

GWEN KRATIS nee HONEY: TELEPHONIST, HOMEMAKER, PIONEER DESCENDANT

Background



I was born in 1950 and my mum was Winifred Stenson who married John Honey. Mum was born in 1914 and she was one of four daughters of Frederick and Eva Stenson. My aunts were Em, Al, and Ruby, who were all born in St Albans and all grew up in the big family home known as Keighlo. I have two older brothers, Fred and John. Fred was born in 1944 and John in 1946. Both my brothers have retired to the country; one is in Port Fairy and the other near Bairnsdale.

I remember St Albans when it was still a small town – there were fewer houses and lots of paddocks around. The shops were mostly near the railway station, along Main Road and East Esplanade. People still drove horses. I remember there were horses at the back of the Keighlo property and I have photos of my brothers sitting on a horse when they were quite young.

Grandparents

My granddad had a horse and cart and would go and visit Auntie Al who was living in Taylors Road where there were several farms. She was married to Fred Anderson and they had a farm along Taylors Road. Like my granddad, Fred's parents were some of the early settlers in the area who took up farming. In fact several of the Anderson sons became local farmers.



My grandparents were Frederick and Eva Stenson. Grandpa came from England in 1888 to help his uncle on the farm near the Maribyrnong River. He was involved in many things around St Albans, such as the Anglican Church, the Mechanics Hall and the St Albans Progress Association. I was quite young when he died so I don't remember very much about him. He was on the Keilor council for many years but retired a few years before I was born. He was living in Keighlo until he died and the Catholic Church bought the house and let us stay there for a while when they were building the school. The Catholic Church and the Sacred Heart School were built right opposite Keighlo. I still have a photograph of the old house not long after it was built by the Padleys, and it was the biggest house in town at the time. My grandparents lived in that house for about fifty years. Grandpa died in 1958. Grandma Stenson had died about ten years earlier so I

never knew her at all, but mum said she had grown up in North Melbourne. After Grandpa died the Catholic Church renovated the old house and that became the home for the priests.

Winifred Stenson

My mum was Winifred Stenson and she was the youngest of the Stenson daughters. She was involved with St Alban the Martyr Church near the crossing to the old primary school. My grandfather Fred Stenson was one of the people who helped build the original church in the early 1900s and was a lifelong member. Auntie Em was their organist for many years. Mum was the



treasurer at the church for some time and also ran some of their social and fund-raising events. The old church burnt down when I was about 10. I was born in 1950, so it must have burnt down in the late fifties or early sixties.

Mum helped establish a branch of the Australian Red Cross Society and completed a first aid course with them in 1940; I still have her Red Cross certificate. She was on the advisory committee at the St Albans North Primary School when I was there. She was on that for a few years until I went to the high school. Mum was a singer and had a beautiful voice. I remember times where Aunt Em was playing the piano and mum singing. They were both linked strongly to the Anglican Church of St. Alban the Martyr.



Mum did not age well and later developed Alzheimers. Dad wanted to move to a retirement home but mum was set on staying at home as long as she could. She was very comfortable in her home and seldom left it. She passed away about 1997.

Jack Honey

My father was John Edward Honey but everyone knew him as Jack. He grew up in Footscray and was a blacksmith with the railways in his working years. He became a foreman and was very well respected by his colleagues. His team installed rail tracks and signals. He was very proud of his work and in particular the fact that he and mum were awarded free public transport anywhere in Victoria for life. He would proudly show people his pass but the funny thing is that he used it only a few times. He didn't drink or smoke and, like my grandfather, served on the Keilor Council. Not long before he passed away the Council named a street in St Albans East after him - Honey Grove.



Cr. Jack Honey (back row, four from right) with councillors and senior officers, 1963.

He was a keen vegetable gardener and regularly went to the Senior Citizens in St Albans. He sold his veggies there to raise money for the club. Every Tuesday he would do the shopping at Sells, as he would call it, which is now the IGA, for himself and Auntie Em. He passed away of a heart attack at home in his sleep about 1991. My aunt Em, Emily Hall, enjoyed much better health than my mum – probably because she had no kids! She was very active and had many friends who would visit her in her William Street home. Her house was very basic with a wood stove that she still used and no hot water in the kitchen. She married Frank Hall from Sydenham who built the house. He later passed away fishing at Pykes Creek before my son was born. When the house was sold the real estate board read “The last cottage in St Albans.” It was later knocked down for units.

Aunt Emily



Aunt Em lived alone for many years with her dog and a back yard with chickens. When she worked on the farm in Stenson Road she worked as hard as any man. She loved going to the Senior Citz Club as a social outing. I would take the children to her house on Saturdays and she would really spoil them. Aunt Em was the last of the Stenson daughters to pass away. She died about 2000 not long after mum. The reverend gave a fantastic ceremony at her funeral as he visited her every week for years and years and knew her like family.

When I was growing we were living on the corner of William and Arthur streets near the old water tanks not far from my grandparents' place. I have a photo of my brothers with the horse before the old house was sold. The horses were kept at the back of Keighlo because it had a big paddock as the back yard. Aunt Em was living in Williams Street and Aunt Al was on a farm in Taylors Road, which was further away.

Primary School

It was all unmade roads around us and there were no gutters but there were a lot of pot holes in the streets. When I first went to school there was still just the original primary school and that was in West Esplanade across the railway line from where we were living. It was crowded with children from all parts of Europe so you really noticed how multicultural St Albans was becoming. Then I went to the St Albans North Primary when they built that. That was up in Fox Street. Lucia Harricot was a school mate of mine there and we had some good times as friends. Mr Blain was the principal and I remember him because he used to hold school assemblies every Monday morning.

Mr Ginifer was a teacher at the school when I was there. He was later elected as the local Member of Parliament and they named the railway station at Furlong Road after him. He died unexpectedly and when they built the new station they named it after him as a memorial. That's why it's called Ginifer Station. That was in the early eighties.

St Albans High School

There was only one high school in St Albans in the 'fifties and that was in Main Road East. I started there in 1964. Mr Torpey was the headmaster when I started going there. He was alright as a headmaster but I don't remember any other teachers in particular. I didn't play any sports or anything like that at school; I mainly spent time with my friends. Margaret Watson lived near us and we'd get together for company. We enjoyed going to the Sunshine swimming pool, which was the closest one at the time. That was when I was about twelve. We'd catch the train to Sunshine and the pool wasn't far from the station.

Both my brothers went to the St Albans High School. My older brother Fred started there in 1957, which was the year it first opened in Main Road East. He liked sports and played football and cricket at the high school. Fred started playing football with the St Albans Police Youth Club team at Errington Reserve, and then for the St Albans Football Club in the 'sixties. He must have taken after my father's side of the family, because Norman Honey was a good football player. My other brother John was not so much involved in sports apart from school sports.



1960 House Captains. Fred Honey in back row second from right

Working in the city

I was only a few years at the high school and then went to work. At first I worked in a handbag factory in the city. I would take the train to the city. It was messy work because you worked with glues. I was there a few years. There were quite a few people working there because there were the machinists and the bench hands and there was also a despatch section. Every one had a particular job to do and I worked as a bench hand, which meant putting the linings into the bags. After that job I worked in the telephone exchange for a few years, which was also in the city, in Little Bourke Street. I was there about five years and finished in about 1972. Working as a telephonist was much nicer than the work in the bag factory. After that I worked as a clerical

assistant with Telecom on the corner of Collins and Elizabeth Street; it was known as the Postmaster-General's Department or PMG when I started. I was there also about five years, but after I got married and had my first child I stopped working there so that I could look after my son at home.

Marrying Zenny Kratsis



I had married Zenny Kratsis in 1973. We had met through the St Albans Football Club at one of their social events. My brother Fred played for the football club in the 'sixties. The club held a dance at the Church of England Hall and that's where I met Zenny. His parents were of Greek background and migrated to Australia in the 'fifties. Zenny was quite young when they arrived here. He later worked at Angliss Meatworks, which was in Footscray.

After we married we lived in Norman Street. We had two children, Wayne and Jill. When they were little it was easy to take them on visits to my mum's place or Auntie Em's because we were all still living in St Albans. Mum adored seeing her grandchildren and Auntie Em had no children so she enjoyed our visits. Wayne now works in local government with the parks and gardens department. Jill became a naturopath and settled in Woodend. She liked athletics when she was young and I still have some of the certificates she received in her running competitions.

In Conclusion

My brother John ended up working for the RSPCA in the office. We always had a dog or two as pets and he always liked animals so he joined the RSPCA and ended up working for the Lort Smith Animal Shelter. He's retired now and living by the sea in Port Fairy. My other brother Fred became a bank manager, and he's retired as well. He was with Westpac for many years and worked as a branch manager, which meant he usually worked in different places. He has now settled down in Kalimna, which is in country Victoria out past Bairnsdale towards Lakes Entrance.



Gwen Kratsis nee Honey, 2013

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