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Transcript of an interview with

Jessie Butler

1904-1988

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DATE OF INTERVIEW: 15 July 1983

INTERVIEWER: Maureen McGarry

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ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPTION OH004 Jessie BUTLER

Interviewer: Maureen McGarry

Interview date: 15 July 1983

Recorded with:

Mrs Jessie Butler (nee Graham)
Unit 5/ 7 Elvira St Palmyra

Born 1904

SIDE A

What was your maiden name, Mrs Butler?

Jessie Graham

And your date of birth?

1904, August 21st.

Thank you. Where did you live in Melville when you were a girl and what was it like?

In Zenobia Street, Palmyra. And there was only about two, three houses there, Mrs. Neesham and Mrs. Matthews. And we used to walk have to go right to Petra Street to Stammers. And we had no..

Petra Street to Stammers?

Stammers was at Petra Street.

Oh yes, and that was the shop then?

That was the shop there.

Oh, was it?

That was what, 1912?

That was about ...er no I think they had it wrong. I think, I went to ask, but there's only John at the store that I talk to. We was very friendly with Mr. and Mrs. Stammers, and every year we used to have – there's only a few of us then – a big turn out at Christmas you know and all go and have a drink together, have a real nice time. But there was no trams when we came here until they stop at Allen Street East Fremantle. And then they started and came to Petra Street. And Marmion way they used to stop at the golf links at the steps. And then they came in years down to Carrington Street the cemetery. And we used to have to walk to school to the Plympton School right up there all through the bush.

Where was that school? The Plympton School.

Plympton. That's up where the er just near you know where ...

Ern: It's in Marmion Street.

[Where] Marmion Street is?

Oh yes.

There where we walked. And walked home there all through the bush.

No roads at all.

No roads there, it was just a bush track. And then they came after, they used to for quite a while they stopped at Holland Street wasn't it?

Ern: Yes.

Holland Street. Yeah. And then they went further along to the steps. And then they went on right on to where they are now into Carrington Street into the cemetery. But ... we lived in a tent for a long time.

But that was ... when did you first arrive here?

When I first arrived?

Mm. 1912 did you say?

I don't, ...I'm not quite sure of the date. But I thought I was about 8 or 9 when I landed here. But I er, I'm not quite sure.

That doesn't matter.

Stammers was ... when he started in that big shop or whether it was only the little. But when he got it, it was only the small corner shop then. Was Whitickers there, Ern?

Ern: [Partly indecipherable] ...tennis courts and a bit of a grape vine.

A bit of a grapevine. And then we was ... after that we came to, we shifted from Tamar Street and we ... dad bought the block from the bottom ... the bottom of our block then went into Zenobia Street.

When did you move from Tamar Street?

Tamar Street. Ooh. Let me see of the dates ... You see Neeshams have gone then. But they moved into their new home, Neeshams, and we took their tent from them and lived there. It was in the war.

In the First World War.

In the First World War, I know that much. The First World War. Uncle then shifted to Elvira Street and there was no roads to his place. And the tent blew over one stormy night. And about 5.00 in the morning, Annie and I we walked, or it was about 4 or 5 in the morning, just as it was getting light right over there and I'll never forget it, there was trees down and it was terrible to Uncles. And even in Elvira Street there was only about ...there's a house standing now that Uncle and them was in, and that's been up all them years. Anyhow, we, when did we first - oh we had the house, there's a photo of the house that's in Zenobia Street we had built for us.

This was after Tamar Street you went to Zenobia Street, yes.

Then we – we used to go from, we used to have to er – if we went out anywhere – when we started, we still had to walk. And if we went out this is in, when did we start going together? It was pretty early, wasn't it? And we used to have to – you went out of a nighttime, right, you had to still get onto the steps and walk home.

Ern: That was about 1920.

20 was it?

The steps again, what are the steps?

Well we used to call them the steps see..

Ern: Where the - I'll give you an idea. Where *The West Australian* paper mill is now opposite the golf links in High Street used to be a set – that used to be a big bank – used to be a set of steps up there. Of course the cars built on top. A chap by the name of...

I can't think of his name.

Ern: Cassidy.

Cassidy.

Ern: He used to be a tram driver. That's where the bus used to stop, tram used to stop.

Service. Yes.

I'm just trying to think how many houses there was. It was all from about Marmion from here our place, you've got to walk right through and it was all bush and beautiful wildflowers to North Lake Road.

Right through, Marmion to North Lake.

Marmion to North Lake Road. It was really, it was beautiful. And Ern and Mr. ... Pink used to come around on a horse and cart.

Of course we do.

He had a horse and cart and he used to sell rabbit. 9 pence a pair...Who else was it?

Ern: There's one you've forgotten.

What?

Ern: The mail was delivered on horseback.

Oh yes, yeah.

Ern: Used to have to come to Fremantle Post Office.

And the mail, we used to, on horseback the mail was delivered to us in them days.

What type of subjects did you have at school, that was at Primary School was it?

Well I think we had practically ... we had the copy book then in those days... I don't think there was much difference ... than we had now really. But of course it wasn't so far advanced than it is now.

Ern: There was just the one school, there wasn't a separate school from High School.

Oh no, no.

Ern: It's easy to work out. You had mental arithmetic. [Laughs]

Mental ... oh yes we had mental arithmetic.

Ern: I'm only trying to help you.

You just have kind of, well the same as we have today with the mental arithmetic, and English and you know sums and geography and that same thing.

...

When we used to go to Uncles, then he had a poultry farm when he left here. And there was only him and Loves up the North Lake Road. And we used to take - it was all just a two plank road there. And we used to take the two kiddies of course there was only thirteen months between them up in the pram, push the pram, and if anybody came, a car or anything come we'd have to get off in the sand.

Really?

We walked from Zenobia Street to right up to North Lake Road right up there if we wanted to go to visit them.

With those two kiddies.

Two kiddies. And they were only babies you know.

Were these your children?

They're my children.

Yes, they're your children. Well, they were early days, weren't they?

Oh yes, they were very early days.

So you had Stammers to get all your groceries from right from the beginning.

I'd just like to see ... because all the Stammers boys, they're not in there now. There's only John he manages it. If Reg Whitcombe would have been there I could have asked Reg when it was opened. But Reg isn't as old as we are. That shop was opened in 19 - they've got it up

on the big place – 17 [i.e. 1917]. But I thought it was opened before that. And I thought whether they're taken the big shop they've got now into it or that little teeny weeny one.

You'll be wanting to ask that won't you?

Yeah, well I want to ask if I can and find out because they've got it up in big letters and I thought it was...

Earlier than 1917. For as long as when you came, first came from England.

It might not have been or it might ...

...

And what was the weather like when you first came to Australia?

When we got off the boat it was dreadful. It was, I think must have been about 120 to us that day. I had a long dress on down to me ankles and boots and mother was all in black ... the heat was dreadful. Then we stayed at their place for a while and Mr Matthews took us up to see where we were going to live. Of course there was no windows or anything in it and dad got a box for mum to stand on to see what it was like, and oh she nearly fainted. You know, the shock of it, because dad had sent photos home what we were going to live in. Mum said, "Oh well, I don't mind that" she said, "giving up our home to go out there to Australia." And of course when we come here that was what we found. Anyhow, mum was a bit homesick and she used to go every ... trudge into town in Fremantle to see the boats go out and come in. And that was about all she could do really. We got over it. ... What's puzzling me is, I thought that was older like it was more than – Stammers is ... 1917 didn't it say, Derek?

When we used to go out of a night we used to hang the hurricane lamp on the tent to show us the way back, because it was all bush, really.

Very lonely?

Very lonely, really.

END OF SIDE A.

N.B.: Jessie d.1988 aged 83 years

Sidney Ernest Butler

OH004 (Side B)

Interviewer: M. McGarry.

Interview date: 15 July 1983

Name Mr Sidney Ernest Butler
Unit 5/ 7 Elvira Street, Palmyra

What is your full name, Mr Butler?

Sidney Ernest Butler.

Thank you. And your date of birth?

The first of January 1904.

Thank you very much. Now where did you live in Melville, and what was it like when you were young? What was it like where you lived?

We came from South Fremantle in Palmyra in 1920. 223 Marmion Street where we shifted - where we lived. And it's east of McKimmie Street. And from there down it was all bush. There was no street made from McKimmie Street to our place after we had been there for about twelve months before the road was made through – it was all sand. And the whole thing is that the all the back part there was used by a big dairy that was in East Fremantle in Carrington Street run by McFetridge. McFetridge – Shepherds came in afterwards. McFetridge's Dairy, and they used to have all their cattle out there. They had a couple of boys looking after them in the daytime... They'd take them out in the morning and bring them home again.

Now you would have perhaps been a young man working then, would you?

I would be about sixteen, seventeen years of age then.

What were you doing?

Well, the whole thing is that at that particular time I was out of work. But scrounging around, I did find a job in Collie. I went to Collie working the timber mill there for a while. And when we came home for Christmas the railways went out on strike so that put that job out of action. I roamed around Fremantle trying to get work, and finished up working on Wungong Dam. I worked on the pipeline from there ... towards Perth. Came through Armadale and right round through there on the pipeline. Thirty seven inch main pipes they were in those days.

That was C.Y. O'Connor's pipeline?

No, no, no, this was since then. This was about 1922-23 when the Depression came in. And then that cut out and I did a tour to Singapore and back on the Kangaroo as an engineer's steward.

Were many young men in Melville like that at that time?

It was quite a few – quite a few young fellows in Melville looking for work. Another thing is that from McKimmie Street back to Stock Road in those days, you could have bought any of those blocks of land for £5 a block. It's had to believe, but we had no money to buy them.

No. Both things are hard to believe, aren't they?

£5 a block they were going for at that particular time. As things progressed so forth there was more unemployed and things got a bit tough. And I got an offer of a job if I was married so 1927 that was. I got a job, I was courting at the time and I just the young lady I was going out with, I put it to her to – we got married. So we got married in October 1927 and I was lucky enough to get the job that was promised me if I was married. From there on I never looked back.

Marvellous.

I got a temporary job – it was only supposed to be temporary for a few months, but it finished up stopping there from 1927 til 1941 when I joined up with the Air Force with the islands.

Jessie?: That's your history, you don't have that in do you?

That's going through what I done. But the whole thing is, the whole thing is, as far as Palmyra ... They had a road made from Canning Highway to Zenobia Street, McKimmie Street, and from McKimmie Street to Marmion Street it was all laid down. Been laying there that long that the trees had grown up through it again. There was all this rough stones all stacked ...

Really?

Oh yeah, I can remember that. And there's two men I can remember being on the Road's Board in those days. A man we called a Frank Cann, he had a blacksmith's shop in Fremantle.

What was his name?

Frank Cann. C-a-n-n. And the other chap was Dick Bennett. A man who was out of work, and he couldn't get a job on the Council because he was a member of the Board. So those two members I know who were on the Council in those days or the Board in those days. And the board office was at the corner of Canning Highway and Stock Road. That's where it was in those days.

What Board was that again?

It was the Melville Roads Board in those days. It wasn't a Council until after World War Two when it became a City from a Council. So that's er...

Of course you didn't go to school in Melville did you? You passed that when you came.

No, I passed that when I came here. Over the period of time, once the Second World War passed and all that, all Palmyra seemed to open up very quickly, all through the bush right through to Stock Road was all taken up and built on in no pace of time. And the prices in those days were from £35 a block they start in McKimmie Street, and finished up over a thousand dollars at Stock Road end.

Really? That's interesting.

Yeah, oh yeah. But we were lucky, we bought a place, when we got married we bought a place in Cleopatra Street, and we lived there for a few years. Then when I went away for the war, the wife sold it and she built a place on this block here, in Elvira Street. Then I came back

from the war, this new home here. And then we battled on from there and gradually see this place go ahead. Then there was a ...just trying to think the two chaps who started the bus service from Petra Street to Perth.

Jessie: Carroll wasn't one?

Ron Carroll and he was the ex mayor of Palmyra too. That was Melville.

Jessie: Oh, and what was the other name?

Can't think of his name now. He is dead and gone, though. Two men started the bus service from Petra Street to Perth. They used to run about every hour. The highway in those days was in very bad condition. [Indecipherable] ...to get the passengers aboard.

Do tell me, Mr Butler, what route did it take to Perth?

Straight through Canning Highway when it first started from Petra Street.

Oh, right, so it's Canning Highway to the Causeway?

Yes.

Was it an old Causeway, old bridge wasn't that? Yes. Oh, I see.

Yes. It was an old bridge in those days. But the one they started with was a Ford, a blue Ford which was ... I can't think of the name of what they called that bus then. Then they finished up getting two different buses after a while. And they done a fairly good business. Then we had a taxi service start to run from Petra Street to Perth, but that didn't pay so that didn't last long. I can't think of the other chap's name...

Don't worry, I think it might have been included in that history of Melville book.

Well I was looking for it just now, we've got one somewhere, but I couldn't see it.

Well don't worry, I'm pretty sure I read it in there. So don't worry about that.

Whole thing is that from Stock Road down the hill there to Rome Road that's where the hill was, that was all built up. It was all built up all that property along there. It cost a very lot of money, I can't think exactly what it cost a mile now ... but the whole thing is paying for itself now. And since then its been made a dual highway. It was only the single highway. Since then its been made a dual highway, and all the property has all opened up out along there. That's why some of those places on the north side are so low below the highway, because it was built up.

When you caught the trams at Petra Street to go to Stock Road, it cost a penny.

Really?

That's what it started out at. And you used to go out to Point Walter for thruppence. A lot of fun out here when they put the big bogey on. The first big bogey that was ever made was built by Boltions in Fremantle. They used to have a big coach building place around where they built the new shopping complex in William Street. William Street goes down from the Town Hall to

the oval. Well, on the right hand side, Boltions had a big place there where they built carriages and lorries and all that for the horse drawn vehicles and all that, and when the motor business came in they built this big bogey tram and every time it went around the bend it jumped the points. See the whole thing is, the curb was too short for the size of the bogey, they had to extend the curb, because every time -even on the corner of High Street and Market Street when you went around there towards the station it used to jump the points. They never used to take it down that far in the beginning – until they got the tram way all organised.

Jessie: Forrest Street did that too where Wyn's shop...

Yeah Forrest Street.

What's it meant by bogey?

The double, the big long cars.

Oh, that's a name of them is it?

Yeah, that's what they called them in those days. The trams before them were only the short ones. We used to call them the bouncers, because they used to go along like that. But this was the first big double tram that they built. It was in Fremantle before they went to Perth and they got them built, they had them in Perth as well. They used to have a lot of fun with them. Saturday and Sunday, the trams used to run right out to Point Walter. They used to run about every half hour, because they used to get very big crowds out there. And all of a sudden Point Walter just fell off the map. A lot of the yachting crowds coming down from Perth and those places ruined Point Walter on the weekends and that. But the whole thing is, it was a great place to go to in those days. Then you had the Melville playground we called it, the reserve up there now. That got, they had contractors in to clear that. I just can't remember the year of that. And they gradually got sufficient ground there for a sport's ground like football. And they gradually added to it. And they got tennis courts put up there. And then they got the cricket playing ground and cricket pitch put in. Now they've improved it again I see it's, since I've been up there. We used to run a Melville Fair up there every ... They used to run a Melville Fair there when we run the Melville Fair there for about ten years. They used to run – first it started Friday and Saturday and finished Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

That was a fair while ago, wasn't it?

Yeah, that was a fair while ago, yes. Well, the whole thing is that all the bodies around here used to run their stalls there like the Parents and Citizens Association used to have stalls there for the different schools. And the different organisations, the RSL and other organisations, the football crowds and tennis crowds and all that used to run stalls there selling stuff. And then they used to do very well out of it a lot of them. And then of course, the whole thing is there's Walkathon and Telethon all that came in that cut that out. But I used to do a lot of work up there of a night-time. As a fact, I [was] a night watchman up there at one stage with another three other fellas looking after the stuff. They didn't have to pack up and cart it away every day with them.

END OF SIDE B.

N.B.: Sidney d.1994 aged 90 years