Awards for Environmental Excellence.

Some of the things that we worked so hard to put in place, such as the energy-efficient street lighting, have now become standard. Others, like the gas, we would now do differently as things have changed.

When I walk around Seagrove now though, the best investment I think we made was the number of trees that we planted and have now started to mature. They're so important.

A: I think your wife has had some involvement around conserving trees and the significant tree register?
D: Wow. You've done your homework. Jane's sits on the Phillip Island Conservation Society and the tree register is one of her projects there. She's now also on the Phillip Island Nature Parks Board. I have to do the right thing. Mainly I'm embracing sustainability so I don't get in trouble when I go home!

A: It's wonderful seeing the island and the amount of wildlife. We've had our block since the ´80s, we've seen it progressively change and it's just beautiful. I think it's amazing what has been done here.

Thank you very much. Was there any other stories or anything else that you wanted to share?

D: No, no. Thank you.

Anne Oswin
'Trenavin Park' Devonshire Teas and 33 years of the *Phillip Island & San Remo Advertiser*

Interview conducted by Dr Andrea Cleland on 14 January 2022

[This interview was conducted over the telephone with Anne in Phillip Island and Andrea in Canberra. It was recorded at the height of rising COVID cases in Victoria due to the Omicron variant].

A: Andrea Cleland, interviewer
AO: Anne Oswin, being interviewed

Early years and family background

A: Can you tell me when and where were you born, and a bit about your family?

AO: I was born in Melbourne but grew up in country Victoria. My father was a school principal and so we moved about with new postings but ended up in Melbourne. I matriculated in 1965, went to Teacher's College. My first teaching appointment was Westgarth Primary School in Melbourne for two years, and after that I married in 1970 and moved to Phillip Island with my husband John Oswin. We had met in the summer of 1966 while I was on holiday here with my cousin. We were staying at the old Continental Guest House (where North Pier now is) and went to the old Post Office dance on the Esplanade, which is where many a holidaymaker like me was to meet her future spouse.

John did not live here at the time. He came from a farming background at Swan Hill and he was also on holiday. But his parents had a long association with the island, and their family spent a lot of time here. His family connection started in the 1920s. His father was sent to be cared for by his aunt Florence Oswin Roberts, who was a very famous Phillip Islander, after his mother had died suddenly when he was just a young child. As was the way in those times, young children were sent to female aunts to be cared for as a farming family would not be able to look after them. Florence had no children herself, and ran the Broadwater Guest House on Lovers Walk in Cowes, which was also quite famous.

Florence was fiercely protective of the island's unique flora and fauna, and famous for her lifetime efforts to protect and conserve it, and this love of the island was passed on by her to a young Jack Oswin, before he returned to his family farm in Swan Hill when he was a teenager. He married Coral, his wife, and raised two boys, my husband John and his brother Rex. The family regularly came down to Cowes, holidaying at Broadwater with Jack's aunt, and were always strong supporters of conservation endeavours which included her establishment of the Florence Oswin Roberts Koala Reserve.

He took her place in time on the Phillip Island Koala Reserves Committee which met quarterly, to maintain and care for local reserves and wildlife. This meant frequent trips to Cowes and retention of his strong commitment to carrying on the work his aunt was involved

in over decades here. His formative years with his aunt had instilled in him a deep love for and knowledge of the island and its unique natural assets, which remained with him all of his life. He continued her work to preserve the island's natural assets He was quite a famous islander too as it turned out in the end. So that was the background when I came into the family when I was married in 1970.

My in-laws had by then sold up at Swan Hill and retired to a farm they had bought here at Ventnor. They built a house in Cowes at the same time, leaving John and his brother to run the farm. So that's how I came to live at Phillip Island, on a sheep farm at Ventnor.
I taught at Newhaven Primary for the first year, resigning just before the birth of the first of my four children.

I was fairly useless when it came to farming, but I did enjoy farming life.

John and Anne on their wedding day. Anne Oswin collection

A: Did your children enjoy growing up on the farm?
AO: Yes, very much. The kids loved farm life but we've got a long way to go before we get to that part of the story. Your next heading here is about community involvement so I will continue to talk about that.

Community involvement

AO: Initially I felt isolated at first, away from my large and extended family in Melbourne and not knowing anyone much down here. I used to go home to Melbourne a lot. But gradually I began to meet people. Pam and Donald Cameron lived on the farm across the road, and we had children at about the same time and became firm friends, so that was great. Once my

children started kinder and then school, I began to settle into and enjoy island life and meet women of my own age.

I also really enjoyed the inter-generational friendships that are made in country life. John and I played Saturday tennis with teams from the island – this was before I had children – Newhaven and San Remo competing, so you got to know the whole island. There were only about 1200 or 1500 people living there in those days. It was a very social way of meeting people of all ages. Home team players had to take afternoon tea. I was no cook and would labour all morning trying to produce something presentable to take along because these were country cooks with magnificent sponges! I could barely boil an egg.

The older ladies were great. They were very encouraging to we young mums, and handing out advice with amused benevolence on how to get babies to sleep, to tips on cooking. I still use the fail proof sponge recipe they gave me. But learned not to put the brandy they suggested in the baby's bottle to get him to sleep, because it actually made him roar around all night. Our age group really appreciated those lovely older women. Full of fun but paving the way for us to take our place on community committees and mentoring us into community life. But it was not all smooth sailing.

I learned the hard way not to respond: '*I don't*' in my very early days here when asked "if I liked living on Phillip Island" because initially I didn't. I didn't know anybody and I just wanted to go home.

On one occasion, my sister in law and I, as unknowns in the district – we were both newly-married and didn't know anybody – were asked to be the judges at the Cowes Primary School fancy dress ball. We were quite chuffed and thought it quite an honour. Until we realised with horror that we had been handed a poisoned chalice as we looked down from the old hall stage into a sea of costumed children and their beautiful young faces looking up at us with happy anticipation . . . and then you could see their mother's steely gaze . . . and we had to pick winners out. I am glad these days that everyone simply gets a certificate for participation and nobody has to be told they are not as good as the others. Much better idea from where we were looking.

The island community enjoyed a rich social life back in those days, with community occasions usually related to fundraising for special causes. There was an annual ball for Warley Hospital, a hospital garden party, the Woolamai picnic races. The Lions Club held an annual flower show, the school its annual lunch with a high profile guest speaker coming down. Spectator sports like footy, netball, cricket and the like brought people out and together.

I slowly became involved and found myself serving on kindergarten, school, sporting and the Warley hospital committees. I joined Toastmistress which was a new group that started in the 1970s. The founder was Julie Reith with strong encouragement from her mother in law Elaine Reith, mother of Peter Reith, who lived here at the time and went on to become a minister in the Howard government. Elaine's aim was to assist women to develop confidence to take their place in the community at all levels.

A simple thing like understanding correct meeting procedure, how to move motions at meetings etc was taught as well as encouragement and support given with getting up and

our public speaking. Those sort of skills helped – even on the school mothers' club committees, sporting clubs and so forth – where many of us didn't have these skills. The meetings were fun, and designed to help us overcome nerves and gain the confidence to get to our feet and contribute to community debate. There were many women here who needed no such assistance and were extremely capable and active and outspoken in community affairs. But there were many others who like me who were shy and lacked confidence. Even today all those years on, those of us who benefitted from Toastmistress remember Elaine's efforts with gratitude. Sadly she died young and suddenly while still in her fifties.

A: Can you talk a little about how you became interested in the activities of local government?
AO: It was Elaine Reith who encouraged me to run for council. It was something that would never have crossed my mind. Toastmistress and other friends supported me to do that. I was there for five years. I resigned a year early because of the demands of young children and family life. In hindsight I was not much value on council, still in my mid-twenties and without a strong knowledge of the major challenges that were facing Phillip Island in the 1970s and the ramifications of the planning decisions being made then.

I would offer much better value these days as I've learnt a lot over the years. I think I was fairly useless. On social issues, I was probably able to better contribute. I do recall talking council into NOT bulldozing the Rotunda on the foreshore when that was under discussion, which is probably my only claim to fame.

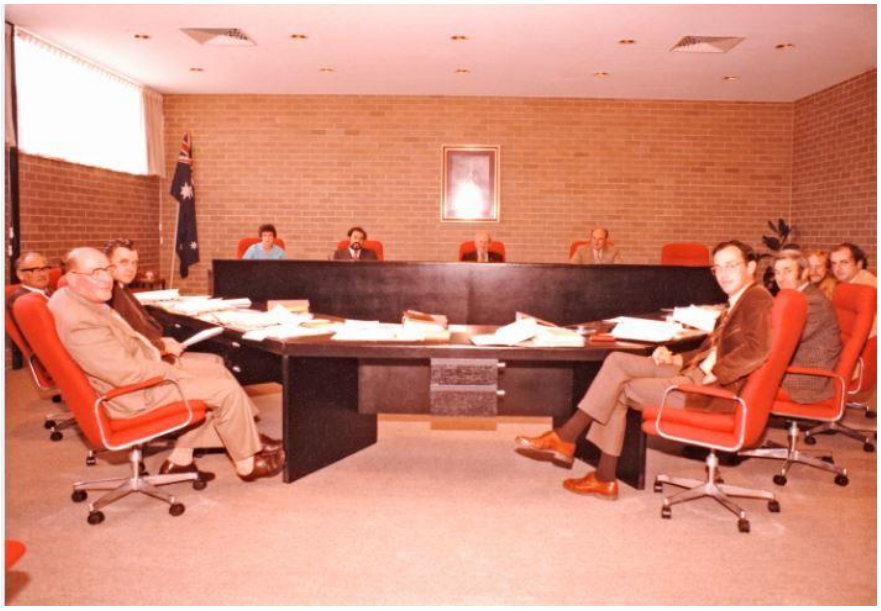
At that point in time when I went on to Council, Phillip Island lacked a lot of basic infrastructure that was taken for granted elsewhere, and it was a period of infrastructure development. There was no recreation centre, an old library was under the very old shire hall, and the shire offices consisted of just a few rooms at the front of the hall that opened on to Thompson Avenue, the main street.

The infrastructure that the island did have such as golf course, tennis courts, footy clubrooms, bowling clubrooms and yacht clubs, had largely been developed by community members through fundraising, volunteer labour and lots of and blood, sweat and tears. Past councils had supported these endeavours but much and most of the work had been done by club members. I came to learn the longer I lived here that is what Phillip Islanders did.

In the early days Warley Hospital was established and supported entirely by the community without a penny of government money for over 60 years. A community committee established Melaleuca Aged Care Lodge and still run it. A Nursing Home annexe was built at the hospital, and Newhaven College was started and run by a committee in a portable building in a paddock in the early 80s. It is still run by a community committee and now has 1,000 students.

What that showed me as a city slicker very early on was the people in those earlier times had an amazing can-do attitude here on Philip Island. When a need was identified, people banded together and worked hard to achieve whatever it was they could see was needed. I also observed the same tenacity over the years, in a different way, when it came to the protection of the island's natural assets by people in the Conservation Society and other individuals, when special places came under threat from developers swooping in.

But back to the five years that I spent on council because I diverted there. It was a period of very strong infrastructure development, although I can take little credit for that. I was more cheer squad and supporter than instigator. The credit belonged to fellow councillors, and especially to the shire engineer of the day Jock McKechnie. In that five year period, a new Civic Centre was built in Thompson Avenue, along with adjoining library and heritage centre. It was the pride of the council back then and the community, and it was bulldozed last year. The Cowes Recreation Centre was also built in that period, so that was the first time that the kids and young people had a basketball and squash courts plus a gymnasium. Stage 4, a pool to be built at a later stage, was planned in my time but did not eventuate when amalgamation of councils intervened and the commissioners threw the plans out.



Phillip Island Council meeting during Anne's term. Anne obscured at left in this photo. Anne Oswin collection

The Phillip Island Senior Citizens Club was also built in this period. It was initiated by the sole island doctor here, Ben Weiss. He had observed frail elderly residents on the island who were malnourished, and approached the council to establish a Meals on Wheels service to address this issue. Government funding was available to do this, but only if the service was delivered from a Senior Citizens Clubrooms. There was a Senior Citizens Club but no rooms, and so those members worked extremely hard fundraising madly to assist with cost. Council built the clubrooms. Delicious meals were prepared in the kitchens there daily by great cooks – usually married ladies who would go in the morning and cook great meals – for frail and elderly residents. The meals would then be distributed by community volunteers, including me when I was quite young. We were rostered on once a month to deliver around the island. After amalgamation, however the new Bass Coast council closed the service unceremoniously and transferred it to delivery from Wonthaggi and certainly the standard of meals went down.

I was the only female councillor until Ruth Partridge joined me toward the end of my term. Unlike today, elections were held annually. It was a nine member council, with three councillors coming up for election every year on a rotational basis. It was a good system, in

that three newcomers would have the benefit of the experience of six sitting councillors as far as background when issues came before them. Elections are now held every four years, and it is possible for a council to be voted out entirely, with little continuity or knowledge of ongoing projects or past decisions still relevant to future deliberations.

Voting day was always a great community day on Phillip Island. It really was good fun. Everybody that was standing and their supporters would be handing out 'how to vote' cards. Somebody would be making money with a sausage sizzle on the side. It was a good way to get to meet the candidates and hear their views and it was a good shire thing that went on. It was fun. Today, you get a thing in the mail with 100 words and that's how you get to know who to vote for, or decide who you should vote for.

A: It's quite difficult to get a handle on council candidates' personalities.
AO: It certainly is and that's where we come in as newspaper people [both laugh]. We do our level best to give the community a much better idea who each person is and what they are standing for and what issues they are against.

A: Did you face many challenges raising a family whilst working and being a councillor? Was there any support for mothers and parents at that time?
AO: I was not working while I was on council, although I did run the Devonshire teas in January over summer. I had four young children, the youngest was born in 1977 while I was a councillor. It was not all that challenging in the first place when my children were young. It was very different than today. Two meetings a month and a few committee meetings was all that was involved in those days. Demands on time were not as heavy as that faced by councillors today. In those days, it was an island council so travel was not a problem, today they all have to go over to Wonthaggi. The odd meeting over on the Peninsula or in Melbourne as an island representative was not too onerous and we used to be able to combine that with a shopping trip or something.

A: Were there issues mainly to do with the Island itself?
AO: In those days, the issues remained the same today as they were then. Planning was very much an important part of all council meetings. Councillors determined every planning application. Now, councillors delegate their authority to office staff or bureaucrats. So that's one major change. I will go on with the question you asked.

I had strong babysitting support from my parents in law who lived in Cowes. Friends would pick up from kinder and school, and the baby would come to meetings with me on the odd occasion in a bassinet if no-one was available. I remember Lizzie my youngest crawling around the chamber at times. It was no big deal, and no-one cared.

In the 1970s there were no day care facilities at all. Young mums would babysit for each other if family help was not available. This worked well. A baby sitting club was established here in the 70s. There was no money involved. Members earned points, if you were in the club, by caring for another family's child, and then you would redeem your points when you needed your child babysat. It was run by a committee who organised the bookings according to who needed to pay back points. Whoever had used up the most points by having their children babysat, then had to be the ones to do next lot of babysitting. It was a fair system and quite successful. But as my kids got older and involved in sport, Scouts and Guides and

the like, I found it quite difficult. I left council after five years when actually my term should have gone six. Perhaps the demands of council were also increasing.

A: What years were you on council?
AO: 1976 - 1981

The next thing you wanted to know was what were facilities like at the time to support parents and babies.

There was no such thing as nursing and baby change facilities in those days. Never had them and so carried on as everyone had always done. Subsequent generations facilitated change, which was great. Young women here in the 80s instigated (and that was after my time) and ran a childcare centre at the newly established PICAL, the Phillip Island Community and Learning Centre. Sue Chadwick and friends led that push. Once again this involved a huge amount of hard work and thousands of hours of volunteer labour from both mums and dads before success was finally achieved. The dads had to go in and make a very old house for the kids habitable. There are many tradies down here so it was a huge community effort with volunteer labour. Those women and men worked very hard.

A childcare centre had been resisted by council for many years. Mainly by men who said that if their wives were able to stay home and mind their kids, so should everyone else, and a childcare centre was not required. That was the prevailing view.

A: That's extraordinary.
AO: Yes, probably when I was on council. Anti-childcare attitudes were firmly entrenched in my day. But the thinking slowly changed thanks to the advocacy of our local young mums of the day who were very active and vocal and successful in the end. But that all happened after my time.

Anne retiring from council, being presented with a bouquet by staff member Michael Lobascher.
Anne Oswin collection

A: Can you please describe other aspects over time of your community involvement – for example, school, hospital et cetera?
AO: I was very involved in Cowes Primary School while my children were there. I served on the School's Parents Club and also on the Primary School Council. I was a member of the

Warley Hospital Committee for a long period of time. I was involved pre Newhaven College in efforts to get it off the ground. I was president of Phillip Island Netball Club for a while and other sporting things.

Business - Trenavin Park

A: As part of this project I interviewed Heather Hamilton, who spoke of their years at Trenavin Park. I understand that you came to later own that property and I believe you had a successful Devonshire Tea business there.

I love Devonshire Teas so I am very interested to hear about your experiences.

AO: Trenavin Park was a very happy time for us. But busy. It was a lovely old home and we had the bright idea one day when chatting with our neighbours Fergus and Viv and Donald and Pam Cameron that we should use its appeal to start up a tourism business.
So we settled on Devonshire teas and we started it in a partnership. We opened in the summer of 1977/78. I had four children, Pam had two and Viv was yet to produce Dugald and Hugh. Trenavin Park was a big old house. We bought it from the Hamiltons. The Devonshire teas were served out of the kitchen window, on a tray to the customers who were lining up.

John, Donald and Fergus made the tables and stools that we set up on the lawns.
Each table had a colourful umbrella to provide shade. We provided free Aeroguard to customers in an attempt to ward off the never-ending flies. Inside was a flurry of activity with the kitchen renovated to accommodate stands on either side of the window so we could assemble a tray quickly and pass it through the window to its recipient. On the tray was a teapot, milk and sugar, a basket of scones that we made and jam and cream. We had flavoured milk for the children.

Pam, Viv and I took it in turn to make the scones each day. And we all worked together from 1pm to 5pm in the Christmas and Easter holidays initially. It turned out to be a very popular tourist attraction. I think the appeal of the house which could be seen from the road had a lot to do with people turning into the kilometre long driveway. And once in, they enjoyed our Devonshire teas. On cool days we were frantically busy. We would go through 40 dozen scones in a day. On hot days, we had a reprieve as people went to the beach.

It was a very simple operation. We loaded the tray and sent it out the window, and the customers were trained to pack it up and brought it back when they had finished their afternoon tea.

Anne receiving returned tray through the serving window, Trenavin Park Devonshire Teas.
Anne Oswin collection

We washed dishes madly so we did not run out. We were all novices and sometimes had a queue a mile long. People were patient and wandered around. John, Fergus and Donald would take people on hay rides when they were not busy on their respective farms. We had three buffalo in the paddock and so the ride would go past them down to McHaffies Lagoon and back up the hill again.

This involved opening a farm gate and on one occasion, one of the buffalo bailed Donald up and it was between him and the tractor pulling tourists sitting on hay bales on the cart. It was a bit hairy – although I don't think the customers were aware of the danger – it made us aware of the fact that they were dangerous animals and not to be trusted. We sold them after that.

The kids had a sideline going selling lavender. We had a few hedges of lavender. The older kids would pick them and put them in small bunches, and send out their younger and cuter siblings to sell them for 20 cents each. It was in the days when people still smoked a lot and my children can say that their first paid job was picking up butts, not in Bourke Street but on the Trenavin lawns.

On one occasion I greeted a customer at the window who was gasping and looking quite terrified, but speechless and unable to utter a word. I looked out and between her and me – I was inside and she was outside – was a rather large copperhead snake. We also had a goose we called Gough Goose (after the Prime Minister of the day) and he was initially well behaved. But people used to throw him pieces of scone and after a while he had guests screaming up on the table with Gough hissing at them for a tidbit. So that was the end of him too.

We carried on in summer for about ten years. It was a very busy time as we also had a houseful of cousins over summer, aunts and uncles holidaying with us. It was basically all hands on deck between 1pm and 5pm. Everyone pitched in and it was a happy time. We operated over January and weekends until Easter.

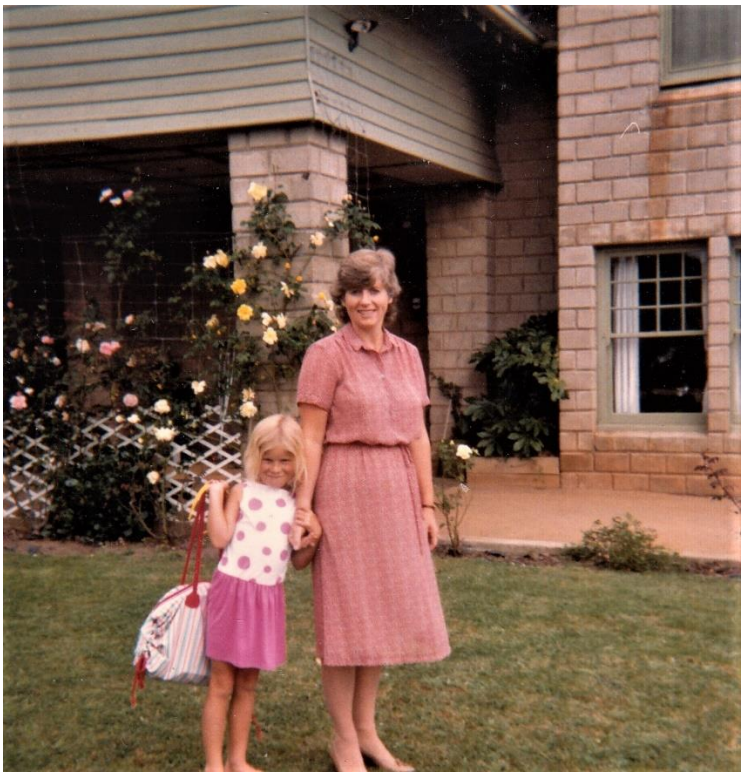
We also used to hold fundraisers at Trenavin and the annual Cup Day function to raise money to help get Newhaven College up and running, and this was a memorable occasion each year. We had a chicken and champagne lunch on the lawns, a fashion parade, sweeps, and Rick Banfield (who opened Banfields Motel and Cinema which unfortunately is also now gone) would act as bookmaker throughout the day. There was always heaps of helpers and we did all the cooking and serving ourselves. Red tape was not a worry in those days.

A PMG staffer (I better not say his name because it was highly illegal) would come out and connect a phone line to Rick's table so he could lay bets off (I don't really know what that means but mobiles were yet to be invented so that was the only way that he could operate). The constabulary steered clear of Trenavin on the day so as not to disturb the operation, and the bus driver from school obligingly dropped the school kids from Cowes off at the front gate so that their parents would not have to leave early to collect them. It was innocent fun devoid of red tape and the money raised was substantial.

The beautiful setting of Trenavin Park garden for a Newhaven College fundraiser.
Anne Oswin collection

We also set up a B and B in an older part of the house. It was the first on the island, and if not the first on the island, then one of the first. It was the part where I had experienced what I believe to this day was a ghost. After that occasion, I always enquired of the guests when leaving how they had slept, but nothing untoward was ever reported. Did Heather actually say whether she saw a ghost?

A: No she didn't, but I can always ask Carol, she grew up there.
AO: My daughter and I were both aware of the presence of a little girl.



Anne and daughter Lizzie in the Trenavin Park garden. Anne Oswin collection

Phillip Island and San Remo Advertiser

A: Can you tell me about what led you to establish a local newspaper and set up the Phillip Island and San Remo Advertiser?
AO: I'm doing the interview and the answers, that's being an editor [both laugh]!

The Advertiser was established purely by chance after the Phillip Island Sun, run by the Leader Group, was unceremoniously closed down by the Murdoch press in 1988. The community was devastated – as was I – it was a great source of local news. I had often contributed articles on behalf of the various clubs I was involved in, and loved reading the paper weekly to catch up on what was going on.

A few months on, Brian Blake, the owner of the regional paper the Sentinel Times which covered Phillip Island decided it would be a good time to start a newspaper on Phillip Island, and he was aware of articles I had contributed in the past, and that I could write, and rang and invited me to form a partnership to open this new paper. I accepted.

I should mention here that another enterprise had also started up at the same time, but closed the following year.

A: What skills did you draw on to become a journalist and editor of your own newspaper?
AO: There's two basic skills. The ability to write reasonably well, which I had, and a strong connection and knowledge of the local community and I think Brian recognised that. I think during my time there has been four papers start up against us. None of them had lasted very long and I do think you need to live here and have strong local knowledge to succeed. But the

ones that started up didn't and they came in and thought they could. Anyway, we're still here and they are not.

My goal was to produce local news, tell local stories, and to provide the community with a voice for advocacy for Phillip Island, when this was going to matter. Our aim was to present the widest possible diversity of views and opinions on matters of public interest, and cover the comings and goings of as many organisation and groups as possible.

A: What were the challenges you faced to get the paper up and running?
AO: The challenges were many. But they were eased by the experience of our Sentinel partners. Production was in their hands, so news and advertising was up to us. We didn't have the difficult side of production to contemplate or deal with. They were the experts in that. Our job was to compile newsworthy stories and photos each week. Basically, would the community accept our new masthead was the biggest challenge. I don't think the Advertiser would have succeeded without the guiding hand of Brian Blake and Noel Ludgrove, our Sentinel partners.

It would have been beyond us, I now realise. I went into it blind and had no idea what was involved. It wouldn't have succeeded without them, we were very fortunate that they wanted to come over here and be involved with us. They were responsible for the physical production of the paper and had a lifetime of experience. Their advice and patience was invaluable. Their best advice to me was to hire local people with local knowledge and who lived in the community and to have an open door policy always. They were very good men and they were very involved in their communities and they knew how it should work.

Anne Wright took on the job of advertising sales, and was given huge assistance by Margaret Hill, who had held this role at the Phillip Island Sun before it closed. Margaret wanted to go on and do something else but she was a huge help to us and one of the other reasons why we succeeded was that Margaret's advertisers trusted her, and Anne's job was made easier through Margaret's introductions. At the end of the first year, we had covered all our costs and made a profit of $4. Without advertising sales, there is no newspaper; it is what pays wages and costs.

We worked in the small Phillip Island Sun's old office in Bill Berry's legal practice. We certainly couldn't afford to go out and have a shopfront. The old Phillip Island Sun we used to work out of was a little office that Bill Berry the lawyer allowed them to have. So, we went and asked Bill (as the office was empty) if we could use that. Bill, who was to become a firm friend, said later, that he agreed to have us because he thought we'd be gone in about three months. He did not see us succeeding at all. We worked there for many years before being accommodated again by Bill when he bought a property in Chapel Street. We all moved across the road together and we're still in those premises. Sadly, Bill died last year but our friendly relationship and kitchen sharing continues with his successor David Luscombe and team, after 30 years.

Brian's advice on day one to was to always have an open door policy and give everyone the time of day, which of course we do. Everyone and anyone is, and was, always welcome to drop in. That policy has stood us in good stead. Community members have dropped in over the years and are always welcome with whatever snippets and news they have. No-one is

ever turned away and we wouldn't have succeeded without that sort of assistance from the community. Our motto is: If they think it is interesting, so do we. Irrespective of any personal views. No matter what we always find a way to use it.

An excited gardener producing an oversized tomato to photograph is as welcome as hard news. And we can guarantee that another person will always turn up with a bigger and better tomato next week to feature in the paper. Such stories engage people, and they become involved. Which is our aim. We cover every event where people want coverage. Special birthdays, sporting victories, local stalls and fundraisers. It all goes in. We want to be relevant to each dynamic within our community. Not everyone follows the council. Not everyone follows sport, but we want to have something for everyone. From the deep and meaningful to the fun and frivolous, it will appear on our pages.

A: I also understand that your team were all women. Was that a conscious decision, or did it just come about because you were all friends? What do you think having an all-women staff brought to your office environment?
AO: It was not a conscious decision. Anne Wright worked for us and when we needed a third person and her sister Margaret was available. It just happened. They were fourth generation islanders and well connected to the community. That was the important consideration in selection – that they knew the island. It didn't matter if they were male or female, it just turned out that they were female and we didn't consciously decide to do that. It was not deliberate, but having said that, it works well all the same. It probably makes for a harmonious environment in our office, which we have always had.

A: How did you and your small staff juggle family responsibilities and challenges with having to get an independent newspaper out on time every week?
AO: Much the same way as everyone else in the workforce. We have all had young children and availed ourselves of babysitting, after school activities and the like. The kids would come into the office after school on their way home. Sam Docherty, AFL player and captain of Carlton, used to do our supermarket shopping for us at times after school when he called in to see his mother Annabelle on his way home..

A: What were some of the key moments of your time of involvement at the Advertiser?
AO: This was more back to the council matters you asked me about earlier. There were a number of key moments that I recall so I've listed the main three.

Number One. The announcement that Phillip Island had been awarded the staging of the International Motorcycle Grand Prix in 1989 was up there as one of them. It created enormous division initially but has subsequently been accepted as a major economic advantage for the island and is welcomed and looked forward to annually.

Number Two. The handover by the Kennett government of Point Grant, do you know the island Andrea? With a name like Cleeland I assume you do?

A: I'm actually not related to the Cleelands, but yes I've been coming here since the 1980s.
AO: The Nobbies but I am referring to Point Grant, it's official name. The handover by the Kennett Government of Point Grant, a pristine area and major spiritual place, to which our community had a deep attachment, for development by private enterprise, was another key

moment in our history. That decision and threats to close the Summerland Road was made in the face of huge community opposition. I think almost every man, woman and dog opposed that. As it turned out, the community was right.

The enterprise was a flop, but the magnificent area has been completely despoiled in the process and we've been left with an ugly eyesore in the form of the glass building and concrete jungle that now exists there. The issue kept our pages full for months and even years. God nearly exacted revenge. The building was subsequently hit by a water spout and nearly destroyed. It should have been demolished but they rebuilt it. The whole ill-conceived exercise cost taxpayers close to $100 million in wasted dollars. It also cost the Jeff Kennett government at the next election.

The seat of Gippsland West, a safe Liberal seat – one of the safest in the state in those days – fell to independent Susan Davies, who was one of the three independents to determine government in a hung result back in 1997. The backlash against what the Kennett Government had done with that Nobbies development saw Susan win the seat, with die hard Liberals here on the island refusing to hand out how to vote cards for their own candidates on election day, such was their disgust at what had happened.
Liberals would not vote Labor, but they sure could vote independent!

A: What were the top three or four matters you think that the community was most connected with over the decades?
AO:
The loss of Warley Hospital in 2008. It was a huge issue which took the community years to recover from. The proposal to industrialise the iconic Cowes front beach area and pier to facilitate the establishment of a vehicle ferry between Cowes and Stony Point in 2010.
The launch of the Stand Alone movement after the failure of amalgamation on Phillip Island.

Those three have been very major issues that we have covered and the community have been strongly involved in.

A: Do you think these issues were polarising within the community?
AO: The loss of Warley – funnily enough, we had many polarising issues, there's no doubt about that – but I would think in this instance it pretty much bought the community together as opposed to polarising it. The loss of Warley Hospital was sorely felt and we all marched over the bridge with placards and tried very hard for years really to save it. Interestingly enough, it was Daniel Andrews as Health Minister of the day that refused the sum of $2.5million that would have saved Warley Hospital. It has cost them tens and tens of millions over the subsequent 10 years before we had anything here at all before to replace it. Carting people by ambulance up to Melbourne and over to Wonthaggi on a daily basis for a decade was very costly. It was a very poor decision and it cost taxpayers a huge amount of money, as well as a beautiful little hospital that had served the community 24/7, very well.

A: It was very much loved
AO: It was. Specialists used to come down once a month on what was always called 'operating day' where they could do elective surgery, and also consult.. We had a surgeon, Mr Hendrickson who would come down if we had an appendix or things like that, that could not wait. He would drive down from Melbourne and do the op at Warley. Of course anything

major, you had to be sent up to Melbourne, as you do with most country hospitals and then you would be sent back to recuperate at Warley. It was also wonderful for palliative care. Things like that that we do so miss. A lot of people say well you didn't really need it, particularly newcomers to Philip Island. I don't think they understood what Warley Hospital did mean to our community. Also, Warley existed in an era when we didn't have helicopters whizzing all over the place. The Ambulance Service only started in the 1980s. Prior to that, community volunteers undertook first aid training and drove the ambulance as required.

To answer your question, no I don't think the fight to save Warley polarised the community. It united us. Same with the proposal to industrialise the iconic Cowes front beach. I don't think anyone is against the car ferry but they sure as hell are against it being established on the front beach. If you saw the plans, they had this great industrial car park on the beach. What you see now, where you had people enjoying a beautiful north facing safe beach and pier; swimming etc, you would have had concrete and high rise. It was just incredible. So that issue absolutely far from polarising us, united us. I find it weird that this very thing keeps going on when we had a 35 car vehicle ferry here back before the bridge was opened and we had it for 20 or 30 years. There were various old island ferries – the Killara, the Genista – that came, plied the bay, came back and forth bringing 35 vehicles at a time. Then they simply drove off the pier and went their way. Why it is now rocket science is beyond me. Why they can't just do something similar which they did very nicely all those years ago is beyond me. It is 35 cars, not 200. But anyway, we're about to launch into that again.

There's a definition of insanity. Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. I personally think that you could have a car ferry modelled on those old days when there's only 35 vehicles involved. it's not like we're having 100 vehicles. That could be easily worked out in my view but anyway it's very complicated these days, isn't it.

The other thing was the launch of the Stand Alone movement after the failure of amalgamation. The first Stand Alone movement, same thing – the entire community had had enough of the deterioration of Phillip Island and inequity of service and got behind that. The second Stand Alone movement in 2012 was different. That did polarise the community a bit. To me, they are the three main things that have affected us.

A: What role did the Advertiser play in reporting council amalgamations in 1994, and what were the major issues raised by the community about amalgamation and what that would mean for Phillip Island?
AO: Your last question, I have actually gone into that fairly heavily as I think it's had the most terrible effect on Phillip Island. Its improved now. I think the second Stand Alone movement in 2012 – even though it failed— it had the effect of making council for the first time sit up and take note of what was happening and that equity was not being delivered. Phillip Island paid 48% of the rate. We got about 22% back. After that, I think there was a bit of an attempt and we can still complain about the place looking neglected and goodness knows what, but as far as money being spent over here that was the first time that equity began to be delivered. Up until 2012 it hadn't been. I've probably gone for five minutes on this one because I do feel strongly about it.

A: Please continue.
AO: Brace yourselves (both laugh).

While amalgamation turned out to be the most momentous decision made in my time to affect Phillip Island, in my view, we did not know this at the time it was actually proposed. Our role as the newspaper was to report what had been proposed, and to reflect the community views. With the state government informing councils early in 1994 that it intended to reduce the number of municipalities in Victoria from 210 to "about 100" the amalgamation debate dominated the community agenda on Phillip Island for the first half of that year.

The Advertiser did not support a view either way. It reflected the diverse views of the community at the time. It also was an issue that did not grab the whole community – unlike the three issues I just mentioned to you – because a lot of people (a) had no clue about what was actually going to happen. Many people aren't particularly interested in political affairs which is probably the way they saw it.

The council of the day in the end accepted amalgamation although their preferred scenario was rejected. The proposal did not actually engage the broader community widely at the time, because the adverse effects on Phillip Island only became obvious much later down the track.

A: One of your regular jobs was to attend and report on council meetings. Did your own time being a councillor earlier help with that later reporting? Did the logistics of attending and reporting on council meetings change over time?
AO: Yes. I think my time on council did help with reporting because I had a better understanding of the operation of local government and also had an ongoing connection with the shire staff and also councillors which helped when I was seeking information on issues. My time on council in the 70s certainly has shaped my views ever after. It was a smaller town in those days so you sort of knew all the councillors, you knew the shire staff and their families; our kids went to school together and everybody was friends. Even though you might have had a bit of battle in council, then you went and picked up their kid to have a play with your kid after school. It was a fairly friendly time.

Council in those days was an open, transparent and inclusive space. Yes. Debate was uproarious and aggressive at times, but this reflected the passion of participants, and gave ratepayers an understanding of the stance on issues of their elected representatives. Once again, the people on council were very accountable to everybody because you played tennis with them. You saw them regularly at clubs and school.

Democracy was certainly alive and well in the council chamber in those days. Councillors in the main were respectful of each other and meetings invariably ended with a friendly drink and no hard feelings, albeit with the odd exception.

To answer your question, yes, council logistics have certainly changed over time, and very much for the worse in my opinion. I started reporting in 1988. In those days, staff and councillors freely – this was before amalgamation – responded to questions and this open approach enabled us to report comprehensively on the issues of the day. Council used us to get information and messages out to the community and we were happy to oblige and we co-operated. And certainly divisive issues were covered and council came under fire on many

occasions from community members. But always, the press in those days could rely on a comprehensive response from officers and councillors to tricky questions, and a professional attitude when critical articles were published.

Our attitude was always: that we report without fear or favour and give everyone who wanted it a voice. We followed JFK's line of: '*I may not agree with what you say, but I will fight for your right to say it*.' Our stance remains unchanged and has done so over the 30 years we've been in operation.

Reporting at times was difficult in a small community. Individual councillors and community members were often at loggerheads, over one proposal or another. It made for colourful coverage, and sold lots of papers I imagine. In those days council was very much in touch with its community, and accountable to the community and responsive to the community. There were two council meetings held each month. There was a night time planning meeting (which dealt with planning applications) and planning certainly dominated the agenda in those years with so many applications coming in for a sub-division and weird and wonderful developments that were going to come up. I think we were going to have the Queen Mary moored off Churchill Island at one stage. There was never a dull moment really in those days.

There was also a day time meeting which started at 9 am and often went through to mid-afternoon. A tea lady served morning and afternoon tea very graciously to everyone, including gallery members, as the meeting progressed. And the lunch break was used to give council the opportunity to meet over a delicious meal, served by members of the Seniors Citizens Club – who were madly fundraising to pay for their building which I mentioned earlier – and representatives of the island's various organisations were invited along on a rotational basis. At lunch time you had community members invited in from key organisations – or any organisation –and over lunch, the councillors were able to hear directly from them about their work and how they could help. This was a great way for council to connect with its community, learn about the work carried out, and how it could help if required.

The press, that was us, we were always invited to attend and you could chat over an issue and say 'what do you mean by that' and discuss it quite comprehensively. You certainly had a better understanding and you were able to give a better report to the community because of this. Council officers from across the various departments attended, for example the health officer, the local laws officer, etc; they popped in as the meeting progressed to give a brief report on their activities and operations over the past month. In this way councillors and the gallery heard directly from health, local laws, outdoor, roads, planning etc staff and what they were doing, and had the opportunity to ask questions. Everybody was pretty well informed and what were the problems they were facing. Councillors could make some suggestions on what should be done and I thought it was a very healthy, democratic, open and transparent system. We would report on it all to the community and there were people in the gallery also listening.

Slowly, over the years, I have observed successive councils becoming less open and transparent, resulting in disconnection from the community that the council serves. In fact, it's almost a complete disconnection today. That happened slowly over the years. Today, the

Bass Coast Council – the amalgamated council – conducts one meeting open to the public per month, and the duration of this meeting is usually between one and two hours. Before this meeting is held, we know council has already met behind closed doors to discuss the items on the agenda, and they've made their decisions. The gallery in attendance is then treated to a very sanitised debate, with the decisions to be formally made pretty much as pre-determined in advance. Questions from the gallery are permitted, but little interaction is permitted, with the current CEO, I am absolutely amazed to observe, she reads the responses by rote. I've never seen that done by a CEO before. You don't really feel that you've been heard. They read it out. Plonk. Next question. Read it out, plonk. To me, democracy is almost dead in the current local government council that serves us.

Council now has policies preventing officers from talking directly to the press. Well, so did the previous one. Questions must go to a media department, which responds with a very limited response of one or two lines, with little substance or explanation, even on issues of major concern. In the old days, I would just ring up and often an officer would explain and once you did have that explanation, your mind would change completely the direction the report was going to take. You understood something that you didn't understand previously. This is a terrible shame when one considers the advantages of a two way conversation as far as information sharing with ratepayers on issues important to them goes. I do believe accountability and transparency are the losers in the way it operates at the moment.

To go back to your initial question. Have logistics in council reporting changed, the answer is no. We attend meetings and report on who says what. What has changed in my view is the trend away from transparency and accountability of councils to a more closed shop approach, which has resulted in a disconnected community and it makes our job of reporting very difficult. In fact, the council will often complain that they haven't been given a say. They are always given a say. We would never print a story without ringing and saying, 'well this is what he is saying, what would you like to say'. Then they give us two sentences, and complain about the coverage. It's not a good system as far as I'm concerned, and it certainly was far more open and democratic and transparent in earlier days.

A: The whole point of council is to engage with their community. If you haven't got that dynamic, that must be very difficult.
AO: We would love to engage with them, but it's pretty much a defensive and closed shop approach with them.

A: How did you decide what type of stories the community would be most interested in for each edition?
AO: News evolves on a weekly basis and is an ever changing environment. Hard news is always given priority by us. Be that a tragedy or accident that has occurred, a contentious council decision made, or an opinion aired on a matter of public interest. We have a role to play in holding local government accountable, and will always shine a light on council or government actions that affect the lives of local people, so these are the stories that are prioritised. Advocacy on behalf of individuals badly done by authorities is also seen in the same light and get priority And a robust Letters Page we consider to be important and of interest to readers.

Our community also expects weekly feature stories about local people, event coverage, sporting results. We have a dedicated entertainment page/s and four permanent pages dedicated to sport. The aim is to remain connected and relevant to all dynamics in the community. In 2018 the island's 150th birthday was marked with weekly features of historic interest. We found people really loved that. Stories that are date dependent can sometimes be held over for a week or two if space does not allow. But they all get a guernsey in the end. We get a lot of contributors' stories which we are thrilled to get. Sometimes we can't always use them in the week we get them because of space. The pages that are produced in the paper are governed completely by advertising. We have to cover costs. So if we can only have a certain number of pages to break even or to make a profit, then that's what we do. Those stories get hold over, but they always get used. We don't ever leave anything out. Sometimes it occasionally happens but we try not to.

A: So what trends have you observed over time? How has the role of reporting local news changed over time? The Advertiser has always had strong elements of community input – for example individuals like Barry Hayes with their own columns under pseudonyms, sports articles submitted each week by club members, and Rod Carmichael's popular Mower Man advertisement cartoons, and so forth. How did that strong community input come about, and what do you think it added to the paper?
AO: The community have been very good to us. Being a one and a half woman editorial team for the past thirty years, we could not be out at every meeting and taking photographs after hours every night nor attending football and other sports events. But we wanted to cover these stories. So we would invite organisations to send in a report, and lent out cameras to photograph events. In the day before digital photography, we had about four cameras and people would come in and take them to whatever their do was and bring them back the next day, and we would either do the story with them or they would have written a little report.

It was probably good the footballers did their own stories. The best we could write about footy would have been that the boys looked smart in their uniforms as they ran out on to the ground, so it really was best that a volunteer from the club covered the game for us. In return, because they really did a good job and they wrote comprehensive reports of the matches all through winter, we offered sponsorship of a certain amount of money. We would say to them, we do expect you to send us a report and some photos. This worked well and enabled wider coverage than would otherwise have been possible. Although with the footy sometimes we'd say, well who did they play against because they would forget to do that, they would only talk about their own side and forget to say who they played against. Nevertheless, we soldiered on and we're still continuing as we started. Maybe a male in the office might have been handy from that point of view. These days with digital photography, it works even better.

Anne (centre, 2nd row) with her current and former staff celebrating 30 years of the
Phillip Island & San Remo Advertiser business, 2019. Anne Oswin collection

A: Can you tell me about the technological changes you have experienced at the Advertiser?
AO: Technological change over the past 30 years has been massive. I started out handwriting stories for Margaret to type and send across to production. My typing was hopelessly slow. Now I am quite quick but still two fingers. We used the Cowes Primary School dark room to develop negatives on deadline day in our first few years. These would be driven across with the ad copy which was all on paper to Korumburra for production.
Now it is all completely digital and computerised.

Fax machines were our modus operandi initially. No such thing as a scanner then and info coming through had to be retyped onto our computers. Emails evolved and replaced snail mail. The contents could be instantly edited and transferred which was a huge time saver. This and digital photography made a huge difference and presented savings in cost as well. Cut and paste production was replaced with digital production methods.

I was very slow to comprehend and use the technological changes that revolutionised the office, but fortunately the girls in the office coached me along until I finally got it.
Having said that while we have a large online subscription base, the majority of our readers still prefer to buy a printed version each week. We sell more papers than we have subscribers.

A: How did the Advertiser adapt to survive over time? What did moving the newspaper online mean, and how did you achieve that?
AO: They say necessity is the mother of all invention and that is true for us. We had no choice but to go online if we were to maintain our readership and attract newcomers. Thanks to our very talented staff, we managed to do this when Covid struck and kept going without missing a week. No thanks to me. You might as well have asked me to fly to the moon than to do what the girls managed to do to get us online. We determined at the beginning of Covid that no matter what we were going to get the paper out each week because the community would probably need news and information more than ever in lockdown.

A: What problems do you see the news industry currently facing? What are the opportunities?

AO: All newspapers are affected by a major drop in advertising revenue that has come about with the advent of social media. As you know, many of them have gone. The advertising dollars that would have come our way have been diverted to social media. As it is advertising revenue that pays wages and costs, it is inevitable that newspapers will close when break-even is no longer possible. As far as opportunities go to increase our chances of staying in business, we have published a book recently featuring island farms and restaurants this year which we hope will be a profitable venture. It's been very well received by the community and we've actually sold out and ordered a re-run. And we have produced a visitors magazine for the first time. Whether either are cost effective remains to be seen.

The problems the news industry faces are ongoing but we're all trying very hard to face the challenge. I do notice, and I don't know whether it's just because of these Covid times, our public notices pages have gone back to being two pages where they had dropped off entirely. People were using the computer to advertise for staff but I think it's so hard now to find staff that they have reverted back to using newspaper advertising. So who knows if that is just a flash in the pan while Covid is going or whether it's a trend back. We're hoping it is but we don't know.

A: What do you see as the factors that have contributed most to the longevity and success of the Advertiser, while other local newspapers across many parts of Australia have closed?
AO: Our longevity can be attributed I think to the fact that we are the only publication to produce island news. Community members are keen to stay connected to news happenings and local stories, and social media has not replicated what we do. I think there is a degree of loyalty to us as for three decades, we have gone in to bat for the island on issues of public interest and community importance. We have been fortunate to have had the support of a number of engaged and active citizens who use our pages to motivate their fellow citizens, and to scrutinise or resist municipal or other proposals in order to achieve the best possible community outcome.

You would know if you've been here since the '80s that there's some great people in our town. They stand up and they are counted when issues that can affect our lives arise and they help us enormously with their research etc. We are very lucky to have so many passionate people in our community prepared to stand up and speak out, and stand up for what they believe in with their well-considered arguments and put those to the community for their support. Through them the community gets a say in what's happening. This contributes to making the paper of interest to our readers.

A: What do you think are the current challenges being faced by the Phillip Island community and by the business community in particular?
AO: Covid. The effects of the pandemic are far reaching. A number of businesses have gone to the wall and more may follow. It's certainly not over. It's very hard for local business. Jobkeeper in that first year was a wonderful initiative, but not for everybody and a lot of people struggled.

A: It seems to be getting worse. It seems to be the toughest season this one and there has been a few tough seasons before.

AO: Yes even though we're out of lockdown, businesses can't open. I've got grandchildren working as waitresses and serving ice-creams, and those businesses, even if they're open, they have to close down two or three days a week because they can't staff them and they can't all just work seven days a week. It's too exhausting. I've never seen the likes of it before, it's terrible. I don't know where that is all going to end up. I haven't done much shopping but apparently the supermarkets are pretty slim too. Those are what I see as the biggest challenges at the moment.

Memories of Phillip Island and hopes for the island future

A: What do you see as the most memorable changes to Phillip Island in your time of living here?
AO: The most memorable change to Phillip Island was amalgamation of councils, which has been to the ongoing detriment of Phillip Island. Remote control by a Wonthaggi based bureaucracy has not worked and is not in our best interests in my view. Councillors mean well but it is the bureaucrats these days that wield the control.

A: Do you have a favourite memory or story that you like to tell about Phillip Island?
AO: I will tell you this one but if you don't use it, I will understand . I could tell a memorable story about two council terms ago when the Bass Coast Shire attempted to reign us – that is *The Advertiser* – in by refusing to advertise municipal notices in our paper. This was because they did not like our coverage of them. We would argue our coverage may have been unpalatable to them, but was accurate and no errors were ever pointed out.

I've always figured that if ever we got anything wrong, people would ring us – and we do get things wrong – we will always, always correct them and put in an apology. The council never said that what we wrote was incorrect, they just didn't like what we wrote.

To damage us financially, they were prepared to punish the community by denying them information relating to immunisation dates, planning notices, consultative opportunities and the like. Such notices must legally be published in a paper circulating in the district. Bass Coast Council decided to use the *Sentinel Times* with a circulation of about 800 on the island, for island notices, in preference to our publication with a circulation of 3,000 plus. The ban went on for a year, until seven of the nine councillors were turfed out at the next election. The new council reinstated advertising notices in a Phillip Island paper.

A: What are your hopes and concerns for the future of Phillip Island?
AO: My concern is that overdevelopment will kill the goose that laid the golden egg. We have forever got to be alert. Hopes as far as our paper is concerned is that we can still continue to be able to tell it like it is. If reliable reporting disappears and social media is the conduit in the future for news, all I can say is God help us.

A: At the start of our interview, if you are wanting to answer this, you obviously didn't like Phillip Island necessarily when you first arrived, has that changed? Do you feel like an islander now?

AO: Yes, yes very much. I was plain lonely. I was 21 years old. All my life and friends and family and everybody were in Melbourne. I was a city person that came down to the country

and onto a farm. So I didn't know anybody much and then I had a baby so I was home all the time. I used to go home to my mother a lot! Just to go back to Melbourne with friends and family. I didn't find people particularly friendly around here initially. But when Chris my oldest was ready to go to kindergarten, Fran Reith who lived out at Summerland rang me up and said, 'look I heard you live out there and there's a kindergarten meeting on tonight which I'm going into, would you like me to pick you up?' Well, I thought I had been invited to a gala ball.

Anne Oswin, c.2022. Anne Oswin collection

A: It's nice when you get that first 'in' to a community.
AO: I've always made a point since of trying to do the same myself when I'm aware of people that have moved in. Simply because of my own experience. Fran picked me up and of course I met other new young mums and they said, oh do you live out there, look I'll come for a coffee tomorrow. And then you are away, you've met a few friends and you're happy. I just loved Phillip Island after that but it just took that little while to settle in and meet people and feel comfortable living here and not feel such an outsider. Occasionally in those first years we would go somewhere and people would say do you like Phillip Island and I very foolishly would say, no I don't. You would see the shock horror and the withdrawal on faces so I learnt not to say that and of course three years on, my response would truthfully be I love Phillip Island. Now of course, yes, I think Phillip Island is a wonderful place. I love living here. I came in 1970 so have lived here for the last 50 years.

A: And just one final question, do you think people have a very distinct Phillip Island identity that live here compared to being a Melbournian or Victorian?
AO: I do in a way. Yes, I think maybe the fact that we are surrounded by water and that we're an island, maybe we are literally (both laugh) and metaphorically speaking 'an island'. I think we do have a connection because we're islanders.

A: Thank you very much for your time Anne.

Immigration

Freda Aravanis
Migration from Greece to Phillip Island via life in Melbourne

Interview conducted by Dr Andrea Cleland on 4 November 2021

A: Andrea Cleland, interviewer
F: Anne Freda Aravanis, being interviewed

Key:
(Ed: extra brief information added for clarification)
Ed: more detailed information added in subsequent conversation.
[Translated or explained from Greek spoken by Freda]

This interview was conducted outdoors in Freda's garden in light of COVID restrictions. Freda is a Greek speaker and migrated from Greece to Australia in 1964. Born of Greek migrant parents in Australia, the interviewer Andrea has basic Greek language skills. During the interview, Freda refers to Andrea by her Greek name 'Adriana' and there is some use of Greek during the interview which has been noted with the English translation in [square brackets]. The written interview has minor edits to reflect the intent of the spoken word but does reflect the beauty of a non-English background speaker sharing their migration story. Freda and I talked further on 26 January 2022 to add in more details.

A: Welcome Freda
F: [Spoken in Greek: Where should I start first – now in Australia or when I came from Greece?]

A: Can you tell me about your migration story? How you came to Australia and what year you came?
F: I come to Australia in 1964 with the ship, *Australis.* I came here on September 11.

I remember being with my brother Costa and sister Soula on the ship. We had first class cabins because my brother had worked on the *Vasilissa Frederica* (Ed: S.S Queen Frederica of the Chandris Lines) which sailed between America and Greece. My brother knew someone that helped get the cabin. The food was nice and we ate well. There was more food on the ship than what I had in the village! There was dancing and music on the ship. I remember one boy from my village had to look after 15 girls as a chaperone.

I had travelled to Athens by bus and sailed from the Port of Piraeus to Port Melbourne. I saw the houses in Port Melbourne were all old and dirty! I got a shock. I was very sad that I had left my mum. I last saw her at the bus stop before I left my island and I was very sad.

A wonderful photograph of the SS Australis in Sydney in 1966

From: http://ssmaritime.com/SS-Australis-1964-1993.htm

A: Why did you leave Greece?
F: I lived in Lefkas. (Ed: The island Lefkadas on the west coast of Greece in the Ionian sea is also known as Lefkas). I lived in the village, Karya.

Freda's birthplace, the village Karya today, on the Greek island of Lefkada.
From the website: https://amazinglefkada.com/karya/

All the old women in the village knew how to make lace and embroider. One old woman Maria had only one hand and so she started to make textiles and she taught the girls in the village. I started to learn when I finished primary school when I was around 12 years old. I have made many tablecloths, pillowcases and other linen and I have kept these.

Examples of Freda's hand embroidered linen using traditional Karsaniki stitch that is unique to her village. Photo: Family's own collection.

(See more about this traditional embroidery here: https://amazinglefkada.com/karya/ with information about Maria Koutsohero and the Karsaniki embroidery museum at Karya)

A: Was that near the beach?
F: No. In *arino horio* [In Greek – a village up high in the mountains.] It takes one hour to go to the beach.

A. Why did you leave Greece?
F: Because there were many kids in the family. Eight all together. My father died. My mother can't accept eight kids so I came here with my brother and my sister together.

A: And how many of your brothers and sisters came to Australia?
F: Five – three girls and two boys. The other 3 stayed in Greece.

A: Are they are still there, if they are alive?
F: One died and my other two siblings, the girl and the boy are in the village. My brother stayed in the village and my sister left for Athens and I have been back three times.

A: Were you born in that village? What year was that?
F: Yes. In 1949. I came here 16 years old, too young. I don't remember many things from the village. I liked the village yes but, [In Greek – What memories do I have?] Adriana. Poor people, they had nothing

A: That was the time of the Civil War when you were born. (Ed: The Greek Civil war occurred between 1946 – 1949.)
F: No, the war just finished. My father died when I was four years old, [Repeated in Greek – my father died when I was four years old] and my mother can't look after us. Very poor family, very poor family. My father died from a burst appendix as it was too late to operate. It was peritonitis.

A: So it was hard for people in Greece to live there?
F: Yes in Greece and in the village too. It was very hard.

A: Did a lot of people leave from the village?
F: Yes. Those years in my village there was 4,000 or 5,000 people but after many, many people came to Australia and America and Germany and everywhere. Now, there are only old people in my village.

A: When you lived in Lefkada did you get to go to the beach much or was life more in the village?
F: No, no in the village.

A: Did you go to school?
F: Of course yes, I finished primary school. I didn't go to high school. I came here after when I was 16.

A: Where did you live when you came here?
F: I first lived in Hawthorn with my brother. I had another brother here, my brother George and his wife, and three lived all together, and then five of us. And after, I was married first.

A: How did you meet your husband Theodore?
F: I met him here in Australia. He was from my village but we met in Australia.

A: Did you know him from the village?
F: Not much because he was older than me, ten years older.

A: And where did you meet him in Melbourne?
F: My mother-in-law was working in the village. She said that girl come to Australia and she said I liked to…
A: Like a *proxenio* [matchmaking], an arranged marriage?
F: (Laughs) Like a *proxenio*. Then he came here in September and in January I was married.

I knew his family and I liked him straight away. We had a very happy and loving marriage. We were married for 49 years at the time he passed away.

A: Where did you get married?
F: In Agios Ioannis, in Carlton (Ed: St John Greek Orthodox Church).It was a small church in Rathdowne Street that was behind near where they built the bigger church that is there now. We mainly went to the Holy Monastery of Axion Estin in Northcote as we later lived in Alphington.

A: Did you have a big wedding at that time?

F: No, no. We had many people at the church, but it was not a big party.

A: What year were you married? 1966?
F: 1966. I have a party with a small amount of people – it was not all the people who were at the church. We had dinner in the hotel, in Russell and Lonsdale Street.

Freda on the way to her wedding to Theodore, 1966. Photo from family collection

Freda and Theodore during the 'Crowning' part of their wedding ceremony.
Photo: Family's own collection

Continental Hotel where Freda and Theodore had their wedding reception.

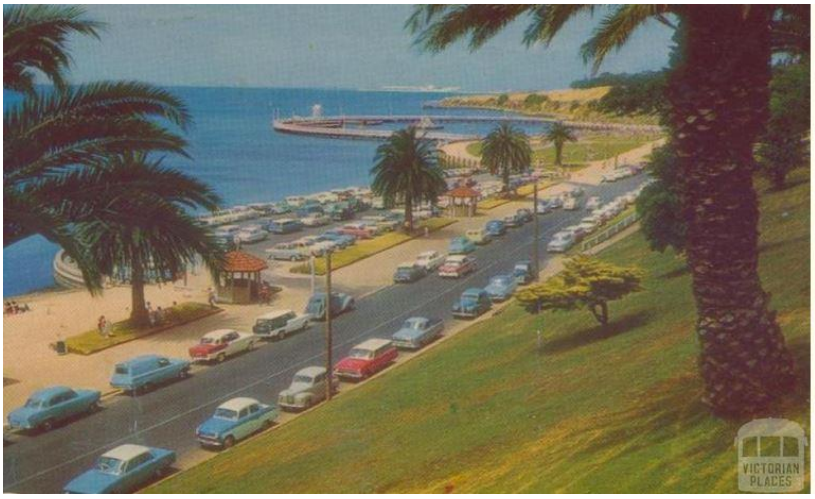
htttps://www.picturevictoria.vic.gov.au/site/melbourne/NorthMelbourne/18652.html

A: That was like a Greek community here in Melbourne?

F: Yes the Greek area. We had a small dinner at the hotel with my brothers and sisters. And after, we had our honeymoon at Geelong (laughs).

A: At least you went somewhere.

F: Yes for one week in the hotel.



Geelong Beach 1960s, Valentine postcard

: And probably working after that?
F: Yes. After, I came here and live with.... [In Greek – This is a nice story].

A: Freda is going to tell us a story.
F: We were renting one room in a house and in the morning, on Monday morning, I went to get up to make coffee. I see in the kitchen, there lived another four or five families in that house. I said to my husband, I can't live here. I come to Australia and I lived in a flat with my brothers and myself and I can't live with others in Brunswick, in one room.

A: So that was like a rooming house. And what did you do?
F: My husband had a house in Sydney Road together with my brother-in-law. But it had a shop downstairs and upstairs there lived people. I went to live with my brother-in-law for one month, to give notice to the people who had the shop. I went to live there with my brother-in-law Alex (Ed: Theodore's brother) and my sister-in-law Maria (Ed: Alex's wife). We lived together for five years and after that we bought the house in Alphington.

We enjoyed living together. There was two rooms. There was a room for each couple and the three children – my son and their two daughters – slept in the living room. The rooms were very big and we all cooked and ate together. Maria was a nurse in Greece and she helped with my son. Everybody worked hard to save for a house. It was cheap to buy a house at that time in Alphington.

A: What year did you have your two children?
F: I had the first child, Paul, in Sydney Road, Brunswick in 1966 and after I had Elizabeth in Alphington after five years. 1971.

A: What hospital did you have Paul in?
F: Queen Victoria. It was good. They were good at that time. My husband only came to visit in the afternoon. It was not all day visiting like now. The nurses helped. Beautiful, it was nice. And Elizabeth too was born in Queen Victoria.

A: Did your husband come at that time with you?
F: No, not inside.

Queen Victoria Hospital, where Freda's children were born in the 1970s.
Image from: https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/774

A: When you gave birth you were with the midwife?
F: Yes. My mother Christina was here, when Elizabeth was born. She helped me, she helped me too much, my mother (Ed: as in Freda's mother helped her a great deal). She lived close by and my brothers lived in Alphington too.

Theodore and Freda with their son Paul and daughter Elizabeth at Elizabeth's Christening, 1971. Photo: Family's own collection

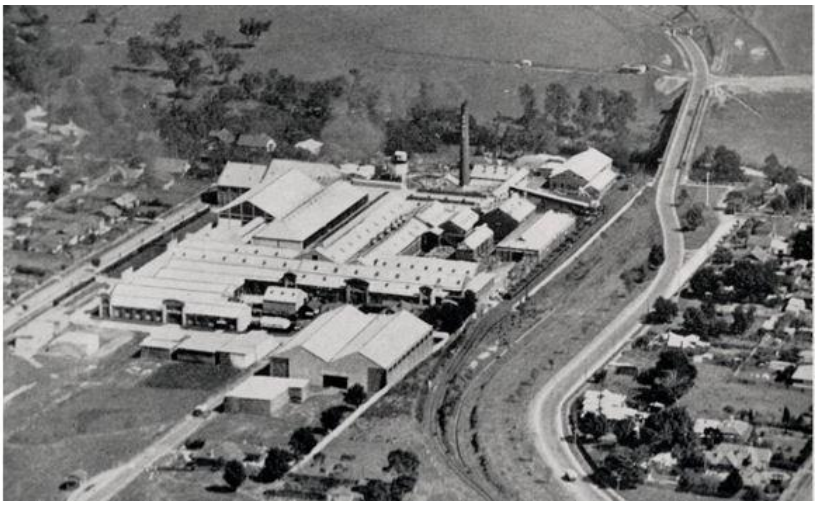
A: How long was your mother here for?
F: My mother was here for four or five years. She lived here in Australia but after she had a big car accident. My brother's wife was finished, dead, and the little baby. My sister-in-law Elizabeth and my baby niece Christine were killed in the car accident.

A: Oh, that's sad.
F: And my mother had a big operation in her head, and afterwards my mother went back.

A: Back to Greece.
F: Yes. My mother lived with my brother in Australia for four years. My husband and I worked very hard. My husband worked the nightshift, and he would look after the kids because I didn't like to leave them with other women to look after. I worked in the laundry, I did afternoon shifts for years.

A: You worked in the laundry?
F: Yes, it was close to my house, at Spotless Drycleaning.

A: What work did your husband do?
F: He worked at the paper mill – the Australian Paper Mills in Alphington.



Australian Paper Mills, where Freda's husband Theodore worked for many years. Image from: https://www.heidelberghistoricalsociety.com.au/image08.html

A: Oh the paper mill there.
F: Yes, for many years.

A: On machinery?
F: Yes, and after working in Brunswick, they made the needles…

A: You can say it in Greek.
F: At the *Clostireio* (Ed: a factory where they make sewing needles).

A: The sewing needles?
F: Yes. And after I worked to make all the metals for the bathrooms, the soap holders for many years. In a factory. There were many other people from Greece there, and from other countries.

A: Who did you work with mainly.
F: [In Greek – How should I say, I worked only with Greeks.]
(Ed: As Freda's co-workers were also Greek migrants, there was limited opportunity for interaction with English speakers at work.)

A: Did you get a lot of opportunity to speak English?

F: That's why I don't speak very well in English because I worked only with Greek people. First, I worked at the Cadbury chocolate factory for six months. That was all Greek workers, all Greek. My first job.

A: And you have three grandchildren. Is family important to you?
F: Oh yes, I grow up my grandchildren, Adriana. I helped raise them.

A: You give a lot of help?
F: Yes, Theodore and Rikki. It was only six months when my daughter-in-law went back to work and I helped to grow them up. I looked after them at six months old. My daughter-in-law went back to work. My other grandson is Michael.

Freda's three grandchildren: Theodore, Michael and Rikki
Photo: Family's own collection

A: And Elizabeth and Michael live here on Phillip Island with you?
F: In Melbourne at the start.

Freda's daughter Elizabeth and grandson Michael. Photo: Family's own collection.

A: And later here on Phillip Island. How did your family come to live here on Phillip Island?
F: I had the house. I came here on holidays 35 or 36 years ago [approximately 1985]. After I came here in Ventnor, my brother-in-law bought a house in Fisher Street. My son bought the land here where I live now and built the house. But the first house that we bought in Ventnor was together with our *koumbari* (Ed: best man and woman at Orthodox wedding, sponsor of child/ren). The *koumbaro* was second cousin with my husband Theodore and was the Paul's godfather.

A: Down on the corner.
F: Yes, the small house, a very small house. When family came to visit us, they would stay in a two bedroom bungalow at the back.

A: Oh the blue one on the corner, that was beautiful that house, it's gone now. Was it blue?
F: Yes. Not blue, it was white. Then after we buy the land and built the house. This house is 35 years old now.

A: And a lot of your brothers and sisters bought land here?
F: Yes, my brother, my sister and another brother here in the same street. Good company.

A: How did you design the house, did you design it?
F: No. I saw one house back on the other street, the same style, and I liked it and if I say to the builder I want *that* house, he would fix everything. Hugh was a young boy and this was his first building job on the island.

A: So you went by what the other designs were here? This house is a beautiful house. It's brick on the bottom and timber on the top and the upstairs area is where you can see a bit of the ocean.
F: Before you **could** see the sea here, there were no houses, no fences, nothing Adriana before. That time I came here there were no houses, no fences nothing, not many houses.

A: So it looked very much like a farm area?
F: Yes it did before. One house here, another house there. That house wasn't here or that house. Only the older woman next door and the house at the back were here at the time I came here.

A: Does Phillip Island remind you of Lefkada?
F: Oh, yes! The bridge.

A: Lefkada is joined to the mainland by a bridge. Do you feel when you come over the bridge, it's like going there?
F: Yes, yes, yes. My husband loved it. He came by himself to live one to two weeks, because I couldn't come. I looked after the grandkids. My husband came to live one to two weeks here. After, we retired and my husband and I came here to live for two years. Finished.

A: Is that when he passed away from leukemia?
F: Yes, from leukemia. My husband loved it here. He loved it.
A: Did you enjoy going to the beach?

F: Yes, he loved it here.
A: And so you decided to stay here, haven't you?
F: Yes, I stayed here. I look after the garden. I look after Michael and I look after Spyradoula (laughs).

A: I have some questions around that soon. Do you spend a lot of time here with your family, your *oikeogenia* [Greek for family]. There are a lot of social activities, they come and go.
F: Yes, they come and go. We celebrate Christmas and Easter. It's beautiful. My family are coming for this Christmas too. Before, so many people come here. Every Christmas, we had here 20 to 30 people, and they stayed as well. [In Greek – we made beds for them upstairs and downstairs.]

Freda with her sister-in-law Dina.

At right: Freda holding one nephew, with another on the left, husband Theodore and son Paul at right. Photo: Family's own collection

A: Do you celebrate a lot of the religious festivals, that's a big part of your life, the religion?
F: Yes. We have very big parties. My husband's name day, my 25th wedding anniversary, big parties when there were marriages in Melbourne, my son's wedding– for one week we had a party.

A: Before the wedding, everyone came here before the wedding like a *glendi* [party/celebration]?
F: Yes, yes. One week party, it was very, very big.

A: How did you find the pandemic affected everybody here, because everything had to stop?
F: Yes, everything stopped.

A: Did you find that hard.
F: Yes, very hard. Now I haven't seen my grandkids for two or three months because they are in Melbourne.

A: Can you tell me about the Greek community on Phillip Island. There are a lot of Greeks here aren't there?
F: Yes, we have a big community here and we have got many people. 90, 100 people sometimes go once a month.

A: To the Greek Senior Citizens Clubs? You have 90 people that go?
F: Oh yes, before the last two to three years, at New Year's Eve the kids would come from Melbourne. It was beautiful. At the Melaleuca hall. But not now. (ed: because of Covid). It was beautiful, very nice.

A: What were some of the activities that you would do as a club?
F: Dancing and cooking, talking together. We play traditional Greek music on a music system. We cook together foods such as pitas, oven roasted lambs, chips, salads and Greek sweets. The chef is the sister of our President whose name is Angela. Membership of the club is $10 per year and we pay $10 for person for the meal. There are big tables of 15 people and we sit with the same group each time. Two of the tables are Australians who enjoy coming to the club.

We used to celebrate Apokries. It is a carnival before Lent begins. We would dress up but we no longer do that now as many of the members have passed away. We send flowers for them for their funerals

A: And you would go on holidays together?
F: Yes, one time we went to Adelaide, and another time to Lakes Entrance. We would go for day trips.

A: Do you do Easter and things like that together or is that more of a family thing?
F: It's more a family thing.

A: Do you know how some of the club members came to live on Phillip Island? Did they come from holidays? Or did other people tell them about Phillip Island to come here?
F: Yes, yes.

(Ed: The Greek Senior Citizens of the Bass Coast caters to the Greek senior community with holiday homes in Bass Coast and Greek Seniors now retired and living permanently in Bass Coast.)

A: You've got the most beautiful garden here.
F: Yes, I've worked hard (laughs). I have worked very hard Adriana because I love it. I love the flowers, I love the garden, the vegies I love.

A: There is a huge basket of the most amazing green beans here and we're surrounded by roses and the *kippo* [vegetable garden].
F: In the *kippo* I have beans, tomatoes, peppers, zucchini...

A: I can see tomatoes, olive trees, fig trees and a pear tree.
F: Everything, I love the garden, I love it.

A: Do you garden by the season? How do you learn what things to put in and when?
F: Yes. I learn, I know at summertime to put in the vegetables. At winter time, I put in the broccoli and those types of things, the garlic, the silver beet.

Koukkia [fava beans]. I make *fasoula* which are beans cooked in tomatoes that I grow in my garden and olive oil. You can use other beans too for this dish.

Freda with a tub of her own Koukkia (fava beans). Image: Andrea Cleland

(Ed: Freda always gives away her vegies to family and friends, she is very giving.

All the Greek migrants on the island have vegetable gardens and/or fruit trees. Freda's brothers have many olive trees growing at their island homes and they take the olives to be pressed for oil near Mornington but these are in small quantities.)

Michael and Freda harvesting from her kippo – vegetable garden.
Photo: Family's own collection.

A: And a lot of things from the garden you then cook?
F: Yes. Potatoes.

A: And what are some of the meals that you like to cook, because you make things from scratch.
F: Yes everything.

A: I can say Freda is an amazing cook. The *spanakopita* [spinach filo pie] and *galaktoboureko* [custard filo pie]…
F: *Spanokapita, Galaktoboureko, baclava. Kataifi* [fine vermicelli-like pastry], everything.

A: Especially at Easter time, there are a lot of things you prepare.
F: I make *tsoureki* [Easter bread], the *kouloria* [Greek Easter cookies] *kourabiedes* [Christmas almond butter biscuits], many things, *melomakarona* [Christmas honey cookies].

Freda's Fasolakia- traditional meal cooked with beans, potatoes, zucchini and tomatoes with olive oil. The vegetables are from Freda's garden. Photo: Family's own collection.

Some examples of more of the foods that Freda makes: images from Wikipedia

A: How did you learn to cook these recipes?
F: I learnt with other people and I have books too, I have the recipes. With other people, if I see something I like I will ask 'how do you make that'? We also share recipes and cooking tips at the Greek club.

A: And you cook together with your family too?
F: Yes, my granddaughter has learnt to make *tiropita* [cheese filo pie].

A: Beautiful. Do you make the pastry from scratch?
F: Yes, from the start.

A: That's amazing. And your youngest grandchild Michael goes to school here on Phillip Island.
F: Yes, yes.

A: Your other grandchildren went to school in Melbourne, did you see a lot of difference between Melbourne and Phillip Island?

F: No, because the other grandkids went to private school in Melbourne and Michael goes to the private school here on Phillip Island. But the other grandkids in Melbourne learnt Greek one day a week, that's the best because they speak Greek very well, my grandkids.

A: Do you find Michael is keeping his Greek?
F: He talks but I don't know if he will keep that going or will forget (laughs). I talk Greek to Michael.

Ed: Greek is very actively spoken in Freda's household by extended family members and visitors from the Greek community on Phillip Island. Michael is comfortable listening and speaking in Greek with them and he speaks Greek beautifully. There are no formal Greek language classes held on Phillip Island.

A: Do you find the school here different, such as the sports or the people?
F: No, it's the same here on Phillip Island as in Melbourne.

Ed: Freda has found her personal experiences of taking her grandchildren to school and sports clubs with her grandchildren on Melbourne have been similar to what she has experienced on Phillip Island with her youngest grandson.

A: And do you enjoy looking after your family.
F: Oh yes. I love it. I love to look after my grandkids.

Ed: Freda takes a very active role in bringing up her grandchildren and attending all her grandchildren's activities including parties which she helps organise and cooks for. She loves being a soccer, tennis and basketball yiayia [grandmother]. She was 'awarded' Best Yiayia on

Phillip Island for providing wonderful food at school functions as a thank you for her efforts by the parents in the prep class of Newhaven College in 2018.

Freda with her grandson Michael. Photo: Family's own collection

Freda is awarded 'Best Yiayia on Phillip Island' by the Preps of Newhaven College in 2018 from Martha Gajewski who migrated from Thessaloniki, Greece in 1971. Martha's yiayia founded what was to become Black Swan dips from her kitchen in Melbourne using traditional recipes for Greek dips .Photo: Family's own collection.

A: Did you have to do that while you were working or sometimes when you were working, or mainly when you were retired?
F: I am retired. I stopped working early because my husband was sick with his back and stopped work and after I stopped too and I looked after my grandkids.

A: And you now look after your sister-in-law Spyradoula. How old is she, 88?
F: She's 89. She is the last one surviving from my husband's family and I have looked after her for the past three years.

A: Spyradoula has come to live with you here and your daughter Elizabeth and grandson Michael also live here. Do you get a lot of support for caring for Spyradoula?
F: Oh yes, the carers come to give her a bath. They help me to cut the grass and I have some help.

A: Do you find it hard to look after her?
F: Oh yes. But I love having her here.

A: Because she is family.
F: I love it. I wouldn't like to put her in a nursing home. I love it but if I can and have too, I will put her in a nursing home. What can I do?

A: Have you found language to be a problem, do you find people understand you?
F: Oh yes. I don't have much problem with that.

A: And if you can't do something in English, who do you get to help you?
F: My daughter.

A: So Elizabeth does a lot of the things to help with you any paperwork or government or forms or things like that.
F: Yes.

A: If we talk a little bit about your memories of Phillip Island, can you describe some of the biggest changes that you've seen to Phillip Island?
F: There's been very big changes. From the time I come here, it was like a village to a village. (Ed: in terms of how settlements on Phillip Island were spaced out but now there are much more suburbs.) But now, there are big changes.

A: Like lots of suburbs and lots of people?
F: Yes, big changes. More people, more houses. Very big changes.

A: Do you like it?
F: I like the quiet but it's alright still here in Ventnor, there hasn't been much change.

A: Just more people. And what do you think has changed in Ventnor, more houses?
F: More houses.

A: But it doesn't have any shops really.
F: No nothing.

Ed: Freda does use the Anchorage Store in Ventnor if she needs to get any item and also the butcher Island Primary Produce in Ventnor.

A: In terms of the shopping here on the island, has that changed, like in Cowes?
F: Oh yes, from the first time I came here it has changed so much.

A: What sort of shops were here when you came in the 80s?

F: It had all the shops but not the same shops as now. It was smaller, it had one supermarket.

A: Where was that one?
F: It was just Coles. (Ed: Coles used to be on the site that was initially the Co-Operative Store. Today it is the site of the current Aldi.)

A: But it was further down, was it?
F: Yes [In Greek – It is where Aldi is now]. Now we have three supermarkets, four supermarkets because we have the IGA too.

A: And do you go to all the shops? There's IGA, Aldi, Coles and Woolworths and then there's San Remo IGA.
F: Yes.

A: Do you do all of the shopping here or do you have to sometimes go to Wonthaggi?
F: No I shop here. If I go to Melbourne, I buy Greek foods at the deli.

Ed: In Melbourne, Freda is able to buy supplies in bulk such as feta cheese, olives and olive oil. The local Coles in Cowes does have Greek style coffee available. Freda however finds it is cheaper to buy Greek foods in Melbourne and she grows many of the things she needs.

A: And the banking?
F: I bank here.

A: Do you have a favourite story you like to tell people about Phillip Island or anything you remember a lot?
F: [In Greek – which one is the favourite!] *(laughs).* I like going to the place where we had Spyradoula's birthday.

A: The Cape Kitchen. You like going there?
F: Yes because it has a nice view.

A: What do you like most about living here on Phillip Island?
F: It's nice and quiet and I don't like to go to Melbourne now. It's more nice, more quiet here, I don't like to go to Melbourne now. I can't drive in Melbourne now (laughs), there are too many cars. I like it here more.

A: Do you find the trip to Melbourne is longer than it used to be to drive up?
F: Yes, it's more longer. I remember the time I came here with my husband in the first years, it took 1 hour and 45 minutes. Now, it takes more than two hours.

A: Have you done anything special in the community, fundraising or any hobbies or any clubs, or mainly with the Greeks?
F: Only with the Greeks [at the Greek Senior Citizens Club] because I don't have time anyway, Adriana.

A: You're very busy I know, we're lucky to have the interview today (laughs).
F: Very busy (laughs). I don't have time.

A: Do you feel the other residents, the people who have been here a long time accept you as being a resident here?
F: Oh…no (they do).

Ed: Freda is very much loved by everyone she meets and is very friendly with people from all backgrounds. Freda will often invite people over to share coffee, her wonderful Greek sweets and meals. If someone she knows is ill, she will often drop off meals to support other families on the island.

A: So you feel people see you as a Phillip Islander, part of the community here.
F: Yes.

A: What are your hopes for the future of Phillip Island, or any worries?
F: [In Greek – just how long will I live?]. I'm 72, how long will I last? (laughs). How will I go for the future?

A: For the island, do you worry about too many people, or about the climate, the weather on the *kippo*?
F: Too many people, yes. The weather has very much changed. I remember the first years I came here, everything was more burnt dry because of the weather. I find it very hard now.

A: What do you find as the difference, more dry or wet?
F: More wet, last year there was no summer, nothing. [The seasons are not the same patterns]. I don't know this year. I remember the first years I came, it was hot, hot. I went to the beach at 12 o'clock at night and stayed at the beach but now, no.

A: Do you think more trees have grown or more trees have been cut down?
F: More trees have grown.

A: Is there anything else you want to tell us?
F: [In Greek – what else Adriana would you like me to tell you?] (*laughs*)

A: (Laughs) It's been lovely to talk to you Freda. Thank you.
F: Thank you, thank you.

Family dog Zeus – an important member of the family! Photo: Family's own collection

Credits for food images from Wikipedia:
Galaktoboureko Image: Wikipedia by Badseed
Tsoureki Wikipedia recipes
Triopita Image: Wikipedia Tanya Bakogiannis
Koulorakia Image: Wikipedia by foodisdablog
Kourabiedes Image: Wikipedia by Jastrow
Melomakarona Image: Wikipedia by Kalambaki2
Spanakopita Image: Wikipedia Warehouse Deli Alpha
Baclava image: Wikipedia Robert Kindermann
Kataifi Image: Wikipedia Vanilla Lounge

About Greek migration to Australia by Dr Andrea Cleland

The devastating impact of the Second World War (1939-1945) and the Greek Civil War (1946-1949) prompted large-scale emigration from Greece from the 1950s to the 1970s. From 1947 until 1977, over 1.3 million people left Greece particularly from rural areas. These migrants set out for regions and countries with well-developed secondary sectors or resource-rich economies, such as Western Europe (mainly West Germany), Brazil, Australia, Canada and the United States

In Australia, what became a post-war immigration boom was initiated by the signing on 31 March 1947 of the United Kingdom-Australia Free and Assisted Passage Agreement, with other agreements to follow. Between 1947 and 1983, almost a quarter of a million Greeks came to Australia as permanent and long-term arrivals. Many migrants made the journey from Greece during the 1950s and 1960s on dedicated ships such as the *Australis*, *Ellinis* and *Patris,* with migration from the Greek Islands accounting for 15 per cent of the Greek Australian population.

Work was seen as crucial to economic independence and the establishment of independent family households. In the early 1950s, there were an estimated 200 jobs available in Australia for every applicant. Most found work in factories or farms, as over 75 per cent of Greek migrants who arrived between 1947 and 1971 were unskilled labour. Government regulations and control of post-war immigration to strategically target the occupational and employment patterns of migrants largely explained why many Greek post-war migrants went to Melbourne and worked in factory employment. By the mid-1980s, Melbourne had emerged as one of the principal centres of Greek population in the world, with a Greek community of over 200,000 people. By the late 1990s, the Greek community was the second biggest non-English speaking immigrant group in Australia.

Currently, the number of Greek migrants in Australia has rapidly declined due to an ageing community and decreased numbers of permanent migrants from Greece. At the 2016 Australian Census, there was an increase of those who identified with Greek ancestry at 421,000 people but a decline to 1.8% of the total Australian population with 93,740 born in Greece.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Census of Population and Housing recorded 169 people on census night who identified as Greek Orthodox in Bass Coast from a total 32,796 people. 65 people in Bass Coast recorded their birthplace as Greek. It is important to note

that Bass Coast has been traditionally a place where Greek migrants have owned holiday homes so this may not reflect the true extent of the Greek presence across generations that have developed a connection to Phillip Island.

References

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2016) *ABS Census*, Australian Bureau of Statistics website, <http://www.abs.gov.au>.

Clogg, Richard (2008) *A Concise History of Greece*, 2nd edn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Sixth Reprint.

Doumanis, Nicholas (1999) 'The Greeks in Australia', in Richard Clogg (ed.), *The Greek Diaspora in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford: Macmillan Press Ltd.

Jupp, James (ed.) (2001) *The Australian People: An Encyclopaedia of the Nation, Its People and Their Origins*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press.

REMPLAN 2022 accessed at: https://app.remplan.com.au/basscoast/community/summary?state=PN1xTabgmTO63LMTnWeMJoseuwu8Py, viewed 2 January 2022.

Roudometof, Victor (2010) 'From Greek Orthodox Diaspora to Transnational Hellenism: Greek Nationalism and the Identities of the Diaspora', in S. et al Leoussi (ed.), *The Call of the Homeland: Diaspora Nationalisms, Past and Present*, Leiden: Brill, pp.139-68.

Tastsoglou, Evangelia (ed.) (2009) *Women, Gender, and Diasporic Lives: Labor, Community, and Identity in Greek Migrations*, Lanham: Lexington Books.

Yiannakis, John N. (2009) *Odysseus in the Golden West: Greek Migration, Settlement and Adaptation in Western Australia since 1947,* API Network.

LIFESTYLE

Heather Hamilton 1.
Lifestyle on Phillip Island

Essay written from Interview conducted by Dr Andrea Cleland with Heather Hamilton together with her daughter Carol, 31 March 2021, Cowes, Phillip Island.

Early years, family background and memories of growing up on Phillip island

Heather Hamilton (nee McLardy) was born in Cowes on Phillip Island on 19 February 1931.

'I don't remember being born but I was born on Phillip Island,' Heather remarks. Her ancestors included George Walton, who was one of the early settlers at Rhyll.

> My father was Newton McLardy and my mother was Mary Walton, who was known as Polly. We lived in a weatherboard house. There were four sisters in one room and one brother in a tiny room off the kitchen. It had a wooden stove, one of those Lux stoves.

Heather's siblings included Violet, June, Newton and May.

> My father had a farm halfway across the island on Ventnor Beach Road. Our neighbours were the Dixons and the Grachans and the Stoppas. The farm was 80 acres. We milked cows and had chooks and raised chickens in incubators. My mother sold the eggs in Cowes.

Heather's mother Polly had a horse called Lassie but the horse didn't like the bitumen roads. Instead, Polly had to lead Lassie down the side of the road to get the eggs to the shops in Cowes. There was a butcher and a baker in the main street. The road to Rhyll was just a sand track back then.

> It was a cart which Polly used and she would harness it herself. Other than Lassie she had another horse called Dottie. Dottie was the younger horse, so when Lassie got too old, Dottie took over the egg run to Cowes.
> (Carol additional information 22 July 2021).

Heather recalled:

> My mum would bring the eggs to Cowes to sell them and she had a horse called Lassie. She was all right but it was only dirt roads, not roads like they are now, dirt

> roads. The road to Rhyll was sand tracks. Anyway, mum would get to the RSL as you would know it. The horse went round and round and round and didn't like the bitumen. So mum had to get out and lead the horse down on the side to get her eggs into the Cowes shops.

As a child, Heather remembered playing at her family farm:

> My father used to play 'Hare and Hound' * and would chase my mother round the paddocks. May and I were on this horse this particular day. We were riding over the paddock and the horse started to jig, and I started to fall off. I said to May, "you've got to come with me" and she said, "don't fall off, don't fall of"'. So anyway, off I went, and took her with me and we both landed on the ground and the horse decided to go home so we had to get up and walk. She said "now look at what you've done!" We had lots of fun. We had lots of fun.

On the farm, Heather would milk cows and she recalls how she would put the teat cups on the cows and how the family would churn their own butter. Heather also recalled that the milk inspector would 'test the milk and stay at our house and there's the window and he was sitting having tea with his back to the window and the window blew in on him!'

Heather went to school in Cowes. The school was first situated on Thompson Avenue on the site which has now become the Cowes Cultural Centre. (In 2020 the Cowes Cultural Centre was demolished in advance of a new building planned for the site). The current site of Cowes Primary School situated on Settlement Road opened with 2 buildings in 1954, while the rest of the school was moved to the settlement Road site in the 1960s.

Carol, Heather's daughter, remembered: 'There was a story that they heard the bell from where the RSL is and they had to run the rest of the way because they were late because they were dawdling. They walked along Gap Road from Ventnor Beach Road.'

Heather recalled that they would knit the socks and scarves in khaki for the army during World War Two. Her school teacher liked sports and they were all good runners and jumpers. During the war, her father was a volunteer coast guard (Volunteer Defence Corps).

On Boxing day, Heather recalled that a sports day was held, where the McLardy family took out most of the honours:

> A sports day, I don't know who ran it. It was held at the Ventnor Recreation Centre (Reserve). Anyway there was Violet McLardy, which was my sister, so she wasn't married at the time. June was married I think, so she was June Stephens. There was May, my brother, my father, my mother and myself. My mother won the hammering of the nail. My father won the old over 60s race over 100 yards, 150 yards I suppose. My father was the old one, my brother was in the next one down, he won that. Vi won the throwing of the broom, and June won something. May won either the running race or the high jump and I won the other one! All the McLardy family took out the sports on this particular day. We came up against the Harris and the Hobbes [families] and all the locals. We had a lot of fun!

Heather played netball – which in those days was called ‘basketball’ – on red courts on Bass Avenue, Cowes. Her mother would come in on Saturday morning and mark out the lines of the courts in lime. The courts are no longer there. Heather would play defence positions and the games were between the 'married and the single ones'. Heather was on the singles team as she was single at this stage of her life.

Heather was 14 years old when she left school in Grade 7 (Form one) with her Certificate of Merit. Heather describes how her father sold the farm in 1946/47.

Young Heather McLardy with two of her pets. From the Hamilton family collection

> My father sold the farm. Then I had to go and get a job. My first job was at the Penguin Café which is not there anymore. The second job, I went from the Penguin Café to the Elsford Guest house. They were all guest houses in those days. That was down Chapel Street. Then I went from there back to Elsford. It was sold to somebody else, a subdivision I think it was.
>
> I went from there to Yackatoon guest house which was run by the Nivens which were local people. I waited on tables and the guests.
>
> Then I went from Yackatoon to The Continental. It was a wooden building run by Arthur Jones at a certain time. Then Arthur Jones sold to Keith Jobe’s mother and father.

Today, The Continental is known as the North Pier Hotel.

Carol added (additional information by email on 23 July 2021):

Mum went to Deniliquin with her older sister Vi, where they were waitresses. They went up there during the winter months as Phillip Island went quiet for winter (not like it is these days the island is never goes quiet). Vi meet her husband Norm (Marshall) while she was up there, she never returned to the Island to live. Her three children still live in Deniliquin.

Yackatoon Guest House. Phillip Island & District Historical Society Collection

It was during the time that Heather was working at Yackatoon that she met her husband Neil: 'I met him in 1948. My sister May and her boyfriend went to the pictures this night and they brought this 'so-called boy' with them. I met him [again] and we started going together when we met at the football'. Heather barracks for Collingwood and they loved going to the local football on Phillip Island. 'Football was our life'.

At 20, Heather married her husband Neil who came from Burwood, Victoria and had studied at Dookie Agricultural College in Shepparton. They were married on 5 May 1951 at St Philip's Church of England in Cowes. They had 105 guests and Heather had two bridesmaids: her husband's sister and sister Vi [Violet]. The best man was her husband's brother. Neil was also attended by Heather's brother. The reception was held at the Koala Café in Cowes, which is now called 'Hotel', and Heather recalled they danced the bridal waltz. She and Neil loved to dance.

Lifestyle

Heather and Neil 'came back and started a family at Trenavin Park', the farm Neil had bought in 1947. They had 5 children and lived in a tiny cottage with 3 bedrooms. 'We shared things in those days '. They used to walk to the top of the track at the farm to get the mail and there were cattle grids to stop the cattle getting out.

Carol added (additional information by email on 23 July 2021):

Heather McLardy and Neil Hamilton on their wedding day.
From the Hamilton family collection

From 1947 my grandparents Arthur and Jess Hamilton moved into the 'Big House' as the family called it. After the death of my Nanna in 1962, Dad, Mum and the siblings at the time moved into the Big House (Trenavin Park), and my pa moved into a flat that was attached to the main house. The cottage was used after that for farm hands and their families to stay, while working on the farm. When I was born they took me back to the Big House and I lived in it until 1977 until we built a house on the property of Trenavin Park. Trenavin Park's property was way bigger than it is now. The Cottage is still standing, I think the last owners did improvements to it.

Trenavin Park Ventnor - the Big House. Photograph: John Cook.
Phillip Island & District Historical Society collection

Heather's children were born at Warley Hospital Cowes where she would stay in hospital for a fortnight following the birth of each child.

> We had cloth nappies. We had rolls or whatever it was. We had to take all our own nappies. All our own nighties. Everything that you put a baby in, three or four bunny rugs. Nothing was provided in those days.

On the farm, Carol recalled that her mother Heather had to care for her children and cook for the farm hands. Heather would make scones for morning tea and casseroles for lunch.

> It was only me and the shearers and I had to cook for the shearers while caring for them. I was laying there one night thinking, what the devil did I cook those shearers? I never could remember. I had casseroles one day and prayed to God it would rain so they didn't come in [laughs].
>
> John Dixon still says my cooking is the best on the island. They were down to earth shearers and local men we knew from growing up.

Heather cooked on a kerosene stove. There was a small cup of kerosene and one day her son Donald got the cup and drank the kerosene. It burnt down into his throat. In those days, vomiting was induced to assist him. They took him to the doctor who told Heather he would be OK.

> Donald was independent in a way. At Moonya, he did wood working, painting, rug making and cooking. Moonya made planter boxes out of wooden hammer handles, which I still have the planter boxes at my home. They also made tables out of tiles which I have a few of them some that Donald bought home, and some were purchased, as this to help fund the Centre. My husband and I, and a few other parents of children that attended Moonya, were involved in Moonya appeals committee on Phillip Island that had cake stalls, etc to fundraise for the Centre. All our fundraise money went towards a twin cab ute, for their home maintenance team. Donald was involved in the home maintenance team, which they mowed lawns and attended to people in the community gardens. He also worked at the shop they had in Wonthaggi which sold the stuff that they did at Moonya.
>
> Donald did various jobs with the Phillip Island Football Club from giving the players water to the scoreboard attendant from Juniors to Seniors, also helping out at social functions by picking up glasses and cleaning up. The Club was his second home. Donald died from a short illness in 2004. He was a very much loved by the community that knew him.
> (added by Carol on behalf of Heather 22 July 2021).

Heather has 10 grandchildren with two being born at Warley Hospital. Heather's eldest daughter Nola married at the age of 20 and she had 4 boys. Heather also has 5 great-grandchildren – 4 great granddaughters and a great-grandson (…at the moment).

> I only have 2 children living on the Island now – Carol and my other son Stewart. Stewart operates the Anchorage store in Ventnor with his wife Kay (Jeffery), who is a

> descendant of the Cleeland family. They have 3 children. I also have another daughter that lives in Melbourne with her husband Peter they have 3 grown up children.
> (Added by Carol on behalf of Heather 22 July 2021).

Community involvement and reflection

Heather's husband Neil was a member of the Freemasons and their Lodge was on Church Street. Heather would often set up for the Installation dinners. Heather was a member of Rotary and was involved in the Rotary Op Shop for 30 years.

Heather does not like to go to the beach but used to sit on the beach at Woolamai as her husband was a Foundation Member of the Woolamai Beach Surf Life Saving Club. Although Heather could not swim, her husband taught half the kids at the beach to swim:

> He couldn't teach me to swim but he taught half the kids on the island to swim. But this particular day we were sitting on the beach, my husband and 2 other lifesavers, and they were on patrol. You had to swim between the flags. These 2 young 17-year-old boys, decided they would be smart. The boys went out and so of course my husband went out to bring them back in. We were sitting there waiting and [they were caught] in the rip, we thought they were gone.

'I don't like change,' said Heather when asked to reflect about the changes to the island she has seen. 'Traffic lights; we didn't have them in my day. But then we never had the cars either. I daresay it's busier now than it was then. '.

Heather Hamilton 2.
Farming and community

Interview conducted by Dr Rebecca Sanders on 10 September 2007.
Used with permission of Dr Sanders and the Hamilton family.
Transcribed with editor notes (ed:) by Christine Grayden, December 2021

H: Heather Hamilton
R: Rebecca Sanders

R: My name is Rebecca Sanders and I am interviewing Heather with the Churchill Island oral history project. Today's date is Monday, 10 September 2007. I'm just going to start by explaining that Heather has agreed to speak to me even though she doesn't know so much about Churchill Island. But you are a long-time resident of Phillip Island, are you not?

H: Yes that is correct.

R: Have you lived here all your life?
H: Yes. I was born in 1931. I lived on a farm in Settlement Road until I was 4 and then we moved to a farm on the middle of the island on what was then called Rainbow Road and I believe is now Ventnor Road [sic] (ed: Ventnor Beach Road). I was there until I was 14, milking cows with my family: 3 other sisters and a brother, mother and father. Then we moved to Cowes where I lived locally and worked at guesthouses.

R: So you were involved in the guesthouse industry?
H: Only as a waitress. I worked in the Penguin Café from about 15 until I was about 17, then went into guesthouses as a waitress. I met my husband in 1948 and we were married in 1951. We moved to a farm, which was then Trenavin Park still out there at Ventnor. I raised 5 children and we retired to Cowes in 1986.

My growing up years were mainly out on the farm at Rainbow Road in Ventnor. I remember my mother and father had chickens and we never had cars. It was mainly by bike into the Cowes State School. The only main road on the island was from the RSL (ed: corner Ventnor Road and Thompson Avenue Cowes) down to the Esplanade – all the other roads were dirt roads. Out the road to Rhyll was all sand tracks from Coghlan Road, or all dirt roads.
We had a lovely life and made our own fun – a very simple life; a very good life.

R: Did your parents have a poultry farm?
H: Yes and we had cows and pigs. Just your typical farm. And my father grew chicory.

R: I was going to ask you about that. It was quite a big industry on the island wasn't it?
H: Yes it was. My sisters and I went topping chicory for other farms on the island that grew chicory. That was a very hard, backbreaking experience.

R: Can you explain how you topped chicory for me?
H: Chicory is a root very similar to a parsnip. When they'd dig it, which was mainly by 'devil' in those days – which was a long thing with a digging bit on the end of it – we used to go along the rows behind them and top the green tops off and bagged the roots up. Then they take that to the chicory kiln. There's quite a few kilns scattered across the island still. Not as many as there was, but there are still some. So that was backbreaking and we were only young.

R: How old were you when you first started topping chicory?
H: I was about 14 or 15 I suppose. So, very young. We used to do that for my father then go across the road and help other farmers.

R: Did you do that to help out or was there a payment involved?
H: I don't remember any money. I suppose there was a certain amount of payment but I don't remember handling any of it. Probably when chicory was dried and sent away to Bushells and Robur who made coffee and chicory essence out of it; instant coffee out of it. Probably at the end of that process we might have got a few shillings out of it. But not money like it is now.

R: Please tell us a bit about your working in the café and guesthouses as a waitress.

H: The Penguin Café is now the State Savings Bank I think (ed: approximately 20 m down from the corner of Chapel and Thompson on the east side). My sisters and I worked there. We had a good relationship with the owners. We would work till 12 or 1 o'clock in the morning.

We would go to the football. It was a different way of life – more sociable. People knew one another. The café just stayed open till 12 or 1 o'clock. You could always get a cup of coffee after the pictures, after they finished about 11 o'clock. (ed: movies in the Shire Hall on east of Thompson Ave between Chapel St and Esplanade). There was the Koala Café which is now known as the Jetty (ed: North East corner Thompson and Esplanade); I don't know if it's changed its name since then. The paper shop was around the corner from that, between opposite the jetty to the Isle of Wight Hotel (ed: approximately next door to Hotel on eastern side) and the post office was on the opposite corner which is now the pizza parlour. (ed: Isola di Capri restaurant). So things have changed around quite a bit.

R: They have, because I have looked in Gliddon's book *Phillip Island in Picture and Story,* and he's got pictures of what the main street used to look like and it looks nothing like it looks now.
H: No, nothing. We used to tie up horses by the reins you know. Of course there was not a lot of cars. My father had a T model Ford when I was about 4 in 1935. He used to pick up people from the ferry and take them out to the Nobbies or the Penguin Parade. But we had 40 acres and he was a builder, so he did that to supplement his wages.

R: So 1935 would have been just the end of the Depression wouldn't it?
H: Yes – in the Depression. But we had our own chooks and eggs and we had our own milk, so we milked our cows and made our own butter and that sort of thing, but sugar we had to buy. I remember sausages were sixpence a pound and bananas were 25 bananas for a shilling. But wages were nothing like they are now and the cost of living has gone further up.

R: I think too that the diet has changed. It's very different now. If you look at an old cookbook the recipes are very different to what they are now.
H: Yes, very different. Well, we mainly grew up on bread and milk because we had our own cows. Bread and milk and sugar. The first time I introduced it to my family they said 'What's this?' But they got to like it. We had bread and dripping and tomato sauce. Those were the days when we didn't have a lot but we did manage to have a good life. And a healthy life too. We were all healthy, probably we were very lucky. But also because of my mother who was a very good cook.

She was involved in the island, and a real identity. She was one of the Waltons. There is a bit in that *Phillip Island Chronicle* in which I learnt about my great grandfather and what he did. I didn't know my great-grandfather but I know my grandfather. There's a bit in there about my great-grandfather George Walton and that opened my eyes to what he did. There wasn't a photo of him just an article.

R: Explain the Waltons to me. Who were the Waltons?
H: The Waltons came here in 1868.

R: So that was straight after closer settlement?

H: They were one of the first families on the island. He was digging up business, that's what he was doing. Here it is on page 11.

R: Would you like to read it out?
H: Reads:

> "Digging up business in 1869. It seems Mr George Walton senior was a very adaptable man. After purchasing 8 acres of land adjoining the township of Rhyll he began digging a waterhole, being one of the first needs of a settler. The hole exposed deposits of clay suitable for brick making. A business is born. He then set about building a kiln. His children squelched around in the mud which was then shaped and left to dry to bake in the sun. The bricks were laid, the kiln complete and he made bricks by the dozen.
>
> "It appears Mr Walton senior has been at it again. He has been gathering shells at low tide and floating them at a high tide. He then digs a pit measuring 5 m long and 3 m wide and 2 m deep. Mr Walton then covers the bottom with firewood and after cleaning and drying the shells he layers them over the wood. This is then burned and allowed to cool after which the residue is carefully raked (?) off. The resulting material is lime. What will he think of next?"

That was my great-grandfather. I didn't know he did that. So I learnt something out of this. Whether it is correct or not I don't know!

R: So there was lime making at Rhyll?
H: Yes, well apparently there was. That was the 1870s.

R: Because I knew there was lime making at Corinella and further down towards Bass and a few other places. But I didn't know there was any lime making on Phillip Island.
H: What else would you like to know?

R: What can you tell me about your mother?
H: Well my mother was one of 11.

R: That is a large family!
H: They lost one. She was more or less in the middle. No, towards the end. I think there was only about one after her. My mother was just an ordinary little lady. A very special little lady to all of us. She had my father. She was born in 1901 and she died in 1990 so she was 89 years old when she died. She met my father here. Actually his mother and father owned Glencoe guesthouse, which was now where the car park is behind Coles, going down towards Genista Street. (ed: Aldi as at Dec 2021 south west cnr Thompson Ave and Chapel St). They ran that for a few years.

R: Glencoe was one of the large guesthouses wasn't it?
H: it wasn't one of the first guesthouses. It's in the guesthouses book.

R: Do you mean the book, the piece of work by June Cutter?

H: Yes. Do you know her work?

R: Yes. I have her book on *Churchill Island A Special Place*. I had hoped to get in contact with her but the number I have is not current it appears. No one seems to know whether she is still around even.
H: I haven't heard of June Cutter for a long while.

Well I think my mother met my father when she went to work. When she was working at Glencoe. Whether she met my father then or whether she met him before… They were married in 1923. They moved to a farm in Settlement Road. They had 40 acres.

R: 40 acres was quite a lot at that time wasn't it?
H: Well 80 acres was the norm. Most of the farms were 80 acres. Within the Cowes area it was usually 40 but it may have been 20 – I'm not sure. He was building houses and that sort of thing. My grandfather built the churches – Alec McLardy. They ran Glencoe. He built all the churches then. The Uniting Church; not the present one, the first one. (ed: now the St John's Uniting Church hall, north west cnr Warley Ave and Chapel St) The one here at the Church of England (ed: St Philip's Anglican Church, north west cnr Thompson Ave and Church St) and the Catholic Church which is now called… (ed: approx. 70 Chapel St Cowes)

R: The bar? Opposite Coles? (Aldi)
H: I can't remember what it's called. And a couple of the ones at San Remo. The one that's now around at Trenavin Park. (ed: Formerly Star of the Sea Catholic Church in San Remo. The other McLardy San Remo church was St Augustine's Anglican Church)

R: So he was quite an influence.
H: Yes. And he was the MC for the dances in the early days. But no, we are just an ordinary family that grew up on the island and saw all the changes that have happened. Some of them for the good and some for the bad.

R: You described your mother as being quite active in the social life of the island.
H: She used to play the organ for the church, she was on the school committee. As she got older she joined the golf club. She started playing golf at the age of 59 and broke her handicap in the first year from about 36 to about 17 I think.

R: Oh my goodness!
H: She endeared herself to all of the local people on the island. She just had that… well, all of the Waltons did. She had a very easy-going nature. So she was made a Life Member of the golf club for the work she did around the place. Unfortunately she had a stroke at the age of 85, 86 I think she was. So she had a couple of years at the nursing home before she died. Luckily for us her memory was good and she knew us all. It was her body failing her more than anything. So that was unfortunate circumstances. But she endeared herself to all her grandchildren. I think at the time she died she had 34 great-grandchildren. She'd have a few more now – she's got some great-great grand ones now!

R: It sounds like she is very fondly remembered.

H: Yes. Everybody on the island knew her. She had a nickname. I don't know whether my father gave it to her, but her nickname was 'Polly'. Her real name was Mary Walton; she only had the one name.… I have a feeling it was my father called her Polly but I don't know why.

R: We talked quite a bit about how you grew up on a poultry farm venue began your working life I suppose topping chicory and then you moved on to waitressing.
H: Well it was a matter of you had to go out and get a job or you didn't survive, did you? My last wage was in 1950. I was married in May 1951, and my last wage was 6 days a week for £7.10 shillings. But I managed to save enough to get married.

We had some wonderful times. In those days all the guesthouses on New Year's eve had a carnival type atmosphere with the floats. Each guesthouse did a float which was judged on the best float. Most of the guesthouses got involved; I wouldn't say all. The people who came and stayed there sort of participated and people were wonderful. We got to know all the people. They came and stayed not just for one night like a motel. They came and stayed for perhaps a fortnight. I worked for Arthur Jones who bought the Continental Guesthouse, which was totally different to what is now. In fact there is probably a photo of it here in the guesthouses book. He was a wonderful boss.

We used to get involved. Each waitress had 3 tables of about, well you'd have about 24 people to wait on. If you got your guests out of the way quickly you could get away.
We used to have sports days. My sisters and I were always pretty good at sports. We used to go. They used to have sports days on Boxing Day. They were held at Ventnor. The guests would all come in for an early lunch. Get them all fed and packed up and away you go. So we had a good rapport with the people we waited on. We didn't very often find somebody who was offput or standoffish or anything. They were always friendly people.

R: Do you think that Phillip Island was the sort of place that you went when you are looking for that type of atmosphere?
H: I would think so. Everyone was very friendly. I remember one of my nieces, she was coming down from town. She came shopping. Her husband's sister it was, and her little girl. She came shopping in Cowes. And in those days – in 1954 I think it was, or 1955 – so you knew everybody. And she went home and she said: 'auntie knows everybody on the island! She said hello to everybody on the island'. Well you did know everybody on the island then. But I don't know half the people on the island now! Even when I go to Probus Club now – it's all right if they put their badges on. But there's 140 in the club!

R: Goodness!
H: You just don't get to meet everybody. You know their faces but you can't put names to them.

R: So how many families or people would there have been on the island in say 1954, 1955?
H: Well I think it was only probably about 3000.… It did swell in the summer time and Easter time there were a lot more. But permanents there would probably only be about 3000.

R: So that gives us an idea of how small it was.

H: Yes, how small it was. They were nearly all farms except for the ones that lived in Cowes. We all knew our farmers and when anything ever went wrong everyone sort of helped out and that sort of thing.

R: So would you travel much from one side of the island to the other? So would you ever have made a trip to Newhaven?
H: No, not when we were young. As I say I never set foot on Churchill Island until my eldest granddaughter, who is 15 now, well she was about 8 or 9 months. I had never been on Churchill Island until that day because we just didn't have the transport. We went to football when we were growing up and that sort of thing, but that's the only time we really went off down that area. And we were only just off over the bridge for football and back again, and that sort of thing. So we didn't spend a lot of time at Newhaven.
R: So the football league around here was comprised of Cowes…?
H: To start with there was Cowes, Ventnor and Rhyll I think. They were the original ones back when my father was a footballer in 1921. He was a nice tall type of footballer. Such a tall man he was. A good footballer. He passed all his football knowledge on to his grandchildren; his children then his grandchildren.

R: (ed: looking at his photograph) He's got a very classical profile hasn't he?
H: Yes. Their shorts were long but now they're short! Revealing aren't they?

R: Yes, very much so!
H: But they were the style. I'm not sure whether he played for Ventnor or Cowes in that particular photo. But he did kick a football. And he was a very good cricketer. We used to get dragged along to the cricket when we were little. He was a good cricketer but… I don't mind it so much now. But some of the cricketers would be out there and they used to be what they call 'stonewalling'.

R: Oh yeah, when they just make little bats.
H: Yes, and they wouldn't run, and they'd have to go back and bowl it all again.

R: My father used to do that. Not when he was younger, but as he got older he would just make little hits all the time.
H: That's my Stewart and his wife who run the Anchorage store at Ventnor. And that's my oldest sister Vi. I always think this one (ed: pointing) is like him, but like his father also. But he was tall. There were 4 McLardy boys on my father's side. My grandmother was a Jeury. There is road named after her going out to Rhyll. That's Jeury Lane, all that was my grandmother. She used to ride side saddle.

R: Oh! A lady!
H: Yes she was a lady and she used to ride side saddle. A very elegant lady. Not very tall but very elegant.

R: Did many of the women on the island right side saddle or did they ride astride?
H: I really don't know. I only know she did on occasions. I don't know whether she ever did ride astride a horse.

R: I just thought it's far enough out for people to have the option of not worrying about it.

H: I don't know that I have been very helpful.

R: You are doing very well.
H: You may be able to pull some bits out of it, but not very much. If you keep asking me questions I may be able to answer them.

R: I wouldn't worry so far. We haven't had any long pauses yet so we are doing well. You spoke earlier about your visit to Churchill Island. Why did you go?
H: My husband had given Churchill Island an old piece of machinery that they had out on the farm. I can't actually tell you what the piece of machinery was. I should know, but I have forgotten. They were having an open day then on Churchill Island, so that would have been about 14 years ago. They had an open day where they invited people who had given pieces of machinery, and my husband got an invite. So we went with my mother and my daughter Faye. I don't know where my daughter Carol was. And my son Donald was possibly there. We lost him 3 ½ years ago. So that is why we went to Churchill Island that day.

R: Were there many people there on that day?
H: Yes, many people. They had the machinery and everything all around the place like they still have.

R: Did they have any of it working or just set up?
H: They had it all set up but none of it working. They didn't have the Clydesdales. It was just an open day for people to be remembered for the work they'd done and the machinery they'd given.

R: Did you get afternoon tea?
H: Well I think we had to buy it. I'm not sure. It's a long time ago. We just wandered around and had a look at the old cannon. You've been on Churchill Island, there is an old cannon there somewhere in the gardens, isn't there? We took my mother. I don't think my mother had ever set foot on Churchill Island either. Because they didn't get around. They were mainly on bikes (ed: bicycles) or horses and that sort of thing. But we used to go to visit my grandmother who lived at Rhyll. We went in a horse and cart, and on the sand track you'd half get bogged! The roads are a vast improvement now.

R: How bad were the roads? Were there big potholes?
H: Big enough. I remember when my mother went with the eggs into Cowes to sell them. We had two horses: a younger horse and an older horse. One was called Lassie and the other one was Dottie. But the older one must have passed its knowledge on to the younger one because when we lost the older one, mum put the younger one into the cart. With the older one, when we got to where the RSL is now (ed: north east cnr Thompson Ave and Cowes-Rhyll Rd) where the made road started, she would NOT go on to that road. So my mother had to get out and lead it. And she would go round and round and round and round. Mum would be sitting there and say: 'Come on, come on Lassie come on'. It was just the bitumen under their hooves. But she passed it on to the younger one, because the younger one wouldn't do it either.

But they were all dirt roads. We used to ride our bikes to school. If we had a flat tyre and couldn't mend them we had to walk to school. That's why we were good runners because we

could hear the bell when we got to the RSL corner and we used to have to run down to the school where the Cultural Centre is now which was the school (ed: north east cnr Church St and Thompson Ave). Many a time we got the strap for being late! But never mind… We enjoyed it (ed: at school), it was good fun.

R: Did you like going to school?
H: Did I like going to school? Yes, I loved the sports part. The only time I ever passed was when a new teacher came when I was in grade 6. I used to like history. I was very good at tables. Don't ask me anything about maths. Don't like maths, never did. I wasn't a very good writer, but I could spell. And fortunately I could retain it. I liked poetry. I had a very good memory for poetry.

R: What sort of poetry would you learn at school?
H: We learnt 'My Country'. All the poems that were in the grade fives and sixes readers, which you don't get now. But My Country had so many verses! By Dorothea Mackellar it was. I remember going home and had to learn this poem. We had to stand up. We only had one night to learn it. But anyway I did it and we had to stand up (ed: to recite in front of the class) but I got through it. The only thing I remember of it now is 'I love a sunburnt country'.

R: '… A land of sweeping plains'.
H: Yes that's right. I've got the book here somewhere. Every now and again I get it out and have a look at it. The teacher we had… there is a bit about it in this week's local paper, at the Ventnor School. It's 85 years since the Ventnor School started. The paper was on Thursday. My children went to the Ventnor School. Not that I went to Ventnor, I went to the Cowes school. We lived right on the boundary of Ventnor and Cowes. Because we were living in Cowes until I was 4, the others had started at the Cowes school. So we all went to Cowes.

But with the school sports some of the girls there said they had a real thing about beating Cowes. There were 4 McLardy's on this side, and 3 or 4 Harisses on the other, and we had a real thing about lining up against each other. Sometimes they would win and sometimes we would. I don't know if you know any of the Harris girls. Julie Box is a Harris.

R: I haven't spoken to her yet but she is on my list.
H: She's into the historical things.

R: She is or is going to be the new president of the Historical Society.
H: Yes, she is well and truly into the historical thing like Cherry McFee is too. Whereas I just hang on the outside.

R: Oh, I don't think so.
H: I don't delve into history. My husband Neil was always into the old history part of things. So that is why we have Joshua Gliddon's *Phillip Island in Picture and Story.*

R: So do you know much about how that book was put together? Because a lot of it is not by Joshua Wickett Gliddon but by other authors. It's a bit odd. It's very useful but a bit different.
H: No I don't but – I'm not sure about it, but I think he went around and interviewed different people to get the version that he's got. But most of it is pretty true. Just like June Cutter you

know. She went around and interviewed different ones about the guest houses and that sort of thing. And I think she interviewed mum on Glencoe when she did that book. And Mrs Oswin Roberts was at Broadwater guest house.

R: Quite famously.
H: Yes, famously. And she had the bear in captivity. There is a photo of him in the paper there. You will find the little teddy bear and the little dwarf which was Percy Drawbridge. She went, they went down to meet him off the ferry and he was just a tiny gorgeous fellow.

R: Do you remember him well?
H: He was a cheeky little fella. (ed: Looking at photo of Percy with Edward koala) See his cheeky little grin? And he used to tease the kids. He'd go along and he would pinch them. We used to think he was gorgeous though. My mother lived down in Rose Avenue which is down past the football ground. He'd be walking along the street and we'd be going down to the football ground and we would pick him up. Gorgeous little guy! He is buried up at the cemetery.

R: So he was well loved in the community? Or only by certain sections?
H: Well I don't know whether too many people loved him or not but he never did any harm to anyone. But I think it was there where somebody says about going to pick him up from the ferry expecting to find something different. He was employed as a handyman and they were looking around for somebody tall and he was this little tiny guy. Our Donnie used to love him. Because Donnie was slightly handicapped.
And what else would you like to know?

R: I think I'd like to ask you about the fact that people didn't travel much around the island for a long time and the reason that people didn't see each other very much was the bad roads and it took a long time to get around. Everyone knew each other and felt very comfortable. I guess it was different in Cowes and having people come off the ferry. But do you think all that would have created a kind of insular environment as well? Where people felt odd about strangers?
H: I don't think so. Most of the people in those days were genuine people. There's a lot of genuine people around now; don't get me wrong. But there did not seem to be any of that fear. I lived out in Trenavin Park in the 2 storey house and we never had a lock on the door. My husband used to go off to meetings and I'd be there with 4 or 5 children. And I never once felt afraid that someone would come in and cause trouble or anything like that. A lot of the people on the island were the same. And when John Oswin bought Trenavin Park from us – you know Anne who writes for the paper – when they bought Trenavin Park from us in 1976 and we moved up onto the farm and built our other house there… My husband had a heart attack so we sold up and came in here. That was a family concern. The 2 storey house set in the centre of this 730 acres which Hamiltons all owned. So that all got subdivided because 2 of the other Hamilton children wanted money so it got split up…

We moved and built a house on what was our share before my husband got sick, so we moved up here in 1986. But most of the people on the island trusted one another and there was no fear of anybody robbing anybody or that your things weren't safe, you know. It was a good place to live.

R: Can you describe what it was like when the first bridge from San Remo to Newhaven opened?
H: Well I was only 9 when the first one opened. So I don't really remember much about that but it made it possible for people for people to travel without the punt. I know my grandfather – how old was he I think 80-something when he died – went to stay up with one of my aunts when he was living with my mother out on the farm. That would be 1939 before the bridge was opened. I remember him jumping off the pier down onto the punt to go across and go to Melbourne. I remember he went to Melbourne, got pneumonia and died there. So we didn't actually see him again. He was fit and healthy jumping off the pier onto the punt and went to Melbourne, and that was it.

But the bridge did make a difference. As it says somewhere in the paper the first bridge could only take a certain weight because it was a swing bridge. I know my husband – they came here in 1947 – they had a beast and they had sheep. They had a block of land over at Officer and they used to take the cattle over and fatten them up on the 80 acres or whatever they had over there. They had to unload them at San Remo and walk them across the bridge and then pick them up again on the truck on the other side.

R: Now I've heard stories of similar happenings with tourist coaches – people having to get out and walk across.
H: Yes that's true. But the bridge did make a difference to people who had cars, who could then leave the island and travel.

R: You describe your father as having a model T Ford. Is that right?
H: Yes, that was his first car. I don't remember much about that because I was only 3 ½ to 4. I just remember sitting in where he used to take the passengers.

R: What happened to that car?
H: After that car I'm not really sure. We did finish up with a Paige which was a much bigger car. One of those old type compared with the cars today. We had that but I don't remember what year it was. We had the T Model Ford and then we had that Paige but I don't remember a car in between.

R: I want to ask you about – I suppose when various technological advances were making their way into people's homes like refrigerators and vacuum cleaners, because they were seen as…
H: Extravagant.

R: Yes, they were. And I can remember even when I was little having a carpet sweeper rather than a vacuum cleaner. And I was wondering if you remember when your first fridge would have turned up?
H: I had – when I was married in 1951 I lived with my mother and father – behind them. And then we went out to the farm

We had electricity run by a generator hooked to big what's their names (ed: batteries? Inverters?) that they charged that used to be 110 (ed: 110) and that was used for lights. We had no electric iron. No washing machine. We had an old copper. We lived in the cottage and then after I had 4 children

R: That's a lot of washing in a copper!
H: Well I only did the sheets in the copper, and the nappies in the copper. I had 4 children down there and then we moved up into the 2-storey house in 1963 when Neil's mother died because it was too big for my father-in-law by himself.

So I had no iron, no washing machine, I used a double trough with a wringer. The clothes used to be washed by hand then run through the wringer. Washed with the 'blue bag'. Remember the blue bag? It used to whiten your clothes. Very good for bull ant bites so my mother said, which was quite true too.

R: What was in the blue bag?
H: Oh just some blue powdery stuff. You just put it in the rinse water and it would whiten your sheets. Because they were all white sheets; there was no such thing as coloured sheets in those days. White shirts. I had a flat iron, I had to run the flat iron – put on top of the hot wood stove to heat it up and then get a handkerchief because the husband had white shirts when he had to go to the (ed: Masonic) Lodge. And you had to get the first part of the soot off (laughs). So then I invested in a petrol iron.

R: A petrol iron?
H: Yes and you put Shellite in it. But you just have to make sure you emptied the iron after every use, because if you had too much you could blow yourself up (ed: both laugh). So you had a can about that big, so you emptied your iron. And I invested in that so that I could iron the clothes flat. You get about an hour and a half's ironing. You'd have a little bowl. I wish I still had it. Not to iron with, but just as a…

R: As a souvenir?
H: Yes. But it had a bowl; it was just like a silver bowl, an ordinary silver bowl. But it was just like an ordinary iron. I never did blow myself up. But I was never satisfied

It had a little can that you had to fill it, but no further than that, and then you used to have to pump it to get the pressure up and then you would light a match and away it would go. And the kerosene fridge – the first fridge I had was a kerosene fridge. We had ice chests before that and a Coolgardie safe. You would come into the butcher's once a week and you'd buy your meat and you used to put it in the safe. You used to take it out and smell it and wash it under the tap and hope. Like steak and that sort of thing. And hope that it was all right.

But the first fridge I had was the kerosene fridge and you'd have to light that up. And it kept everything cool; kept everything cold.

R: Did it change the way you did things?
H: Yes, I think it did in a way. You could buy your meat and sort of know that it was going to be all right (both laugh). You didn't have to smell it and wash it under the tap and that sort of thing. But no, it was a good life. The young ones today – and probably you too – you couldn't imagine now. I have washed… When the washing machine has gone bung and I've stood there and washed clothes (ed: by hand), I've thought *Now how the Dickens did I ever do this for 4 children*?

R: Four children is a lot of clothes to wash!
H: Yes, four children is a lot of clothes. Not that they had a lot of clothes; not like today where there are clothes everywhere. They've got far too many! We couldn't afford a lot of clothes so they barely had their clothes they go to school in. But they had good clothes.

R: Which you would make?
H: No, no I never made them. But they had a lot of pants and socks and that sort of thing and all those clothes had to be washed. But the first; we had no hot water. We used to light the copper to get the hot water for the kids to have a bath.

R: Did they bath once a week?
H: No a bit more than once a week probably. We had an outside toilet (laughs) which I wouldn't let them use because it used to blow here in the winter time and you'd be frightened it would come down on top of you. But this was only when they were little of course.

But then we bought a Raeburn stove where the water went and my husband found an old big round concrete pipe – I don't know what it actually belonged to – down in the lagoon, McHaffie's Lagoon. So they brought it up and dug a big hole in the ground and they sunk the tank in there and we got this Raeburn stove, which we then put the water through the stove. So therefore I had hot water over the sink and over the bath.

R: I will just stop and save this
H: But I've been talking about me and my family life and not what you want to hear about the island.

R: No! You don't see your family as being part of the island?
H: Oh yes, yes, we are part of the island. The McLardy part. And great grandpa Walton came here in 1869. The other grandfather didn't come here until the 1870s. He first started off in San Remo and then moved into Cowes. He wasn't what you'd call an original ancestor. But he was original enough because the island only started being developed in 1868, being subdivided into settlement. So yes, I class my family as an island family.

R: How long do you think you have to have been here to put yourself in that group?
H: Well, to be an islander you have to have been here 25 years and I've done that! Tripled that I would say – 25, 50, 75 – yes, tripled that. So yes well and truly established as an islander and very proud to be an islander too. I've seen a lot of changes. As I say, some for the good and some for the bad.

R: What would you describe as some of the biggest changes?
H: Well all of the high-rise buildings, all of those buildings going out here on the left-hand side. What we call 'dog boxes'.

R: I've heard that name a couple of times!
H: I came back from Ventnor the other day. We'd been out to the Ventnor school. And I looked across the paddock at that and I thought it was such wonderful farmland. In a few years' time they'll just be slums. There is no design to them, or no niceness.

R: So you would be much happier – there's 2 problems here as far as I can work out. One is that they are on what would be good farmland and the other is that they just don't look very nice. Would you be happier if they looked –
H: What is going to happen to them? I don't know whether you've got to buy them or whether they are called 'timeshare'. What actually they are going to be? Whether you've got to buy them outright, as an investment for – What's going to happen to them in a few years' time? Are people going to be living in them, or are they just going to be using them as holiday homes?

There's a lot of places down Church Street – we've got one across the road here – that are made out of corrugated iron. Well this street is mainly bricks, except for this one across the road which is weatherboard. It's a neat little weatherboard. A neat little house. But the one up the road here – I don't know whether you noticed – but it's corrugated iron; it's straight up and down. There's 2 or 3 of them off Church Street. Is it Vaughan Street? Are they supposed to look like chicory kilns?

And the whole of the Esplanade is just high buildings now. Bayview guesthouse was there. It was a lovely guesthouse.

R: It's very interesting that a lot of the guesthouses aren't around in any physical form anymore. There's actually no trace of them.
H: It doesn't seem to be, does there?

R: What happened? I know the Isle of White burnt down as did Broadwater. Is that correct?
H: They pulled that one down. They pulled Elsford down, which is Elsford Close now. Marldon house in the Main Street down from the National Bank. Down towards what used to be a chicken shop. Marldon house was quite a nice-looking guesthouse.

I don't know what happened really. People sold out and other people had other ideas. Probably the guesthouse people needed the money I suppose. They just sold up and moved away. Some of them died I suppose. But no, it's nearly all motels now. I don't think anyone runs as a guest house on the island.

R: Because it's kind of an old idea. You can still go to guesthouses in Europe. They have them as well as motels. It's another accommodation option.
H: But the motel is – Well you go to a caravan park and you're in a caravan. You've got a caravan next door to you so you get to meet those people. You come out your door and you can talk to them and you go to the community toilet blocks and you meet people there. My husband used to love to meet people there. You'd only go over for a shower then half an hour, three quarters of an hour later: 'where have you been?' 'Oh just talking'
But if you go to a motel you close your door and you don't come out until you go out and get into your car the next morning and you don't see anybody. It's a very unsociable way of life.

R: it's very lonely.
H: I like to meet people and see how the other half lives. But not in motels and it's all motels. But that's the way of life these days. We used to do a bit of caravanning. Not as much as we would have liked to have done.

R: Do you think there could ever be a move back to staying at a guest house?
H: I don't think so.

R: Do you think people are happy to just have their own little enclave?
H: I don't know whether it's more money, or people want bigger and brighter and more modern things than guesthouses because guesthouses were just basic. They had a chef and they were just basic rooms and they were just basic happy holidays. But life is too fast these days; a lot faster than when I was young. The time goes so fast now; you haven't got time to turn around today!

I didn't have a car, my husband and I. He had a truck, but Stewart was 7 months old I think when we got our first car – a Mini Minor.

R: You had a Mini Minor? How cool!
H: A 'Morris Minor' as it was called. That was our first car. There was a chap who used to live out there. He used to go rabbiting; kill the rabbits and get the skins and sell the rabbits to the butchers. So I'd catch a ride in with him to come to Cowes. Or Neil would knock off what he was doing if we had to go to Cowes for something. But nearly always I would come in with the chap who was catching the rabbits. It was different; it was a slower way of life. We didn't have the water on out there on the farm. I think that came in the late 1960s, and the electricity. We moved up in '63.

I remember our eldest daughter plugged in her radio – a 240 (ed: volt) radio – and they were charging up the batteries for 110 and we had this thing that converted from 240 over to 110. Anyway she decided she wanted to listen to the (ed: inaudible). Anyway she turned it on and it was too much voltage going through and she set it alight! (Laughs) She had to go and get her grandfather. Luckily he was around. She wasn't very popular because it was the only radio we had and it cost us a bit to buy it and she'd burnt it all. So it was in the late 1960s also, when we got the electricity I suppose.

I know they used to – when did television come in? I think about 1956. We used to have this little television about that big (indicates size). We used to start up a little motor under the house, watch TV and then have to go under the house to turn the motor off when we were going to bed. But you made do with different things. The kids didn't miss out on much. They were always taken to their sport and youth club.

R: Now you're very keen on your sport, aren't you? What sorts of sport did you participate in, because you obviously took a great deal of active –
H: Well, nothing really professional. We ran, we high jumped, we had long jumps, we had egg and spoon races, we had sack races, we had three legged races. We had three pots, which you had two pots; one pot in front. You used to step on one pot then bring the other one back. All those sorts of games. We had ball games – tunnel ball and cross ball, all those sorts of things. Yes, we loved all sports and football. We used to love our football.

R: And still do.
H: And still do. Stewart started playing football when he was about 9. Donny never played but he was well and truly into the football club. They made him a Life Member down there.

He used to leave here at half past eight on a Saturday morning and never come home til half time or midnight or something!

R: Helping with the juniors and seniors?
H: The juniors and seniors and seconds and thirds. He was time keeper. Or not time keeper, but he was score board and would sell the raffle tickets. But my father was sport. Mother wasn't really. She took up golf, but that was the only sport mother ever played.

R: She obviously got quite keen on it though.
H: My sister was very into golf. I actually babysat the 2 sisters' children in 1957. I was pregnant and my baby was born in 1958. So I looked after their 2 kids after kindergarten and they took up golf. They were good golfers. I didn't take it up until 1976. I won a few trophies. May was club champion 15 times down here.

R: There's quite a bit of prowess in your family!
H: Yes. Mum won a few trophies too. My eldest sister was the only one that really wasn't into that much sport. She could run. She wasn't as good as us other 3.

I went down to the juniors, because I've got a grandson – one of Stewart's boys. The two of them should be playing, one in the under 18s and one in the under 15s, but the under 18's got a sore foot. He's over 6 feet (ed: only 16?) but he has to play in the under 18s. So they had the junior Best and Fairest the other night.

R: The local leagues have just had their grand finals haven't they?
H: No, this Saturday for the 2nds, 3rds and 4ths. We've got the whole 3 of them in it. They were hoping for 3. But I felt like a fish out of water. I was the only old person around at 76, and I was still there. But I saw the football club start off in an iron shed where we used to cook hot dogs and have pie ovens and that sort of thing and boil kettles. But I was down there and I felt like a fish out of water.

R: Do you kind of feel that there should be more older people going to those sorts of things?
H: Well, a lot of the ones who play football now are newcomers to the island. Not so many older families. I've had Stewart go through from when he was 9 and then his boys are going through now. My sister May has had her boys go through – she's had 4 boys. One her boys had a bung, he got injured. My other sister who is no longer with us, she had a boy who played for quite a few years, but he had a girl so he hasn't kept going.

Do you know Snow Dixon? Have you ever heard of him? He's an old islander. He was one of the originals in the Ventnor School started 85 years ago and he's a great character. He'd tell you lots about the island. He's 85,86 now and still bright. He'd tell you a lot about the island. Actually he was on the DVD of the ah –

R: Historical Society
H: Yeah, the one they got out of the war years – 1939-45 – what it was like on the island and a lot of the island people –

R: What a fantastic project.

H: Yes, so they got a DVD on all that.

R: It's interesting.. you can't help but notice when you drive onto the island that they've got the Vietnam Veterans' Museum there. Certainly things have changed from when I was little. You certainly never used to see anything about the Vietnam War.
H: We didn't in my day either. 1969 it was. Well I didn't know much about the Vietnam War either. But I was grown up with 4 or 5 children then. You knew something, but we didn't know a lot about it and what they went through. And they did go through a lot. How they suffered afterwards, and this Agent Orange.

R: Yes, they've just started a full investigation into it.
H: A lot of people have been affected by it. I don't know too many down here but I know my eldest daughter went to Tasmania to live and met a few of those over there at the bowls club which the RSL is involved in. She met a lot of the Vietnam Vets who had been affected quite a bit. It didn't get recognised for a while, did it?

R: No. It's becoming a bit different now. But it's interesting when you go back and look at old records about the First World War and the Second World War. People would often not talk about problems they had as a result of the war years then either. And the recognition - again came a long time afterwards. In some ways it's kind of funny that we have this idea that you came back and were suddenly heroes instantly, and it really didn't work that way.
H: No, it didn't work that way. My brother-in-law, he's now in Melaleuca (ed: Melaleuca Lodge Aged Care) but he was captured by the Japanese. He was nearly blind. But the only thing that he said was to my sister was after the war. In 1947 they were married, but he met her in 1946 or something like that. He came back skin and bone and Vegemite was the only thing that he could eat. It helped keep his eyesight and that sort of thing.

R: Because it has Vitamin A and iron in it.
H: Yeah. He won't talk – he's got dementia now, but he would never talk about the war. Japanese – he just couldn't handle them at all. No, it was amazing, because I don't know if it was Changi he was in, but he was in the POW camp for most of the war and he came out when the war was finished. But he was an amazing boy. 'Cause he went through absolutely Hell too.

R: The war would have been on when you were only a child.
H: '39 yeah I was 14 I think when the war ended in 1945.

R: Did you ever hear much about it then? Did your parents talk much about it?
H: No, my father was one of the – what do you call it?

R: The Militia? (Ed: Volunteer Defence Corps)
H: Yeah, well. We had blackouts and that sort of thing. Rationing, food rationing and you had to have tickets to buy butter. I don't think we ever had to buy butter. But they used to have to go and man the beaches. I think they were called the Voluntary Corps or something like that (ed: Volunteer Defence Corps VDC). That's what mainly this DVD is about in the war years between 1939 and 45 and what it was like on the island. They interviewed a lot older people than me about what it was like. Cherry (ed: McFee) and they grew carrots and

whatever out on the farm with their father. The only thing I can remember about the war was at school knitting scarves (ed: laughs) to be sent off to the troops.

R: Do you think they ever made it?
H: What, the scarves? Oh yes I think they probably would. Yes, they'd go through the Red Cross. So I'd knit scarves, but I could never knit the socks. I remember Cherry saying - we were talking about it recently – and she said she could never turn the heel. She made a mess of it and her mother said she can't do that because they'd get blisters. (ed: both laugh) so her socks never went. But the scarves, yes it was that odd – knit 2, purl 2. I knitted lots of scarves for the war.

R: To move back to Churchill Island before we finish up I guess. I'm very interested by the fact – and this is not unexpected I should say – that you know very little about Churchill Island and that you've only kind of visited it just the once.
H: That was the first time. I have visited it several times since. But that was the very first time I ever set foot on Churchill Island.

R: So why did you go back again?
H: Well we went back at Easter time this year to take my daughter from Tassie (ed: Tasmania) and son-in-law over and they had the Easter Horse Festival. So we went and really enjoyed that. I've been back a couple of times at Easter. Mainly at Easter I've been. And I've been there on a Probus day, luncheon we had there. And the Rotary Club have had their Christmas nights a couple of times over at Churchill Island. So I've been back for those just in recent years.

R: That's just as interesting to me.
H: Oh yes, Churchill Island. See there was no bridge to Churchill Island. So you couldn't access it, but as I say you never had a car and it was never opened to the public.

R: No, because it was privately owned.
H: No it was never opened to the public when we were growing up. And to go that far on a bike! (laughs) It was just out of the question. Too far! Three and a half miles to Cowes to the dances was enough.

R: So you used to go to the dances?
H: Yes, father and mother taught us. Oh yes, we used to go to the dances. We used to dance for an old fellow who played the piano for the music. Some young ones as well. Hilda Foster played the piano. The young ones wouldn't dance to that sort of music these days but it was the music in our day. You'd have somebody on the piano, somebody on the drums and somebody on the sax (ed: saxophone) or a mandolin or something.

R: And would you do things like the Foxtrot?
H: The Foxtrot and the Modern Waltz and the Pride of Erin and the Barn Dance, the Progressive Dance, the Charmaine, the Tangoette – all the old dances. The Lancers. The Alberts.

R: That one I don't know.

H: That's where there were 8 people, 8 of you to a set. You met in the middle, and whats-his-named, then around you came. (Ed: watch the Alberts and variations here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=muN7zNW5Kzs)
And then square dancing. Have you ever done square dancing?

R: Yes, all of the ones you've mentioned except for the Alberts and the Lancers.
(ed: watch the Lancers here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcCfQZlNqLA)
H: And the tangoette when you went down on one knee?

R: That and the other one I haven't done. I've seen it though.
H: I watch this 'Dancing of the Stars' and that's not dancing to us.

R: No, ballroom dancing looks very different now. But you can still learn the older ones. They call it 'Modern', then there's 'Latin' and then there's something else which was the old traditional dances that everyone used to do.
H: The dances when you danced with a partner not like the Twist where you dance opposite one another and you never touch. We went through the Jitterbug and we got good – this way and that way and through the legs. You never did the Jitterbug?

R: No, I've never done the Jitterbug.
(ed: watch it here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRYrY-YR2RM)
H: No, but we used to go into a lot of dances. All the old silly things we used to do.

R: I wouldn't call you silly.
H: We didn't have much, but we had a good life. We appreciated our life I think. I think that's the main thing. You've got to appreciate what you've got. Which helps.

R: I'll just return briefly to that fact that you have visited Churchill Island a bit more in recent years once it's opened up to the public. I'd like to ask you firstly if you ever thought about it much? Whether anyone ever thought about it much during the earlier part of your life? And secondly if anybody thinks about it much now?
H: I think a lot of people think more about it now. Because I never ever thought I'd go to Churchill Island at all.

R: No?
H: No. I knew it was there. But probably because I never visited there I didn't know much about Churchill Island at all. I've learnt more about Churchill Island in the last few years than I ever knew about it before. But a lot more people do think about it now, and do visit. When we were down there at Easter time it was amazing – the people that were there. We were just wandering along with our daughter and son-in-law. She was young, married and she had some children. I don't know whether it was her husband, but she was on the mobile phone talking to him and saying she was on Churchill Island and how amazing it was, and just wonderful! So I think a lot of people do think about it and it is an interesting place.

R: Why do you think it is?
H: Because of what happened years ago, and who bought it, and what they did. And they've got those hairy cows – what do they call them?

R: Oh, the Highland cows.
H: 'Hairy coo' they call them I think.

R: I always just called them 'Highland cattle'.
H: They've got a name. 'Haaa-ry coo' I think it is.

R: It's probably the Gaelic.
H: I think with the Clydesdales: they add another dimension, they are just beautiful. The work that they do opens up the younger generations' minds to what the horses did. My husband had a couple of Clydesdales when we were first married. Well, we weren't married at that stage but when he first bought the farm. You know, how they'd clear the land and ploughing and that sort of thing. So I think it is a lot more interesting there.

R: Do you think in some ways it's showing how things were done rather than what it looked like? Do you think the how is the important thing, or would you put those things the other way around?
H: No, I think it's showing a lot more of what it was LIKE – of the way things were done. With the sheep – at Easter time they had the sheep dogs rounding up the sheep and how the sheep dogs work and that sort of thing. People from the city would just think 'oh well, they get the sheep in. I don't know how they get the sheep in'. But those dogs are just so brainy, they're just so clever. How they obey all the commands. Some of those dogs were only 8 weeks old that they were working one time we were over there. And they are just amazing – they really are.

Until I went out to live on the farm and used to see my husband send the dog around to get the sheep. I mean we used to send our dog around. We'd say: 'Go and get the cows', and he'd go around and bring them home. But that was just part and parcel of growing up. Now I can't stand the smell of a cow! (ed: both laugh) Or its milk!

But I hate milk! It's got to have coffee or Milo in it or something for me to drink it. Even now with the pasteurised milk.

R: Oh, cow's milk straight out of the cow is very rich and creamy and strong.
H: We used to do our own separating and that sort of thing.

R: All the cream floats to the top.
H: You'd put the separator together wrong and you'd never get the cream separated.

R: So would you sell the cream?
H: Mmm. The milk and the cream. A lot of the milk we used to feed to the pigs and that sort of thing. The cream was always sent off (ed: to the Archies Creek butter factory). We used to have a separator with 'cups' they call them – so many cups. But one cup had to go on the bottom. It had a little lip on it. But if you didn't look what you were doing and you had it wrong, you could never get the milk to separate from the cream. Unbelievable! But we learnt; we learnt.

R: The hard way?

H: The hard way (both laugh). But no, I think Churchill Island is a good project down there and they've done wonders with it.

R: You think so? You think it's a worthwhile project to keep going?
H: Absolutely, absolutely.

R: It's important for showing younger generations what life used to be like?
H: Mmm. It's a pity we don't do more of it on the (ed: Phillip) Island instead of putting these silly looking things out there (ed: 'chook sheds' referred to earlier). (ed: both laugh).

R: You can find scraps on the island but once you get into urban areas there isn't a lot left.
H: I don't know that there's anything left on the island as far as – the kilns, the chicory kilns. There's nothing being done with them.

R: One's been turned into an art project down on Ventnor Road.
H: Yes, well the Nature Parks got one out there haven't they? Are they doing anything with that?

R: I don't think they're doing anything with that at the moment, no.
H: Nobody grows chicory any more, because it's all instant coffee.
(36 mins 52 seconds. Family member arrives, greetings all round)
Do you want a cup of tea? (ed: to family member) Put the kettle on please, good girl.

R: Yes, let's finish it up. So thank you very much for talking to me Heather. It's been very interesting Heather. It's been fantastic.
H: Well, you won't find much out of that.

R: Oh yes I will.
H: Will you? So this is for…?

R: This is for my PhD. I'm writing a PhD on Churchill Island. I'm looking at the fact I suppose that it's a heritage tourist destination and not just writing about its history, you know 50 years ago.
H: (ed: asks family member) How many times have you been on Churchill Island Kath? (ed: Carol?) You've been recently though. Not with me though. Oh yes, you and I went..

R: Ok then, well we'll finish it up. Thank you very much.
H: Is there anything else you want to know? I've been rambling on here for over an hour and (ed: directed to family member) I've told her all about us and about how naughty you were.

R: (ed: laughs) I am turning it off now.

Eileen Maiden
Island childhood and retirement

Interview conducted by Dr Andrea Cleland at Melaleuca Lodge 13 April 2021.

A: Andrea Cleland, interviewer
E: Eileen Maiden, interviewee

(*This interview took place with background noise present. The recording was also paused several times during the recording due to staff entering the room and a phone call).*

A: Hi Eileen
E: Eileen: Hi.

A: Just to start, can you tell us about your early childhood and family, such as when and where you were born?
E: I was born on the island in Warley Hospital in 1927.

A: Do you or did you have any brothers and sisters?
E: I had three sisters. One older, Isabelle and two younger, Nancy and Ruth. And [when] we went Rhyll was all farmland. As you can see by that photo up there, that's our house in Rhyll.

A: So you grew up in Rhyll?
E: Yes I did. They had a school at Rhyll, Ventnor and Newhaven and Cowes.

A: Do you have any memories growing up that you can tell me about?
E: I went to school in the Rhyll Hall. It stands today, and its number was 3121.

Rhyll Hall, where Eileen went to school.
Phillip Island & District Historical Society collection

A: Were there many children in the class?
E: No there was only one teacher and there were only about 20 kids going to the school.

My mother used to be the school teacher at San Remo. That's where she met dad. I was Eileen McFee in those days.

A: Was your father Jim McFee?

E: No. Len McFee.

A: Len McFee. And what did he used to do?
E: He was a skipper on the ferry.

A: And where did the ferry used to go?
E: To Stony Point. There was no bridge. There was a punt that used to take the cars over in, not windy weather.

A: Do you remember the cars?
E: Yeah.

Did you have one?
E: We had a T-model Ford and it had plastic windows.

A: Did you used to take lots of trips in the car?
E: No there was only two cars in Rhyll in those days. We came into Cowes in horses and jinker.

A: Did you have your own horse?
E: No my grandfather did. They came to Rhyll when dad was three months old.

A: So that's when they first moved to the island?
E: Yes they came from Dandenong and his father, Grandfather McFee used to be the mayor of the Hawthorn Council.

A: What was his first name?
E: William Thomas McFee

Hawthorn Town Hall in early 20th century. William Thomas McFee was on the Hawthorn City Council before coming to Rhyll. From: boorandarra.vic.gov.au

A: He was the mayor of Hawthorn.
E: They tell me he says he was, and cousin Cherry told me he wasn't.

A: Ok, so there was a mixed story about that? Do you know why they came to the island?
E: I don't know. They must have had a holiday place down here.

A: And with your house in Rhyll, was it on a farm? Were there a lot of acres?
E: No it was on a one-acre ground. The farm belonged to the place next door, George Lock.

A: Do you remember the sort of things that your mum used to cook or what she used to cook on?
E: She used to cook on a wood stove. We used to have to clean it with black lead and wash the dishes by hand before we went to school.

A: Was there any particular type of soap at the time that you used?
E: Yes. Velvet soap and we used to clean the wooden top of that table with sand soap. The place is still standing. Mum left it to the four of us and we sold it to the eldest sister.

A: So you were talking about how your mum left the house to you and it's still standing.
E: My eldest sister left it to her kids, four of them, and they are keeping it. They are keeping it and they come down at summer time.

A: That must be really lovely to know your house is still there.
E: Yes. I'm the only one left out of four of us. They all keep in touch with me, the nieces and nephews.

A: That's lovely. What were some of the things that you liked doing when you were a child, did you have any special activities or sports?
E: We used to play football with the boys. There weren't enough kids in the school, and we used to garden, and we built the tennis courts. We used to have a dance once a month to pay for them.

A: So it was like a fundraiser?
E: Yes.

A: Were these the courts that were on Bass Avenue.
E: No, the courts at Rhyll.

A: Oh sorry, I know them. Of course, you're in Rhyll, my mistake. And did everyone from Rhyll come to the dance?
E: Most of them. When we were teenagers, before that, we used to swim. I can't remember learning to swim. We were taught at school in the sea. They do it in swimming pools now.

A: Yes. Do you have any other favorite memories growing up, anything that sticks out in your memory?
E: We had four boys next door and they were every age, they were. The eldest boy was the eldest sister's age and so on. So we were tomboys [laughs].

The Swan Bay Estate used to have gum trees around there and the koalas and they used to go to the trees down the flat and one got on the fence and jumped onto my sister. She was patting it and she still had the claw marks on her face.

A: They are rough aren't they, koalas [laughs].
Can you tell us about when you met your husband and what his name was?
E: I was staying at a friend's at Gelantipy. That's up the mountain from Buchan with friends for the weekend. I used to have to come down to the Buchan pub and his sister owned the pub and she took me in to her lounge instead of staying with all the drunks. Ted was there. I met him there. During the war he was a soldier in New Guinea. He was in New Guinea for two years. When he came home his wife had a baby to someone else.
A: He was married before?
E: Yeah and I've got two step-children.

A: How many children do you have?
E: One. He lives on the island. Allan. Two L's in Allan.

A: Thank-you.
E: And the step-kids, their father died of war injuries in 1980. And I could have lost them, they've got closer. So, I count them as mine. Lendsay and Nancy. Lendsay LE N D SA Y

A: Thank you and Nancy. Did you have Allan at Warley?
E: No I had him in Orbost.

A: Orbost.
E: I lived in Cabbage Tree for twenty years.

A: You spent some time in the air force, didn't you?
E: Yes I did. When I was 18. 1945. I joined up and I was in in for 12 months. Just before the war finished.

A: What made you want to join the Air Force?
E: I just wanted to be involved.

A: Where were you living at the time when you joined the Air Force?
E: Rhyll.

A: Oh so you were in Rhyll. What was it like on the island during World War Two? Do you remember how people felt?
E: They used to have a Home Guard out of Ventnor on Bass Strait. And it never affected us much.

A: Were people worried, or did they feel a bit removed being on Phillip Island?
E: Some of them. May's, Heather's brother-in-law, was a prisoner of war and Arthur Luke was too.

A: Did you go through high school on the island before you joined the Air Force?

E: No. We did leaving by correspondence. The state school used to go to 8th grade. We got our merit in 8th grade and my mother was a school teacher at San Remo. That I told you, that was where she met dad and she taught Jim McFee's mother and aunties.

A: And what were your parent's names?
E: Len and Margaret.

A: That's right, Len you said earlier and Margaret.
What did you do after eighth grade? You did your leaving by correspondence.
E: My dad's brother had Narrabeen Guest House and his sister had Widgee Guest House which is in Findlay Street. When I was 14 I left school and went to work at Narrabeen and then I went to Widgee with my cousin.
That was on the corner of Findlay Street where The Continental was.

A: A lot of those places are gone now aren't there?
E: They used to have a parade down the street on New Year's Eve and each guest house had, what would you call it? A truck. Some of them had trailers and dressed up as something. And they had a New Year's Eve parade down the street. The school was where the Shire Offices were. We all went to the parade. . The band led the parade. The older islanders used to play musical instruments in the band.

A: Did you have any other jobs apart from the guest house?
E: I worked at the Shire Office before I joined up. Typing and bookkeeping.

A: And that office was in Cowes?
E: Yes, it was down in the main street and the Shire Hall was upstairs and lower level.

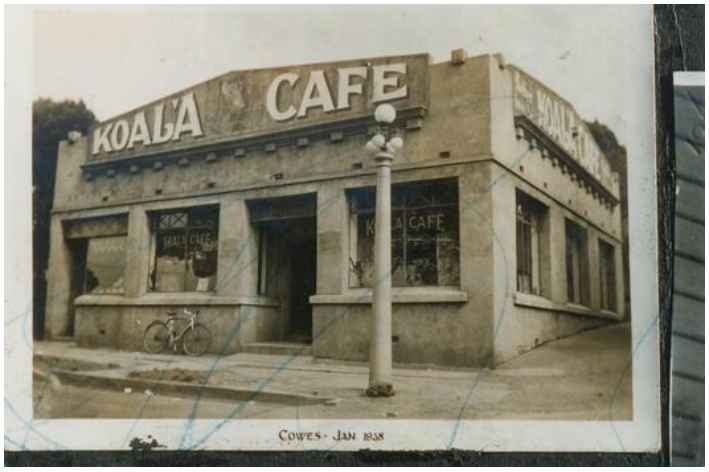
Phillip Island Shire Hall, which was in Thompson Avenue. From society's own collection

We used to have a youth club down in the yard. The newsagents was down there next to the Isle of Wight.

A: Do you remember any other shops that were on the street? There was the butcher I think on the corner?
E: Yes there was. Where the Greek café is now on the corner of Chapel Street, and Wests had the bakery opposite where it is now.

A: Were there a lot of cafes? Sorry, you continue.
E: No. The Post Office was on the corner of the Esplanade and Thompson Avenue to the left and Loughtons (ph.sp) had a café the opposite corner.

A: Do you know what the café was called?
E: The Koala.



Koala Cafe, cnr Thompson Ave and Esplanade, at time of Eileen's wedding reception. From the society's own collection

A: The Koala, that's where Heather [Hamilton] had her reception, I think she mentioned.
E: She did. We got married in the "Presbie" [Presbyterian] Church on the corner of Warley Hospital Avenue and Chapel Street. It was only a little church then, a church hall.

Original Presbyterian Church, cnr Warley Ave and Chapel St Cowes in its current use as the church hall. Society's own collection

A: What year did you get married?
E:1953.

A: Did you have a reception at the Koala as well?
E: No, at home at Rhyll.

A: Lovely. Did you have a lot of guests?
E: You only had – no friends – and uncles and aunts and brothers and sisters in those days. And Thelma Forrest – she became Thelma Richardson – and she made big sponges. I can see her walking up to mum with the tray of sponges.

A: So, they would have been a big hit I imagine?
E: Yes, they were. My sisters cooked the meal. A roast chicken I think.

A: Where did you get your dress from? There's a photo of you over there isn't there? [Eileen had a wedding photo on her bookshelf in her room at Melaleuca Lodge].
E: I wore my cousin's dress.

A: And you have some beautiful flowers in your hands?
E: Yes. I must have got them. The Shire secretary's wife did the flowers in the church, Jan McCadie.

A: So before you got married, you went to the Air Force. Did you want to talk a little bit more about that?
E: I loved the Air Force. I did me Rookies in Sydney in Penrith and I came back and went to Bairnsdale for 12 months. It was out where the aerodrome is now. We used to go into Bairnsdale – the Mechanics Hall had a dance – Bairnsdale – before it got supermarkets – and there was a Coles there. Everything – nothing over '2 and 6' [laughs]! They charged '2 and 6' [2 shillings and 6 pence] for the bottom of the pyjamas and '2 and 6' for the tops. And they served you – they had the counter down the middle.

E: And did you do a lot of training in the Air Force?
E: In Sydney. We walked into Bairnsdale to the dances. It was a couple of miles out of Bairnsdale where the aerodrome is now.

A: Did you have a favourite dance or a song?
E: No. I liked music. I enjoyed dancing. My husband was a good dancer.

A: So when you got married, you settled down and lived here on the island in Rhyll?
E: No we lived at Cabbage Tree Creek. 17 miles out of Orbost. I didn't move back here till 1972.

Cabbage Tree Creek was a major timber area in Eileen's time of living there.
Photo from: http://www.cabbagetreecreek.org/history.html

A: Did you work when you had Allan or did you stay home?
E: I worked at the store at Cabbage Tree, at the post office. And there was only a little store at Rhyll and it was a post office too.

It [Cowes] wasn't as big as it is now and there were houses down the main street. Arnold West lived in one and the fellow by the name Arnie Brown, owned the house where the newsagents is now and there was a little house beside that. There was a chemist, we used to call him "Donkey Bray", and that State Bank, he had there too.

A: So he had that in Cowes. Yep.
E: There was a lane where it is now when you go around the back between the restaurant and the bakehouse used to be behind there and there used to be a shoe shop on the corner, Bray's the chemist next to it and a greengrocer. Greengrocer Morrison and it was the best fruit on the island.

A: Were there particular days that people shopped or was it during the week?
E: They shopped every day. The main store was on the corner of Thompson Street opposite the butchers and Herb Parry used to deliver at Rhyll.

A: So you didn't have to always travel in to town, you would get deliveries?
E: No he took your order the day he came and delivered the mail.

[After the interview, Eileen added that Herb Parry was the butcher and he would bring the meat and anything else you wanted twice a week. You could buy groceries at the Rhyll store.]

And there was a General Store at Rhyll, a wooden place. It was the post office too and the exchange. There's no exchange there now.

Rhyll General Store and Post Office. From visitvictoria.com.au

A: And what made you come back to live on the island?
E: My husband liked his brothers-in-law, and I thought we'd build at Orbost and he said "no, you go back". Mum was alive and he made me come back to be amongst my own family.
A: And how old was your son at that time?
E: He was 18.

A: Did he come with you?
E: No. He got married to an Orbost girl and she went off with his mate and left him with an eight-month-old baby.

A: Oh no, that would have been tough.
E: And he re-married to Sue.

A: Do you have any more grandchildren?
E: I count me stepchildren's grandchildren. Lendsay has got three, Nancy has got two and Allan has got three. And they're my great-grandkids [Eileen pointed to the photos on her wall].

They're brother and sister. I've got six. Allan's got six. They're my great-grandkids.

A: Do you think raising children has changed a lot from when you had children?
E: Yes it has. You're not allowed to hit them now and I think as long as you didn't hit them around the head, it doesn't matter. It does them good.

A: Did you have a lot of help when you had children, or did you have to do everything on your own?
E: I did everything. I had a girlfriend that had two boys and she used to babysit for me.

A: Do you remember going to the hospital to give birth? Did you have a lot of help there?
E: I went into Orbost and stayed with Ted's brother and his wife. The Princes Highway wasn't made between Orbost and Cann River and it was a windy road. I had trouble having him. The

afterbirth came first. I was in hospital a fortnight before I had him. My husband and I had black hair and he had red hair and I couldn't believe he was ours.

I got on with – we were like sisters – his brother's wife, Middy. Their kids still ring me.

We started – the friend and I, Jessie Richardson and I – started the service station at Cabbage Tree. The Mobil company gave me the building rent-free as long as we put the petrol through them and it had to be Mobil.

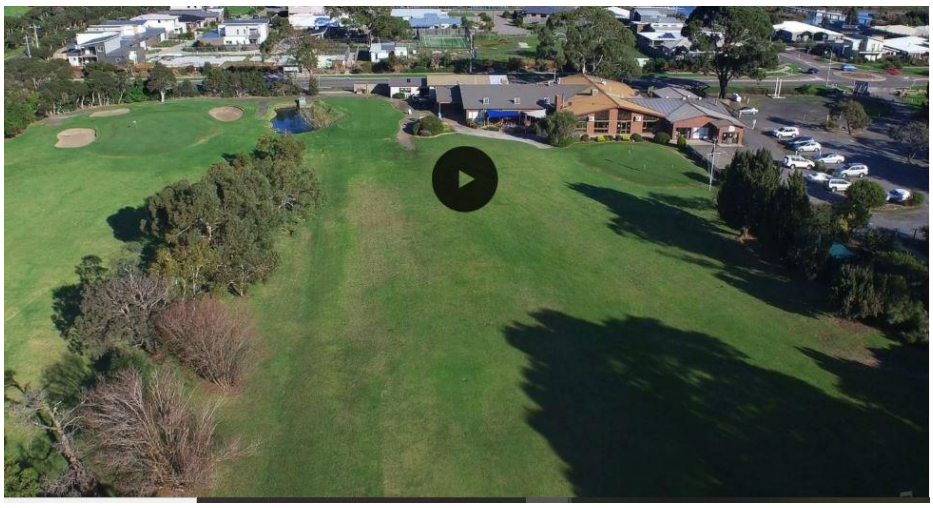
A: So the petrol was Mobil and you ran that station service?
E: Yes. We used to do the lunches and the school lunches and we used to do hamburgers and sandwiches.

A: Oh yum.
E: The lorries used to toot us coming in and put their order in on the way out and they would toot when they came in for a 'loggies' and we would start cooking and have them ready by the time they unloaded.

A: So when you came back to Phillip Island in 1972, were you happy when you returned?
E: Yes. I started playing golf. I played tennis in Cabbage Tree and my sister and her friend said 'you can't play tennis, we've left tennis and we're playing golf' and I said, 'I can't play golf' and they said 'we'll teach you'. And they sent me clubs and saw I liked it and it's not a game, it's a disease! [laughs]

A: So it was a good decision that they got you to play golf?
E: Yes. I was on the committee and I played golf for 40 years and I was captain for 12 years. I was on the committee. May was too.

A: Did you have other involvement in the community?
E: No I was playing golf two or three times a week. My favourite hole on the golf course was the seventh. I had a hole in one there.



Screenshot of video tour of PI golf course From https://www.pigc.com.au/course-tour

A: Where did you live when you came back to the island? Back at your house?

E: Rhyll. We built. Mum's was on an acre ground and she sold us a block off that.

A: What's your favorite thing about Rhyll?
E: I love Rhyll. I love going out. Every time they come down – my nieces and nephews – they take me out to Rhyll for the day and it's still on three-quarters of an acre and it looks over Churchill Island and San Remo and Bass Hills. I just love Rhyll. I don't know what it's like, what it's become.

Ours is the only one with the land around it. I'm sure you've been to Rhyll.

A: I think I know which one it is. It's the one slightly up the hill, a white house, it's beautiful.
E: On Beach Road.

A: Yes. Do you think the island has changed a lot?
E: It has. Too much. It's too many houses.

A: Do you think there are good things or bad things about the change?
E: Bad things. I liked it as it was.
They closed the Ventnor School and the Rhyll School and they bus them to Cowes. And at Newhaven the Boys Home…

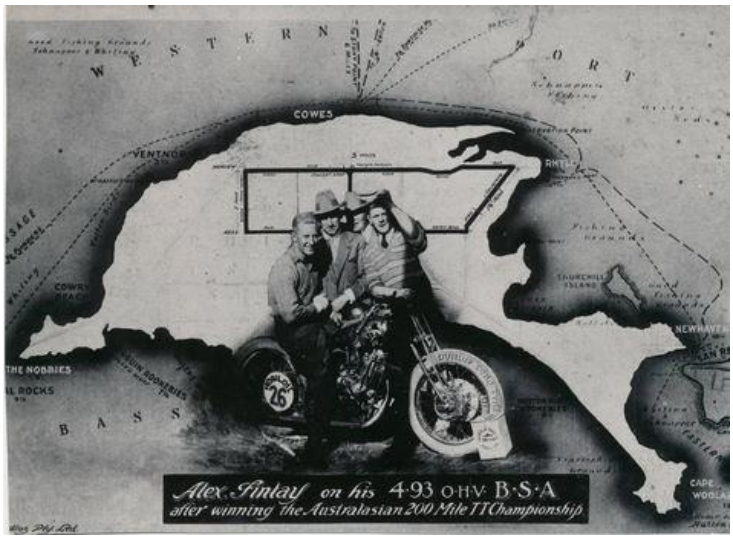
We were talking about how they closed the Ventnor School and they bus them to Cowes and some of the things you don't like, the things that you feel how the island has changed.

A: Do you think it's lost a lot of…
E: Yes, it used to be I don't know what the population is now, it must be over 10,000 and it was only 3 [thousand]. The school used to be Harry Matthew's farm.

A: Oh Harry Matthews. I understand the school, used to be, the one in Cowes.
E: Yes. It was all farmland.

A: Do you remember a lot more woodland and bush and native?
E: There was a lot of wild trees at Rhyll.

A: What do you hope that Phillip Island will become?
E: I don't know. The racetrack used to be on the roads. Used to be Young and Jackson's Corner and Angel Heaven and Hell Corners. You used to go out the Nobbies Road. Young and Jackson's used to be on that RSL corner.



Publicity for a big win in a road race on Philip Island, 1920s. From the society's own collection

E: I'll stop as soon as you can. I'm happy to finish.

A: Thank you so much Eileen

Notes: After the interview, Eileen thanked me for listening to her. Eileen also said that she appreciated that what we were doing in terms of recording stories and memories of Phillip Island.

Phillip Island life 1940-2022

Oral History Interviews 2021-2022

Despite the Covid pandemic and the every-present threat of infection and lockdowns, Dr Andrea Cleland and the generous community members she interviewed continued on with the task of completing this oral history project. Their combined efforts have resulted in a cornucopia of wonderful information and insights of what life has been like on Phillip Island for a wide variety of residents over the last seven decades.

Interviews around the themes of

- Business and Community
- Immigration and
- Lifestyle

can be found in these pages. They paint an excellent picture for the reader of how those from various walks of life, countries and occupations have made their lives on Phillip Island.

We are all richer for their contributions