

Glenhaven

Part Two

Interviewee: *Helen Zamprogno, born 1945*

Interviewer: *Frank Heimans, for Baulkham Hills Shire Council*

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Now, I believe you had a problem with bats in the house. Tell me about that.

As the old place got old, and and, of course, it was original. It was probably built in about - if he had the original selection in 1888, I assume that's when the old slab hut was built, so yes, it deteriorated over time. We used to be sitting there and sometimes you'd hear funny noises up above your head and you'd realise it was the bats in the ceiling. Little ones.

Were there many of them?

Not a lot, but there was obviously a few. And they used to live over in the ceiling of the old packing shed which was built beside the old house too, so it wasn't unusual to see the odd bat flying around.

Did you have problems getting them out of the house?

Not really. We used to shine torches and make a lot of noise and they'd fly away, but they used to come back again as soon as you'd turn your back. But I grew up with that so I didn't really think anything of it. I can also remember the flying foxes into the fruit. That used to be war. We used to have a big old blood plum which we planted beside the house, and it used to fruit very heavily and she used to make a plum jam - beautiful. But the flying foxes used to get into it. Flying foxes are noisy things, and she used to go out with a double-barrelled shotgun and just fire it. I'm sure she never hit one of them, but all of a sudden there'd be this great flapping out of the tree where she frightened the fruit bats away from her plums, because they were into them and she objected.

How long did the old slab hut last?

It was pulled down when my father built the new house up the back - late '62, early '63. The old slab hut was pulled down then. But the house in front of that, which was built in 1905 was still there because that still had the Post Office in the front of it. We were allowed to retain that there, but Baulkham Hills Shire Council, who had suddenly become great conservators since, insisted after the Post Office closed in '72 that the old house at the front be pulled down. My father fought long and hard for the retention of that old original four-roomed house, because it was a beautiful old home. And what is particularly galling is that Roughley's Pines house out on the Old Northern Road at Dural, was built and designed by the same fellow who built our old house that my dad tried to save, and the Council insisted that it be pulled down. And ultimately, after wrangling for

years over the retention of the old house it was pulled down. But it should have been saved as it was part of the history of the district and really, to Glenhaven was just as valuable as The Pines which are still a flourishing memento of the district's past out at Dural, and it should have been allowed to be... Well, that always left us with a bad taste in the mouth - that one was saved and ours had to be pulled down. We were very sad when it went.

Now let's talk a bit about your neighbours when you were growing up here in Glenhaven, along the road. Who was living there? Do you remember their names and what they did?

Well, my Aunt and Uncle had built a house on the family property immediately beside us. That was my Uncle Claude and my Aunty Esma and my cousin Valerie. They lived there as I was growing up. Then as time moved on my Uncle wanted to change so he moved out to Baulkham Hills and another Aunt and Uncle - my Aunty Barbara and my Uncle Clive became our immediate neighbours in that house and Uncle turned it back into a thriving citrus orchard. He had had a sheep property down at Yass and wanted to bring my two cousins, my cousin Anne and my cousin Joan up from this remote little property down at Yass - Bookham, just outside of Yass - because he wanted a better schooling for them because they were doing Correspondence School down there. They were my immediate neighbours, but then we had the Bonnard family, another old family in the district that lived opposite us and the boys did quarrying. Then down the road were others that I went to school with... the Godbee family was another very old family in the district who came out to Glenhaven not too long after the Holland family did. There were the Nix's - four daughters, the Huddovans (?), four daughters, all of which I went to school with. And other old family names... the Evans's of course were an old family. And the Mills's. And I can remember the Smith family. It was a very nice, small rural community.

Were they all growing fruit?

Largely. Though I think the Nix's mostly did poultry. But we were all in rural pursuits in those days, pretty well. A lot of the men growing up after the war got jobs outside the area and went off to employment of the day.



Glenhaven Public School 1951

What was the communal spirit like between people?

Very strong. I can remember get-togethers. The Progress Association was always raising money for a hall which I think at last they've got. But there was always sausage-sizzles and dances and things, and get-togethers on different peoples properties. They used to have a portable dance floor that they used to put down and have a shindig. That's an old word isn't it, shindig?

Where was that?

I could be whoever was going to host it for that night, so this portable dance floor went literally around the district, from property to property, depending on who was having the "do".

Interesting. I wish they'd do that today. It would be fun.

Well, it was fun. I can remember that, yeah.

How many families do you think lived in Glenhaven around that time?

Hard to say. Not all of them had children of school age. Probably 40 or so, I suppose.

Apart from the dances, was there any other social life going on?

Well, the church was a central part. of course, and there was always things going on at the school. There was always fundraising there for different things that they needed, so there was Tuckshop days and things like that that we used to look forward to as kids. Tuckshop day was a big day. That's when all the ladies... of course, most of the ladies were "stay-at-home" ladies in those days.



Castle Hill Theatre 1950s

They'd do things like chocolate crackles and toffees and fairy bread and things like that and we'd have a Tuckshop day that they'd set up in the outside weather shed, and we'd be all agog because this would be a treat. Maybe two or three times a year we'd have a Tuckshop day. And that would raise some funds. Of course, the theatre at Castle Hill was a mecca for the district. That was a regular pilgrimage for a lot of people on a Friday or a Saturday night. There were people from all over the district that would have regular bookings for certain seats that they would just come to - perpetual bookings - and just sit in every Saturday night. That went on until the advent of television, pretty well. Then, of course, the television hit, and the theatre industry was pretty seriously knocked about, so that changed things again.

Was there a library where you used to go and borrow books?

At Castle Hill there was a library set up by the Council, but I rarely went there. They used to have travelling libraries in those days that used to come around to the school and there would be books brought out in a van and the headmaster would make a selection and then a month later they would be picked up and another lot selected, so we sort of had this floating service that came and went - we had a turnover of books.

Was that run by the Council?

Gee, I never really thought of it as a kid. I suppose it probably would be, unless it was through the Education Department. I'm not sure. Can't recall that exactly, but I do remember it coming and going. Lots of things came by vehicle in those days. The bread used to be delivered. I remember old Mr Clarke in the horse and cart. He used to bring the bread. I can remember Mr Ronnie H James, the draper at Round Corner. He had a mobile drapery van. He would go around the district. Always stopped at the Post Office because he had needles, threads and materials and a bit of haberdashery and sometimes some clothing. My mum who was largely house-bound because she ran the Post Office and was pinned there from 9 to 5 literally 5 days a week. She used to look forward to Mr Jones coming with his mobile van. Then there was the broom man, and there was a knife man... they used to come around once every 12 months or so and you could buy things.

Did they all have carts or cars?

Little vans. Vehicles. Mr Clarke was the only one I remember with a horse and cart. He brought the bread.

He was the bread man?

Oh yes. I couldn't get out there quick enough. His cart used to smell beautiful. Fresh bread, mmmm.

Was it possible to get all of your necessities this way, or did you have to travel further from the area?

Well, we could go into Castle Hill and get whatever we wanted, but, of course, in those days, if there was a vehicle and the man worked outside the district, he would go in the vehicle. So a lot of the ladies were pinned at home, largely. So, unless things came out to them, or they did the walk up Glenhaven Road and up the hill to catch the bus to go, they largely stayed at home. So there were travelling tradesmen who came around and brought things to you. And also for groceries, I can remember my grandma and my mum used to ring an order through for flour, sugar, tea, whatever was needed, and Mr Snell was the Grocer and he would diligently write the order down and the next day it would be packed in a box and brought out and put on the kitchen table for you. He'd have it all costed, he'd give Grandma the bill and she'd check the bill and pay the money and the groceries were there. Yes, if only you could do that now.

Where did you get your meat from?

There was a butcher's shop in Castle Hill and also, Dad used to tell the story... of course this is when I came along. Years before there wasn't a butcher's shop in Castle Hill. They used to keep pigs and they would have the piglets.And they would feed the piglets and kill them. Or Grandma always had poultry, so... but Dad used to tell the story when he was growing up during the Depression he used to say if the old man didn't go down the back and shoot a couple of rabbits or Mum didn't chop the head off one of the chooks you didn't have meat, so that was how they ate during the Depression.



Snell's Grocery and Morris's Butcher shop Castle Hill c1930

Now you were born at a time when a lot of migration was coming to Australia from overseas. Did you notice any new people coming into the area?

There were a couple but it was very rare. I can remember a little boy, he was the same age as me. His name was Carlos, Carlos Moisents(?). I think they were Austrian, and I used to marvel at what he used to wear to school. He used to wear leather shorts. I had never seen leather shorts before. And his English was very poor, but that didn't last long because he played around with the other boys and in the classroom it was very one-on-one. That was when Mr Barker was the teacher, and Mr Barker spent a lot of time with Carlos and helped him with his English and he very soon became very proficient.

Helen, tell me a little bit about the roads in Glenhaven at that time.

Well, I can remember when Glenhaven Road was a dirt road. It was a dirt road for a long while. As President of the Glenhaven Progress Association, I can remember my dad agitating long and hard for years with the other residents to try and get it sealed, because in the summertime, of course, it was hot and dry and the dust was a major menace. It nearly drove my grandmother mad because having the Post Office in the front room of the house and having to have the front door of the house open all day every day. There used to be a quarry at the bottom of Glenhaven Road and the trucks used to go up and down, and the clouds of dust they generated was massive. And my grandmother, being a fanatical housekeeper, was nearly driven insane. So it got to the point when

she used to hear one coming and she'd jump up and run up the hall and shut the door 'til it went past and the dust had settled, and then she'd open the door again, because she just couldn't stand the dust through the house. I used to watch this as a kid and think "gee, this is great!". It was all a bit of entertainment, actually. But that was when it was hot and dry and dusty, but then, of course, if we did get rain, the Glenhaven hill was quite steep and the dust would turn to mud, and often people who were in Glenhaven couldn't get out of Glenhaven because with the muddy, slippery hill, unless you had a car with a lot of "oomph" that you could really rev up and get a run at the hill and manage to get to the top... many people would get stuck half way up the hill. As a kid I used to sit out on the footpath and watch the cars stuck, sometimes one behind the other, up the hill. It was difficult, so having a sealed road became very important. And when it really, really rained and the hill became impassable, the creek at the bottom would also rise, so the little wooden bridge would almost be over. I can remember Glenhaven before it had the bridge in it, and you could be in Glenhaven and be scarcely able to get out, unless you walked the hill, because the creek would be flooding down the bottom and the hill would be impassable. But then, when it finally did get sealed, we could get in and out of Glenhaven more-or-less trouble free. I can remember that we did have some torrential rain that went on for weeks and weeks, and the Old Northern Road used to snake along the edge of Oakhill College, and it was on quite a fall of land that went down into the creeks at the bottom, and the whole road slipped away. It was just like a giant had taken a big semi-circular scoop where the whole hillside had slipped down and taken the Old Northern Road with it. So we used to have to get around to Castle Hill via Hastings Road and down through the back blocks of Pennant Hills to get to Castle Hill in those days. They slowly shored it up and made it more secure as time went on and the technology got better. But I remember standing there thinking "Oh, we're stuck! What are we going to do? We can't get down there!".



Helen cycling on Glenhaven Road 1950s

I guess it was an issue. What about if you had to go to a doctor? Where would the doctor be so you could get some help?

Castle Hill was the nearest doctor in those days. It was pretty vital - the Old Northern Road was their main artery, so if something happened to it, it was a much more circuitous way to get out to our area, Glenhaven and Dural and Glenorie.

Now, the character of Glenhaven, has it changed since the time that you started living here?

Oh gosh yes. I don't recognise where I grew up any more. Development came into Glenhaven 20 years or so ago now, I suppose. The Glenhaven Road is the boundary between the residential development on the Castle Hill side, where it's all been turned into house blocks, unfortunately. That was where my family property is, was. And on the other side of the road, opposite my family property, it's still a rural area with 5 acre minimum blocks, and its now turned into, what we used to call Livermore's Row... there were some magnificent homes built on the rural areas. Glenhaven Road has got two aspects to it now. When you go down Glenhaven Road you've got the rural area on one side of the road and the residential on the other. So the old family property that we had that we farmed and I grew up on has now just been turned into a sea of houses. And the lovely rich, black soil that produced so well is now people's backyards. Glenhaven used to be part of the Hills District and the Hills District used to be Sydney's "Fruit Bowl". It was a large provider of fruits, vegetables and produce for Sydney Town, and did very well. I can remember my grandfather working in his orchard and he used to

load the dray up with fruit and take it around to the railhead at Pennant Hills to go into the markets with the horse and cart. So, all that's gone. So it's changed very much from the rural community I remember as a child and grew up in.

In the process of subdivision that was going on to build those house blocks, did that take a long time? What was involved in all that?

Oh, it was mooted years ago because Dad was always in different Local Government things and he came home and said "You wouldn't read about it. They're going to turn Glenhaven into a residential area." and we were all aghast. It was not exactly welcomed by a lot of the residents, by some it was because they could see dollar signs and some people did get out of their properties, but they slowly (?). When it was finally down to the last acre that the Hollands owned out of all that they did own, you couldn't afford to keep your property. You couldn't afford to maintain it as a rural area once it had been gazetted to be turned into a residential... because they looked at you as owning so many house blocks, and the rates would have been pretty prohibitive, and the land tax would have been prohibitive, and ordinary working people said they couldn't manage to afford to maintain the properties as they always have. So they slowly dropped them - chopped up and sold off, and whittled it down to the last acre. And even when my father was down to the last acre on which we built - we'd built well back on the acre, we weren't built down on the road as a lot of residential areas are - the house that we'd built occupied what they considered to be two house blocks. And the acre that he retained they considered to be four house blocks in total. So they were continually tormenting him with our rates and water rates, trying to rate him on four properties instead of the one. Only that he'd had the wit to get a letter of exemption from the then Minister for Lands that he used to be able to quote to the different bodies that were tormenting him, so he was able to be exempted. But they did make life very, very hard for him, and the attitude towards the old residents wasn't very nice in those days. Actually he was told that he was just a nuisance and that he ought to move out of the area. So that left him with a very bad taste in his mouth after all those years.

How do you feel about the transformation of Glenhaven?

Well they call it Progress. I always say Progress with a question mark. They would have gained a lot, they got more house blocks, but they've lost a lot too, because it was a way of life that was rather nice. Actually it was a way of life that we've been very lucky, my husband and I, because when we were looking at property, we decided to move out here to Oakville. There were a lot of aspects to Oakville that I remember in Glenhaven as a child - a small public school, and still that same small sense of community, that everybody knows everybody. We enjoyed living out here because it sort of echoed my childhood particularly as I remember it in Glenhaven.



Aerial view of Holland family Glenhaven Rd property c1966

Was that a common thing, say, people used to move out from, say, Glenhaven to a place like Oakville? Was that happening then?

There were a lot of residents from the Hills area, not just Glenhaven specifically, but other ones that moved out from Castle Hill, Northern Hills areas that I've met up with that we're still friends out here, because they moved out - they didn't want that sort of lifestyle that the changing district provided down there and they still wanted to maintain a rural lifestyle so they came out a little bit

further out to the Windsor area, into the Hawkesbury, and they've been able to pursue that.

Now, talk a little about your work, the work you do. Tell me about your work career, how it started when you left school. What did you do when you started and later on?

Well I did my Leaving Certificate in 1962 and, of course, we still had the Post Office and Dad still had the picture theatre and he gained a couple of mail contracts, so I used to say "In order to be fully staffed we needed three sons and two or three daughters" but unfortunately it was only me, so I used to be run off my feet. Nobody asked me if I wanted to work, it was just accepted that there was work to do and we needed more hands to do it, so that's what you did. So I found myself doing quite a few things. I said, being an only child - an only daughter - I could do anything from making a sponge cake to setting up a fence line. A well rounded education! So I worked for Australia Post for 23 years - in the Post Office, and then later doing mail contracts, and then later on doing mailrooms because I knew the area so well. I did that for quite a while. And then I had a few health problems, but then, of course, by that time I thought I'd settle out here in Oakville, so I ended up retiring. That would have been in '85, and I stayed home here for a while and got very bored. We always knew the Powell family around the corner who had a mushroom business and Verna and King Powell who at that time ran it (the sons run it now). They said why don't you come up and help us a couple of days a week when it's busy, so since '86 I've been up doing mushrooms, so I had a complete career change because I said I don't know anything about mushrooms. She said that they'd soon fix that up and they did. So I've been going up there ever since that.



Glenhaven Post Office extension

Is that a big industry in Oakville?

Oh it is. Oakville and in the Hawkesbury generally. The Hawkesbury produces about 80% of Australia's mushrooms. It's quite a thriving industry out here. And it's a rural industry and a rural area and sometimes, as the development is starting to creep out into the Hawkesbury now, some of the newer residents aren't always happy to have a rural industry, because sometimes there's smells or noise. But I think there's got to be a balance achieved, where people realise if they come to live in a rural area, well they've got to accept rural pursuits. Especially farm people that have been - and that's their livelihood - and they've been doing that for decades.

Are there any of the old families, like yours, still left in Glenhaven?

The Godbee family is still there.

Are they the only ones?

A lot of the older ones have now got old and, of course, children marry and move out of the area, and the older ones do get older. I kept up with a lot of my parents' friends for a long time, but, of course, my parents would have been in their eighties had they been alive so we've lost a lot of the older families from the area, and really, no, there's not a lot.

So the Glenhaven of your youth is not there any more?

It's gone.

How do you feel about that?

Oh, very sad, actually.

You're rather nostalgic for the old days, I guess?

Oh well, you look back on what's been... it's alright, I can't talk when I'm upset, without I sound upset... You look back on earlier years where you've been happy, I suppose. And there is a sense of loss because it's a way of life that's just disappeared.

I can see that you're a bit emotional about it...

Oh I do. I can get very emotional very quick.

You have a history there. How important do you think this history is, that it should be recorded?

Oh I think that it is very important, because people just drive through an area and just see houses and Hills Hoists, largely. But what was there before? Sydney is just spreading with such a sprawl so quickly, and what were outlying areas are now just becoming "dormitory suburbs". It is nice to know that there has been people who have had different lifestyles in that area prior to the "suburbanisings" of the area.

So do you feel yourself lucky that you lived through those years?

Oh, very. I can still remember my grandfather hitching up the horse and the dray or the horse and the sulky. I can still remember him preparing the horses for shows. When you get a horse ready for a show they call it dressing the horse. Nobody could dress a horse... I used to stand and watch all that. I can still remember the horses after Grandfather died, Grandmother retained them for a while until it became obvious that my Uncle and my Dad weren't as into horses as... they were more into machinery. So, I sort of remember all that the way it was. I can remember the farm being very self-sufficient.

Right. So do you still go back to Glenhaven, or not?

I go down there occasionally and I look in at where the old house used to be, and it's so changed. I don't even recognise where I grew up any more. But when I turn my head and look to the other side of the road, which is still a rural Glenhaven, and still has the old original fire shed and the old original church, I suddenly think "Oh, yes. That's what I do recognise." But the residential side of Glenhaven Road has changed totally.



Holland family in their orchard 1913

So, how do you see the future of Glenhaven? What do you think it's going to be?

I reckon it's only a matter of time until what's the rural side of Glenhaven will also be turned into another... well obviously it's going to become just another suburb.

Just as well you've lived through the good times...

Oh yes. I look back on it with great fondness, and think I was very, very lucky. And I'm also very grateful that moving out to Oakville, which still has that rural flavour, and is a rural area, that my children were able to enjoy that sort of an upbringing as well. Because I think it's something that's rapidly disappearing, and I think it's something that they also will look back on and value as they get older.

Right, well have you got any other comments to make before we end the interview? Is

there anything else you'd like to say?

No. I've sort of enjoyed this in a very apprehensive sort of way. And it's taken me back over things that I really haven't thought about for years and years, so thank you.

Thank you very much, Helen, for the interview. It's been a very interesting experience for us as well.