



TOWN OF
VICTORIA PARK

2021 LOCAL HISTORY AWARDS



Equal First Place

Jessie's Story: 91 Years in the Town of Victoria Park

by Sharon Mitchell

Category: Personal Memoirs

Jessie's story: 91 Years in the Town of Victoria Park

Victoria Park and its sights and surrounds have always coursed through the being of my 91-year-old mother, Jessie.

Her grandparents had arrived in Western Australia from Scotland in 1913 aboard the Zealandic with their five young children and spent their first months living in a canvas tent. They eventually bought land in Carlisle from Peet & Co and farmed with two cows, a horse, chickens, growing maize, peanuts, almonds, muscatel grapes and the most wonderful Black Adam fig tree.

Their youngest daughter, also named Jessie, married William Holmes in 1929 and the teenagers set up their first home in Westminster Street. It was at the nearby Sister Seabourne's Maternity Home on Berwick Street, near the corner of Mackie Street, where Nurse Urrie delivered my mother in August 1929.

The 1930s were a difficult time for all due to the lack of work resulting from the Depression and with another four children arriving before the end of decade, the young Holmes family moved to a rented house in Sydenham Street, living next door to their grandparents. Outings to Tomato Lake and Como Beach (wearing itchy, red wool swimsuits) were undertaken in a horse and cart. Eventually the family moved to another rented house located at 20 Star Street, Carlisle.



At the time, Star Street was a roughly paved road, however, the intersecting street of Roberts Road was then nothing more than a soft dirt track. Mum remembers two lines of jarrah railway sleepers being laid end-to-end creating a plank road which enabled the horse-drawn carts of the baker, milkman, and iceman to journey along without their wheels becoming bogged.

Jessie's story: 91 Years in the Town of Victoria Park

Mum and her four younger siblings spent many hours running through the bush at the top of Star Street where they would often come across men training trotting horses. The children would spend hours happily make cubbies in the native Woolly bushes, using broken china they found as plates and decorations for their "house" - thinking they were so rich!



The outbreak of World War II saw Mum's father depart Star Street to join the Australian Army, leaving his wife to raise their young family. The children began their education and walked to Carlisle Primary School, always with a stop at 253 Orrong Road, diagonally opposite "The Big Tree" bus stop, to visit their Aunt Meg Spooner who was instrumental in founding the Presbyterian Church in Mint Street.

In 1942 and 1943 Mum made the journey to Perth Girls School each day until like so many of her era, she had to leave school to help supplement the family income - she was just 14 years old. She would walk from Star Street, along Archer Street which changed into Mint Street at the railway line, all the way to Albany Highway to her job at Aitkens Grocery store, near the corner with Basinghall Street. Here Mum worked as a shop assistant stacking shelves with jams, sugar, and flours, with most of her wage going straight to her mother.

At the age of 14 years and 10 months, Mum started work at Morris & Co Fashion House in Pier Street earning 14 shilling and 8 pence per week. Mum would catch the Carlisle Bus Service, owned by Bert Armstrong and Fred White, traveling along Star Street, to Howick Street, then into Gallipoli Street and on to Great Eastern Highway and across the Causeway.

Each day Mum and her siblings were expected to help their parents make and move cement bricks that were being used to build their new home on a block purchased a few doors down from their rented house in Star Street. This was hard work for all the family, however, it resulted in a home they were all proud of.



Walking each Tuesday evening to the Savoy Picture Theatre located on the corner of Mint Street and Albany Highway, opposite Craigs the Boot Maker, spending sixpence on a ticket

Jessie's story: 91 Years in the Town of Victoria Park

to see the latest movie is a happy memory for Mum. At the end of the night, she would walk home never feeling worried or concerned in the darkness.



In March of 1951 Mum was married to my father at St Peter's Church of England in Leonard Street, Victoria Park by the Reverend Ralph Thomas. Mum estimates 50% of the people she knew were married in this church by Reverend Thomas - it was such a busy place for weddings and christenings.

Dad was a returned serviceman and worked at the State Sawmill Building Supplies located by the railway on Mint Street (now the site of East Victoria Park Primary School). He was able to purchase a War Service block of land in the Millen Estate on Etwell Street, East Victoria Park for £100. Together with Mum's father and brother, they set about building a house on land that was a stone's throw away from the Collier and Bentley Pine Plantations.



Jessie's story: 91 Years in the Town of Victoria Park

Mum, Dad and their 18-month-old son moved into their own home on 14 April 1956.



Etwell Street was populated by many returned servicemen, their brides and children, providing a busy and friendly neighbourhood to raise a family. The rule of “come home when the streetlights come on” applied to all.

Mum saw the now beautiful and green Higgins Park evolve from a yellow sand open space being fondly known as “Higgins Desert” and remembers the ungrassed banks of Fraser Park being used by children for sand sliding on pieces of cardboard.

Mum never learned to drive, so public transport on the old MTT routes of 25, 27 and 28 were her way of getting about with her children in tow or by walking. Many times, she would walk from her home in Etwell Street over to her mother's house in Star Street, Carlisle, often with the children riding their tricycles. A walk to her mother's house was never complete without calling into JW Cakes on the corner of Albany Highway and Canterbury Terrace for their delicious Spice Cake or Jam Roll. After leaving JW's, it was a walk passing the shops of Hendricks Photography, McGee's Newsagency, the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, Stephenson Jewellers with the revolutionary supermarket of Coles New World of Shopping opposite. A special treat for the children was a little boat cake purchased from the Ideal Bakery on the corner of Archer and Planet Streets, run by Mrs Hunter.

Jessie's story: 91 Years in the Town of Victoria Park

The small cluster of shops on Etwell Street, including Mr Egar's 4 Square Market or Pete & Jean's Fruit and Vegetable Supply, provided the family with their groceries. Anything required beyond their stocked items, necessitated a walk down to Albany Highway. Many, many Fridays saw Mum walk "down the street" and return up the very steep Hampshire Street hill carrying full shopping bags.

Albany Highway provided the young families with a myriad of shops and services. Mum's memory is sharp and clear with memories of Mrs Dewar and her delicious small goods, Reynolds the Butcher, the original Sinclair's Jewellers, Hulletts' Hardware, Tip Top Arcade with Betts & Betts and Tom the Cheap, Mr Goldberg the Dentist, Manchester House, Macy's Fabrics, Miller's Sports and the Bluebird Lotteries with their colourful array of charity tickets secured to wooden boards by large silver bulldog clips.

Mum was very involved in her children's sporting lives and many weekends were spent watching Central's Football Club playing their games at Higgins Park, Fraser Park and Raphael Park. Athletics competitions were held at McCallum Park, culminating in the Rotary Fair Carnival in the Spring.

Mum raised three children with her husband of 58 years in the house he built and still lives there independently. She often reflects on what an amazing time she has lived through from seeing horse-drawn carts making deliveries to man walking on the moon; from being a schoolgirl knitting socks for the soldiers in World War II to seeing the terror attacks of 9/11; from setting up her family home as a young bride to becoming a proud great-grandmother - 91 wonderful years all lived within the Town of Victoria Park.

