

5TH JULY, 1982

*Interview with a lady in her  
80<sup>s</sup> living in a Nursing home*

I believe you've lived in Fairfield since you were 15 or something?

No, 18 I think it is.

And what was it like living here then?

It wasn't - like the trains in the morning going to work. If you missed the train you had to run to Clifton Hill to get on the cable tram. I worked in Smith Street, Collingwood, and once an hour the trains ran.

Once an hour?

Yes, and if we missed it, well that was it.

Whereabouts in Smith Street did you work?

**HORTONS** - I was a dressmaker there. Still there, is it?

Well, I'm not sure. I know it was there for so many years.

Yes, I was in there. I had two dressmaking rooms - the order room and the stock, and I was in the order room, and they used to make stock for the shop too, you see.

What used you do on the weekends when you were 17 or 18 in Fairfield?

I used to go to a dance in St. Anthony's Hall - some nights I think it was, I used to go to this dance, and we had Mr. Hoffman's orchestra - ever heard of him.

Yes - three piece band, and we used to have a lovely supper. The ladies would provide the supper. It was run by the Fairfield Branch of the A.L.P.

And what used you do with yourself on Sundays?

Oh, well, just slip out for a walk. Nothing really - go to Church in the mornings and then just go - I'd perhaps be invited out for tea or we'd have tea at home - nothing very exciting.

No - and used you go in to Station Street shopping much in those days?

No, not much, it wasn't much of a shopping centre at all when I first lived there.

Where did you meet your husband?

At the dance. Yes, he had been to Lodge and he came .....*along*..... and I was introduced to him. He said "I believe I've got to wear odd socks, I belong to the Oddfellows", pulling my leg.

And whereabouts were you married at St. Anthony's?

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No, no - Church of England, but I was married at home.

Oh, yes, would that be unusual in those days?

Oh no.

Did many people get married at home?

I know my brother-in-law and sister-in-law, my husband's brother, they were married, I think they were married at home; I can't think, I think I must have been too, and I've lived there ever since till I came here.

How many children did you have?

Seven.

Seven children! Was it very hard bringing them up in those days?

Well, no - I used to make all their clothes and cook in the cooker - I never bought biscuits or anything. Made everything, oh yes.

And what about in the Depression days, did you manage all right then?

That was bad then, really bad.

Did you have to get help from the Council in those days?

Yes.

What sort of help did you get?

Parcels, you know, food. No, we never want to see anything like that again.

No, seven children; that was a lot to bring up in those days, wasn't it.

Yes, and then - my husband was only young when he died. He died from strangulation of the bowels.

And how old were the children when your husband died - how old was the youngest?

She was only two or three.

So you brought them all up by yourself?

That's right; and a terrible old father-in-law into the bargain.

Really, oh gosh.

I shouldn't say, he's gone now - but he was a nasty man.

You had some hard times, didn't you?

Yes. I had some good times too.

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What schools did your children go to?

Fairfield State School. Then the girls went to Collingwood Girls' and the boys went to Collingwood Tech.

And are they all alive today?

Oh yes. My husband's the only one that's gone, and my in-laws, of course. I told you that my mother-in-law was Fairfield's midwife.

No, you didn't, oh, tell me about that.

Who was it - your mother-in-law?

My mother-in-law, my husband's mother.

Was Fairfield's midwife?

Midwife, and she'd go into the home and stay there for two weeks after the baby was born.

Live-in?

Live-in, do the cooking and the washing. She wouldn't do anything dirty like cleaning the stove, ~~WE....HAD...~~ wood stoves those days and you had to clean all the ashes out of a morning and then polish the stove with black LEAD and polish it before you could light it. She wouldn't do anything like that. ~~She would.....~~ keep her hands clean for the Patient.

Would she be mostly busy all the time with births - she wouldn't be living at home much then?

No, she wasn't. She was a lovely lady, too.

So there was a lot of women had their babies at home then?

Yes, it was the done thing then.

Were there many complications, do you remember?

I don't remember, no. I had seven and I had no trouble.

Had them all at home?

All at home, yes.

And did she look after you?

Yes. And, well the last two, I think, yes, she died before my last two. Oh she was lovely. A lovely lady.

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Was there a doctor came at all when you had your babies at home?

No, I didn't have mine, no I didn't, they wouldn't, you could have a doctor, of course, but my mother-in-law used to do the whole work.

And did the ladies book in at all with the doctor, or they didn't even bother to go to a doctor?

Oh, I couldn't say, I never went myself.

Never, ever?

No.

All the time you were carrying you never saw a doctor.

No. Never saw one even when they were born. When they were born I didn't have a doctor because my mother-in-law was quite capable, you know, she was a lovely person, really lovely person. She had a keen sense of humour. She was lovely, but I couldn't say that her husband was a lovely fellow. He wasn't a nice man at all.

So, fancy you going through all those births without ever having a doctor. I suppose you'd only go along to the doctor if anything bad happened, did you, or did you go to the Women's Hospital or something like that?

No. Well I didn't have any complications at all. Oh yes, I had the last two that - my mother-in-law had died then, but I had a midwife come to the house then.

You still had a midwife then, yes? Were there many midwives around the districts in those days?

I don't remember. No. I only know my mother-in-law and then there was this other one that came, I forget her name now, she came later on when she took over from my mother-in-law.

Who were the doctors in the district then?

Dr. Curry, old Dr. Curry, I think it was.

Would this be the father of the Dr. Curry that's here now?

Yes.

You used to push the pram up the hill to High Street, that's where you did your shopping did you?

Yes. And, oh my husband was a grocer. He used to bring our order home. Any other shopping I used to go up to High Street with the pram.

You'd have some little ones, too, trailing along wouldn't you, apart from the one in the pram?

Yes. You look back and wonder, you know, wonder how you do these things.

They sold skim milk in those days, and you used to buy that to make  
CAKES.

Yes.

You must have been a pretty good cook after all that practice?

I was. Oh, yes, you'd have to be wouldn't you. I used to love cooking too. Yes, I often look back and think of the wood stoves. Have to get up in the morning, clean the ashes out of the stove, polish, black LEAD and polish before you could start the day.

Yes, it was a big job wasn't it?

Yes. And then the old wood coppers. You used to do all the clothes, we've all got to do it. Used to do all the white things, sheets and all that - you boiled them up in the copper till the water was bubbling up. Oh dear. Anyhow, we were happy those days. I suppose we was happy as what lots are now, with all their modern conveniences and all. The only thing I was afraid of - our toilet was at the back of the house - like in the olden days we didn't have toilets in the house and we had to come out and go along the side, past the bathroom/laundry, and then around this gully trap to the toilet and I used to be - oh, not when I was young - but when I got older I was just scared to go round for fear I'd fall into the gully trap.

Oh yes, and would that be sewered or just the old pan?

It was sewered.

You would have started off there with a pan service wouldn't you?

Oh yes - the nightman'd come around. Yes, I've seen people go ahead. And picture theatres and so on.

And did you go up to the pictures very often?

Not often, no. But, in those days there was no television - the good old days. But we were happy, though. We used to have musical evenings.

Did you have a piano at home?

Yes. My husband played the piano and I played the piano and my sister played the violin and my husband's best friend, a blind man, he played the violin too. We used to have lovely musical evenings.