



Gawler Oral History Project

Your Memory Our History

Transcript of discussion with Iris Crouch, (part 1) 25 May 2017

Interviewed by Rod McKenzie

Rod: Thank you Iris for agreeing to this chat. Initially Iris I would like some of your memories from when you were born ok obviously you are not going to remember too much of that up to when you were maybe 10, so some of the memories you have from that time.

Iris: well, my father had to leave the farm early in his married life and took my brother and I to Crystal brook. We lived there for 4 years in the twenties, and that's when I started school with the Crystal Brook Primary School. And I had been friends with some of those girls right up until a few years ago. My brother, he's been gone 10 years this year... he was 3 years younger than me. And we went back to the farm after 4 years, as I've said, as my brother left school he worked the farm at Merriton.

Rod: Which is where?

Iris: Between Crystal Brook and Wandearah. Just south of Pirie. About 20 miles south of Pirie. With certain hot north winds we would cop the smelter smoke.... cause it was so close. And we used to go to Pirie with our shopping special shopping xmas shopping and anything like that otherwise we sold our eggs to Crystal Brook shops, did all our shopping there, and that's where I spent 4 years at school and went back to the Merriton school.

Rod: So, you've mentioned to me before some of the fun you had in getting to school, so how did you get to school?

Iris: well at Crystal Brook I used to walk from the outskirts out west, and then went up and over the overway that was interesting, particularly if there were/was a train in the station. Had a real good look at that. And then to the east, to the school that was out in the cluster of hospital, schools, cemetery further out, churches. it was all in the collection of buildings

and business. And then when we went back to Merriton we had a white pony called Bidy, and we used to double bunk on Bidy ... because we were older. And spent the rest of my schooling life at the Merriton school until I had been through Grade Seven. But I had no more education from there on. My brother, he had a bit of high school at Pirie. But I didn't have anything else other than music. I started at the convent and I can still remember the first lesson I ever had. I had my hands on the keyboard ... and she said: "can you play?" Well my mother use to play 2 fingers and she taught me to do that before I ever went to school. And, I played something ... I don't remember what ... and she is sitting alongside of me on my right ... "hold off" and BANG ... " you'll play proper now". So I have done nothing but play proper ever since.

Rod: So, what age ... you were saying when you were older you started to ride Bidy to school. What age were you then?

Iris: Around about 10 I suppose. Because I had the four years in the Crystal Brook school and then, as I said, we went back to the farm. And, dad, he died in Crystal Brook ... Riverton rather.. because I'd moved, had married, moved to Stockport, and then when Glen died, we had already bought the house at Riverton, and I went to Riverton on my own, and dad came with me. Mum had gone and dad lived with me then for about 3 years. So, of course schooling was all finished and everything else by then. But I did have music lessons and no further schooling, ... education as far as that was concerned. But I had music.

Rod: How else did you entertain yourself up to the age of 10?

Iris: Oh Dear. Well when we were on the farm, of course, you went out into the cow yard and you went out into the chook yard, and you collected the eggs and you helped milk cows and feed calves, and feed pigs. The cows were fed by hay. Sheep likewise. We used to go out and help with the hay for the sheep. I was a man. I was never a girl.

Rod: So, as a teenager how did you entertain yourself?

Iris: Well, that is what I did. Load the truck, while the men carted hay and then up until, of course, I had left school. There were no tractors ... or only a few. Dad had no tractor, and we had horses, a team of horses, and there would be three or four horses in the trolley. And the men would load the hay, and then when they came in to the hay yard, I'd be one side of the stack and the guy on the trolley would throw me the sheaf of hay and I would throw it across the stack to dad who was building it. So that's been all of my life. And I never wore trousers. Never wore trousers. But anyhow I've got no regrets because I think working outside, although I was only small my, body was strong. Because I've never had any trouble. And if I hadn't had that fall and broken that bone in my back ... well I've got no complaints.

Rod: Tell me about your family. You had brothers.

Iris: Only the one brother. No sisters. And I was the elder of the two of us. Mum lost a baby some years after my brother. Stillborn. And there was only just the two of us. But of course we had dad's family. He had a brother who was on the original old Sinclair farm next to us. And I was only thinking the other day, it's rather funny, be cause mums father and his

brother came out from England in the 1800's and they bought land out Wandearah, which of course joined Merriton ... and their two farms joined our farm, the Sinclair farm. So it was Monday and Sinclair. And there was only a roadway between the two. So that was how ... and then of course the Sinclair families would have broke up. Dad's brother, eventually, after many years when the children were still younger than me, but in their youth, quite young, the girls would have been older, still younger than me, there were five of them and they went to the west. Then there was Auntie Ellie, the two boys, dad and his brother were educated at Sacred Heart down in Adelaide. The grandmother had stepped in as dad's father had died at 33. Leaving dad the elder of four children aged 6.

Rod: So what did the grandfather die of?

Iris: I don't know. No idea. And Auntie Ellie, the elder of the two girls, she married a cousin of Glen's father, Uncle Lance, and Auntie Lou married a Tom Ryan from Laura. Well Uncle Tom was the only one of the Catholic religion that the old grandmother had stepped in to indoctrinate the children. But anyway she didn't get on too well, because Uncle Tom had no children and none of us, ... there were two of us and five of Uncle Pete's , and three of Auntie Ellie's, ... none of them were Catholics. So, the old girl didn't do too good there.,

Rod: Your family would have been quite small in comparison to a lot of the other families around.

Iris: No. Not necessarily. There was quite a lot only had three children. And some of them only had two. No, we were not a big lot. But the church was nearly always full, and Sunday School of course was quite big. And we had some lovely teachers. One of the teachers I worked for after school, and I see the name in the paper the other day, was Alastair. I don't know if there would be any connection or not because there was only one daughter there for the school teacher but, Jungfer was my teacher for years. That was at Merriton. Of course I had other teachers at Crystal Brook.

Rod: So that was a male or female?

Iris: Male. Family man. The Jungfers only had Joy

Rod: So what was special about that teacher?

Iris: I don't know. He was an interesting teacher. He was interested in us. And I think that the teachers I had throughout my schooling, not that I can remember any of the Crystal Brook ones, but they were all interested in the children. They were good teachers. They were interesting teachers. And as far as I was concerned school was the beginning and the end. It was everything. It wasn't that ... because we used to go to church and Sunday School, ... brought up in the Sunday School right from the time we could go to Sunday School.

Rod: So, most of the community went to Church?

Iris: Most of them. Particularly. I think there was one family. I can't think of any other. One family at Merriton. They had the post office. They were lovely people. But I don't know.

There was never anybody, ... although ... I wasn't liked at school. I was the one child out. I don't know why. Never have found out why.

Rod: You got on well with the teacher?

Iris: Always got on alright with the teacher, and they always helped me if I needed help ... and asked for it. But mum and dad were fair, of course dad had college education but that doesn't always indicate anything.

Rod: I think when it comes to schools that sometimes people who get on well with the teacher aren't necessarily admired by other kids.

Iris: well, could be ... but I don't know that we were over friendly, not involved with the family or anything that way ... but I always got on alright with the teacher. But I always managed to pass and go into a higher grade. So I suppose I didn't do too badly.

Rod: Some of the others didn't do that?

Iris: No. I think they all pretty well scraped through. I don't think we had any special scholars. But one or two of the girls were pretty good, but I always managed to get through, so that was as much as I needed. But, as I said, I had to help with the farm work as far as the cows and things like that were concerned. And when you spend time out in the yard you don't get time to spend in the book. Whether it's a special school book or just an ordinary kid's book. It doesn't matter.

Rod: So when you were late teens did you socialise with the other kids a lot?

Iris: Well a lot of them went away to college. And they were away for year. So I grew up more or less on my lonesome. I think I was about the only one that didn't go to college.

Rod: So the one's that wanted to go on with education moved away.

Iris: They moved right away and, so of course, they were never home.

Rod: Did they go for high school?

Iris: Yes. Mostly college, because you see of the accomodation.

Rod: So they lived at the colleges. So they would have gone from the equivalent to Year 8.

Iris: 7 actually. they went from 7 on.

Rod: So they were the equivalent of what we think of as boarders. And I know a couple of my nephews were boarders at PAC while their parents were overseas.

Iris: Most of the boys went to PAC while the girls went to MLC. It always seemed to be there was this one family and they were Catholic. And the rest of us were all protestants. And as I said, the girls went to MLC (methodist ladies college) and the boys to PAC. I don't

know that it did them much good as far as ... they didn't seem to do anything anymore than what I did, if as much.

Rod: Well, they didn't probably have as many life experiences as you.

Iris: Because you see I worked outside in the paddock and that sort of thing. And the girls, I don't know what they did because there was nothing ... and none of them did that.

Rod: So, when you started working on the farm what sort of things what was your daily routine? How did you start off the day?

Iris: Going to milk. 3 or 4 cows. And then helping to carry the kerosine buckets full of milk from ... well the distance from here to the river, and then you cart it all back and feed the pigs and calves and so forth. Oh yes! what the men did, you did. And then of course busy times when the men were out in the paddock ... you had to do double. Because you had to do what the men would have done. But it was a busy time. And it was hard work for me because I am only 4' 8" now and I wouldn't have been any more than that. I have been 5'. I don't stand up quite as straight. It's one thing I do ... try to do I walk past the mirror or glass ... stand up ... because I did find myself stooping. You know Rita. If she goes any further she is going to fall.

Rod: OK, I'm just going to stop there.