



Helen McLean

Interview Excerpt 21 November 2015

Oral History Project
Reliving the past: Stories from our communities

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The 1955 Flood

Helen McLean was just 8 years old when her family business and home, the Goss Bakery Talbragar Street, was inundated during the 1955 flood. Hear her story of the flood from the perspective of a young child.

This recording created on the 21st November 2015 is part of Macquarie Regional Library's oral history project 'Reliving the past: stories from our communities.' Each recording contributes to the developing story of life in the Dubbo area.

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[0:01:05] (I): Helen, in 1955 you were eight years old?

(S): Yes I was Mandy.

[0:01:11] (I): Tell us about your life as a child before the flood.

(S): Pretty happy go lucky life, my parents owned a bakery.¹ Back then, we had the horse and cart, so it wasn't easy to get around a lot of the places in Dubbo at the time with a horse and cart, because a lot of the places, especially in West Dubbo, roads weren't as good as you'd like them to be. But, I used to go with my grandfather before I went to school, and he used to deliver to a lot of the homes in Dubbo at that time, which weren't as many homes as you would think about now. But it was a pretty good carefree little life helping Mum and Dad at the bakery and, of course, the grandfather.

[0:01:53] (I): How did you help in the bakery?

(S): We did odd jobs. When I was eight it was considered that was a pretty good age to be able to make your first sandwich (laughs). So I did make my first sandwich at eight, and then also it was coming in a little bit around that time of cutting bread, and we would actually cut it by a knife, and then you would roll it in some wax paper and you'd heat it with an iron. So that's how you would wrap up the sliced bread back then.

[0:02:21] (I): Who worked in the bakery as well?

(S): Right, big family bakery. My mother and father actually had my mother's father living with us and a son that hadn't married at that time, so they lived on one side, my

¹ Goss's Bakery was originally the Stevenson Bakery. In 1947 Audrey and Jack Goss took over the bakery and it was renamed Goss Bakery. The bakery operated for 40 years before being sold in 1987 to Tinambu Pty. Ltd. and became the Heritage Bakery. (Our Company History, accessed 23-03-2018 at: <http://www.earlyrisebaking.com.au/company-history>)

grandfather and my uncle. Then my mother, father and elder brother lived on the other side above the bakery, and of course my younger brother was about six months old when the actual floods hit. So that's another story.

[0:03:00] (I): What was the address of the bakery?

(S): It was 108 Talbragar Street and our phone number was 4041.



Goss's Bakery c.1980

[0:03:09] (I): Excellent. So, when did you know the flood was coming?

(S): We were all sort of, like, listening, "Oh, the river's going to break its banks", and we're all excited 'cause, you know, I'm only young, and my elder brother was 11 years older, so he was like really, knows what's going to happen. But we'd run out on to the verandah and we'd be looking up the street, looking up towards Macquarie Street, "Where's the water? Where's the water?" No, nothing was happening. Then in the early hours of the morning unfortunately, it came up very quickly because the Talbragar River behind us - it actually was the sleepy little giant that came in behind - joined with the Macquarie River and *whoosh*, up she came, right up Talbragar Street, and of course we could see the water coming - trickling of course, but then it wasn't too long and it was six foot through our actual bakery.

[0:04:01] (I): Did it reach the top storey of the home?

(S): No, because we were upstairs and downstairs, I think to go up our stairwell, I think there was twenty-two steps I used to count back then, so it was quite, like, safe to stay upstairs, but because mum had a new-born baby the authorities said, "Look, you must get out of here" - because of vermin and everything - so my brother and I we'd do as much as we could by just moving a lot of the little things from downstairs, upstairs. So I had my school case and I'd be putting things in there, running up and down the stairs thinking, "Wow, this is so exciting." Then you'd look and you'd see all the ovens were starting to collapse, and all the bread was actually in the ovens, 'cause Dad didn't realise it was going to come so quick, and you'd be walking and all the tins of bread would be just floating past, you know, exciting, but - not really.

[0:04:58] (I): How did your dad cope with that?

(S): He went into the mode of, "I have to get as much things to safety as possible." We did have, by then, we did have a couple of small vans, that weren't like flash vans or anything like that, so he got the vans to higher ground. And then the next thing was to get Mum, who didn't want to go, to a safer place, and so where we were taken to, was now what we call the Elephant House in Hutchins Avenue, the corner of Hutchins Avenue and Fitzroy Street². So we knew the people that had built that, they were good friends, and they said, "No, please bring the children and they stay here 'til the flood subsides."

² 276 Fitzroy Street Dubbo Google Maps <https://goo.gl/maps/1A1aH6oUp1L2> (Accessed 7 August 2018.)