

The following interviews were conducted in 1980 as part of an Oral History Unit at La Trobe University; none of the interviewees are alive today.

Mr and Mrs Coe - a retiring, private and gentle couple were not asked for their given names or dates of birth for them or their disabled son because it seemed too intrusive for a number of reasons at the time.

The other two couples were related to me (great aunts and uncles), Grace Edwards/Low and Thomas Black were foster siblings of my paternal grandfather; they were both fostered by France~ Chapman/Edwards a local midwife whose parents were George Chapman and his first wife Sally.

Mr and Mrs Coe. Greensborough are a frail couple in their late 70's who still, in spite of Mrs C's arthritis which has partly crippled her, and a son who is mentally disabled and lives with them, carry on, as they have always done, with courage, dignity and a smile for those who come in contact with them:

Mr C is a returned soldier from WWI, who as a result of being gassed, returned to Australia unfit and unable to return to his apprenticeship as a tailor's cutter. After over 12 months of fruitlessly searching for work and then a short spell of harvesting on a farm Mr C became a soldier settler on a farm at Coleraine. Unlike many others Mr C made a success of his farm of 148 acres, his hard work enabling him to sell at a profit. In 1930 the Coe's bought a house and three acres of land in Greensborough for 1400 pounds which they turned into a poultry farm. They sold their eggs, packed in cases of 30 dozen lots, to an agent for sixpence a dozen.

Unfortunately for the Coe's Moran and Cato, a large conglomerate of 120 stores Australia-wide, were selling eggs to their customers for three pence a dozen when they purchased other groceries. The hens were only kept for two years and then sold to agents for 2/6d a dozen. It was impossible to make a profit.

In 1935 Mr C was offered a job at Stubley's, the local produce merchants in Greensborough, earning 5 pounds a week, working 9-6 Mon-Fridays, plus Saturday mornings. He worked there until retirement in 1967, taking pride in whatever his job entailed, even stacking bags of wheat with his own hands represented some part of himself.

Reflecting on their 54 years of marriage Mr C was full of respect and admiration for his wife who without complaint quietly supported him in the background to allow her husband to participate in various community activities. Mr C commented that his wife 'never seemed sick, that is not to say she wasn't ill, but she never complained and that even now crippled with arthritis she still smiles and carries on. We always worked together". He went on to say that life then suited them and that people seemed more willing to help each other, that everyone knew everyone else when they went shopping. "In business we tried to please people, because that was business - today it's take it or leave it - that's hard for old people to get used to"

The gentle humility of this couple was touching, also their philosophy on life. "It's a good world if you're in good health, but just to exist is not enough. We always liked to help others."

Interviews by Bev Moss 1980. Transcribed by Bev in 2012

Mr David and Mrs Grace Low. Greensborough were married in 1930 at the ages of nineteen and twenty and were fortunate to both have bank accounts containing 50 and 35 pounds respectively. Auntie Grace Lowe worked as a domestic for old Doctor Cordner in Diamond Creek until she married earning 35 shillings a week.

Uncle Dave was out of work for 3 months and during this period and for some time later dug for gold, dug sinking holes for 1 shilling a foot and chopped wood for 5 shillings a ton to keep money coming into the household. He also worked with the 'susso workers' for 2 weeks, helping to build the Van Year road with a pick and shovel. (These men were registered unemployed and receiving sustenance payments and were required to work when called upon for Municipal Councils with many such schemes. They were paid at award rates, only working sufficient hours to cover the value of their sustenance (dole) entitlement. A married man with 3 children whose family income was not more than 30 shillings a week received 16/6d relief.)

Uncle Dave then worked for Bruce Small as a bicycle builder earning 3 pounds weekly, riding his bike daily from Plenty to Greensborough Station for 9 months of the year, where he caught the 7am train to the city, returning home after 11 pm. The first home of the Low's was a two roomed unlined fibro dwelling, bought from Sutherland Homes for 25 pounds. This was placed on 10 acres of land in Plenty, which Uncle Dave's parents bought them for a wedding present for 100 pounds; they gradually extended and improved this basic accommodation. Cooking was done in a camp oven which was placed on top of an open fire, the lower compartment was filled with hot coals which cooked the food in the separate top section.

Housekeeping money was 25/- a week, supplemented by home grown vegetables, milk from the cow and eggs from their poultry. A loaf of bread cost 2/2d, a good dress from Coles 2/6d, lodge and insurance payments 3/- a week. Recreation consisted of football and cricket for Uncle Dave, often followed by a local dance where the women provided basket suppers - no alcohol was permitted. Sunday afternoon was spent visiting parents and other family members in their T-model Ford which they bought for 5 pounds and sold at a profit for 7 pounds 10 shillings. Long working hours left little time for leisure though; the Low's had their first holiday to Adelaide by car when they were over forty, more than twenty years after their marriage. Uncle Dave also reminisced about his time as a taxi operator in Greensborough where he also chauffeured limousines for weddings and special occasions.

Life was hard and hours long even for old Dr Cordner who travelled his rounds on a motor bike, replacing it later with a T-model Ford. He travelled to outlying areas of the district, making house calls to the sick at all hours, frequently being woken in the early hours by the shrill ring of the telephone which he shared as a party line with two other households; party calls identified by one, two or three rings. Surgery hours were long ending only when the last patient was attended to and home visits filled the intervals between morning surgery and lunch, afternoon surgery and the evening meal.

Auntie Grace and Uncle Dave summarised their lives: "we always had plenty to eat, things weren't easy but we've never been afraid of hard work. There is always work for anyone who tries hard enough, however hard the job is or however low paid". Interviews by Bev Moss 1980. Transcribed by Bev in 2012

Mr and Mrs Thomas and Irene Black Uncle Boydie aka known as Cheddar Black and Auntie 'rene were married in 1928, they were 21 years old. They were determined to succeed and believed their marriage of 52 years was successful because they supported each other throughout any problems they encountered along the way. They did in fact have their share of worry and sickness, Auntie Irene was asthmatic and frequently ill and one of their daughters contracted polio causing them much anxiety and expense.

Uncle Boydie was apprenticed to Ryan's Butcher shop in Diamond Creek at the age of fourteen; he worked 6am-6pm Mon, Tues, Wed and Fridays, 9am-9pm Thursdays and Saturday mornings for 17/6 a week. Ryan's treated staff as one of the family. Uncle Boydie spent many weekends fishing with the Ryan's returning to work at midday on Monday; they would then work well into the evening to catch up, finishing work at 9pm.

Later, Uncle Boydie decided to start his own business but rather than compete with his friends and employers the Ryan's, leased a shop in Bendigo. Ryan's, reluctant to see him go, asked him to manage their Eltham shop for 4 pounds a week, with free rent and electricity. Following this he leased the shop from 1937-1939, paying 400 pounds for goodwill and one pound a week rent, building up his own clientele. When the lease expired he was forced to quit the premises, found another shop to lease in Rosanna the same day and was back in Eltham the next day serving his regular customers from his horse and cart (see photo?).

The horse and cart was very much a part of Uncle Boydie's life as a butcher, he travelled as far afield as the Bundoora water trough in Plenty Road to Sutherland Homes, Tank's Corner and Kangaroo Ground, serving customers from his horse and cart. The back of the cart was sealed and the meat displayed as neatly and with as much variety as any butcher's window. The scales hung from a hook set above the rear of the cart where customers were served. Ladies chatted as they waited keeping up a continual motion with their switches of gum leaves to keep the hundreds of flies at bay that were attracted to the wonderful assortment of meat inside the sealed compartment of his cart. Neighbourhood dogs provided the butcher with a rear guard as they waited under the tailgate to catch scraps of meat that fell to the ground.

The butcher was well known by hundreds throughout the sparsely settled district as one incident illustrates. Friends of Auntie 'rene and Uncle Boydie, newly betrothed, gave a kitchen tea in their honour in the Diamond Creek Hall. To their amazement, hundreds turned up bringing so many gifts that they had to be transported from the hall by truck. One young lad gave them a clothes prop which he made himself and even today some of the presents have been kept and treasured by the couple in remembrance of a celebration that became a memorable community social event. Dancing went well into the early hours of the next day when dancers left footsore and weary.

Pleasure was derived from simple things in those days, football was the main sport although cricket was played as well and people gathered to watch the matches, often ending up later at the football dances on Saturday nights. The butcher came into his own then, acting as a kind of 'Bush Telegraph' to those in outlying areas of his run. Men met him along the route to ask if they had made the football team for the following Saturday. Diamond Creek in fact contributed several players who became famous as members and players for Collingwood and Melbourne football clubs.

The 1933 Census shows 22.89% level of unemployment and those without work suffered from lack of food. Times were hard for all butchers who bought their meat from the Metropolitan Meat Market; they now found themselves supplied by the Government through William Angliss with poor quality frozen meat almost impossible to cut and with limited variety. Families were issued with a 1/6d ticket each week for meat, which they gave to their local butcher, receiving whatever meat was supplied to him at the time.

Many butchers such as Ryan's gave meat to those who for various reasons had no tickets and suffered financially because they were only reimbursed to the value of tickets they sent on to bureaucrats. Further financial stress was placed on the butcher because although he had to pay cash for his meat, he had to wait at least a month after sending on the tickets presented at his shop for reimbursement. It is important to note that the best quality meat was either exported or kept for those able to pay for it. Given to the poor, lamb being available only to those in better circumstances. Large shops killed over 100 sheep compared to 15 lambs; smaller butchers slaughtered 40 sheep to 6 lambs. Mutton brought between

4d to 5d per pound. Although illegal, a fair amount of trading took place, farmers unable to pay the butcher, traded farmyard animals or home grown vegetables for meat from the butcher shop. At Christmas time none of Ryan's customers went without meat, those who couldn't pay were given it for free.

There are many other stories of caring and generosity. Auntie Irene for example: "During the depression I saw a young woman just standing outside crying. When I asked her what the matter was, she told me that her baby had died and that she had nothing to wear, so I went inside and got her a coat, I always had several. It was so cold and windy and it would keep her warm. I saw her several years later and she told me she had never forgotten me because of that day.

Thomas and Irene Black thoughtfully ended by saying that people had it too easy today and seemed less happy and contented. They enjoyed working hard and taking pride in their work and never expected anything they hadn't worked for, they had few idle hours in which to be bored. Life was hard and challenging, but working together made it easier and more worthwhile.

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