

Oral History transcribed by Ann Crump 4/5/2010

JULIE: This is Julie Christie I'm talking to Ross and Bronwyn Telfor at their home in Blackalls. We are talking about the storm on June the 8th. Ross can you tell us what happened on the 8th of June?

ROSS: Yep, yeah, I think the thing Julie, just to preface it, that our experience is different in that we only bought the house two weeks before so that we come and looked at the creek and we done an assessment and we talked about and we remembered the area as kids and we thought it was a one in fifty year flood that we were going into and we figured at our age it was a fairly safe bet and as it turned out it was a one in two week flood and so the Friday night was coloured by those apprehensions. We were doubly apprehensive because it was a new house we wondered how the roof was going to go, how the trees were going to go and mainly how high that water was going to come up out of the creek and the final factor was we'd assessed very carefully the fact that this house is below the street level and we'd sort of decided we weren't going to buy another one because of the drainage problem so all those things sort of mounted up [pause] and then it rained and then it blew and we were apprehensive I think I was looking at the budget and I knew that the costs were going to be fairly high and Bronwyn said several times that tree Ross is moving and I said no, no, it'll be right, it'll be right but deep down I sort of knew it wasn't and then early hours of Friday we were sort of watching and listening and then by Friday [self corrects] Saturday morning Bronwyn said look first of all we heard a tree flapping in the night and we heard the antennae banging on the roof in the breeze and we knew that is was down and the tree was down so our first look because that was over our neighbours house was to look at that because we knew it was a problem because we didn't want our tree inflicting damage next door so we tried to get the SES didn't we [unclear] so we, we tried to get in touch, well we did get in touch, not easily I couldn't find it in the phone book I was pretty anxious and um I tried 000 and got a rap over the knuckles and I said look they said you know do you want emergency services, no I want SES they said well you shouldn't be on this number, well get off, well before I get off can you tell me who to ring, no you must ring telephone directory. Well, at this stage we'd bought a new fangled remote phone and of course it was going out with the power and consequently that was a problem too but we had a mobile and we were conscience that the battery would run down but we rang, we think Telecom, and they put us in touch with the SES but unfortunately they didn't say when they could come. So that was also a problem and it would be really good in the future if SES could some how accord you a priority number and say if there are 58 ahead in the queue in front of you because they never ever came until it was all over.

BRONWYN: Can I come in now ...

ROSS: Yes, Yes, certainly.

BRONWYN: I think that the problem with the SES, they couldn't do that, there was just so much happening, there were electric wires down which naturally had a high priority but you know they'd get to one job and they'd have 700 waiting on

them [laughs] well not that many but lots.

ROSS: On the Saturday morning having experienced the sounds, we knew that there was damage and at first light we had a look and saw that the pine tree had come down and was actually resting on the roof of our neighbours house so um [pause] no SES. We tried then going through the Yellow Pages to get tree loppers to come and because it was a holiday weekend we only got recorded messages, many of them were just simply out of town. So we rang a good friend who is fitter than us and is also a very skilled person so he came around with his ladder and his saw and he climbed up on the roof and started to get the heavier branches down. I went next door & told the neighbours, these are people we'd only lived next door to for two weeks and had to go knock on the door and say, look, sorry our tree is on top of your house. And they were very good too and between the three of us we shifted a lot of heavy branches which would otherwise have brought it down but we were conscious of the fact that something had to be done about that and then you, I think, prompted the action on this one.

BRONWYN: Well once, once we'd got all the heavy rain we had so much water lying there that the soil was [unclear]. I looked down and I thought that's got a bigger lean than it did have and the branches were almost touching the roof there. Ross was in denial still and when we walked around the back we could see the roots were lifting so that's when we started and when we finally got onto a chap that was.

ROSS: A farmer, somebody from down at Mandalong.

BRONWYN: Farmer Ken Branches Out.

ROSS: Yeah, that's right, we loved the name for a start but he was our first sense of salvation because "yes, I'll send someone" and a young fellow came to assess it and then our world dropped out again because he looked at it and said "no, its too dangerous, we can't go up there" he must have seen the look on my face and I said look mate we are really desperate we have got to do this. "I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll send the team here, leave the decision to them if they're willing to take the risk of getting the tree down we'll do it" and a young fellow and his girlfriend and someone else turned up.

BRONWYN: Two men and a lady.

ROSS: Yep, and they assessed and his first fears were exactly the same. He said "look, I don't think I can climb that" and I said, look mate we have got to get it down. And he said "look I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll go up alone, my friend won't be going up with me and at the first sense of any movement we're out of here". So anyway they were very good, they were excellent and felled the tree expertly. It wrecked our garden but it was a small price to pay and then they came into the pine tree and side, they got that out and we carted it all out. I was most interested that one of the people walking past chipped them for putting branches out, they thought it was going to damage the footpath and pointed out that was public property and they had no right to put it out. I think he was much more restrained than I'd have been in the circumstances. So anyway they put it out and came back the next day to chipped it. And in the between time we kept

watching the waters come up and come up. We've got a nice sort of mini orchard down there with citrus trees, the water rose around the trunks of the tree and I've got a boat moored down there and it was actually upside down and floating up on its mooring, we were watching it come up over the little jetty until finally we couldn't see anything.

BRONWYN: Um yeah ...

ROSS: No, you go.

BRONWYN: No I was just going to say ... but that doesn't matter but what he did, off the record, was, he only cut branches, the biggest of them would be like that. He was so patient he just cut in, in, in and then our daughter arrived because our stuff was starting to go off in the fridge so I took it over to her place at Speers Point and we cooked it up, like pizzas and everything like that. We got back here and we fed them and us too. So it was good.

ROSS: [unclear] you go.

BRONWYN: After that experience every time the wind blew, in fact that night I had my bag packed [laughs] ready to evacuate.

ROSS: I think we have been spooked for a while after that.

BRONWYN: Yes spooked

ROSS: We are just settling now basically. And the water got up to the buildings but really didn't get into too much there. But funny little things like the place had been wood chipped down there completely so all of that went. So we were left with a slick of slime over everything it was very hard to shift, over grass and gardens but the trees have survived. They are coming back aren't they?

BRONWYN: We faired quite well, it was only, it was frightening while it was happening and had they not come and moved that tree we would have had it down for sure.

ROSS: I think if you listed sort of the stress factors before this happened, our age, the fact we'd just shifted house, into this house

BRONWYN: And we hadn't really settled in.

ROSS: And way back to the Signa thing, the Signa thing was at the back of my mind, could it be as bad as that night when the Signa broke away and the tree came down and just missed our previous house. And that sort of cumulative effect of these inputs I think for someone younger experiencing it for the first time they'd have survived it far better than we did.

JULIE: What height would you say the water came up?

ROSS: Here the creek would I reckon, would got to a metre, a metre probably would have done it.

JULIE: Were there any waves or was it just rising?

ROSS: Well actually, the waves were caused by 4 wheel drives going down the

opposite road. And they actually caused waves to lap into our sort of tool shed and I'm sure people that lived in town where the waves were lapping over levy banks into the house would have been very angry at just people, thoughtlessly driving 4 wheel drives like boats.

BRONWYN: Well mentioning boats, that was the main problem, sight seer's coming up the creek and going like mad. That side of the creek were worse off for flooding was concerned because its lower and once the boats started coming up it was just pushing the water back up on them and some of these people really had a lot worse time than us.

ROSS: Sure, there's a sort of, I think, above sea level. Lake Road near Stoney Creek is about two feet lower than us, which I hadn't appreciated at that time since they started to flood and we didn't, so it could have been a lot worse.

JULIE: When did you sort of start to feel you were in the clear, was it late Saturday or ...

BRONWYN: Not for a couple of days after, like, because we were still getting winds and as you can see we have had another tree lopped since. That we didn't have to have, during that time, but that, that was kind of over the peoples place there and a piece was going straight up that had been lopped before and wasn't real strong so [laughs] I think I have a tree thing at the moment.

ROSS: I think that was systematic of It, that Bron said the tree man come back and got stuck into these trees that weren't really doing anything at that stage. But any potential threat now is gone. But I think the forecast too following the actual blow was pessimistic and they didn't induce optimism because they were saying, you know, it was going to come again. And if we could have gotten under our bed I think we would have but we didn't. I was just going to make one additional comment about the SES that they did turn up, they were three or four days late but as Bron pointed out they had far more urgent priorities than us. And when they did turn up they were very, very, good and they came in and checked things out and it's a comforting thought that we weren't missed out. We were there and they got to us when they could. And the other factor was our insurance company, which was NRMA and they were excellent. I was rather fearful of what was going to happen because I rang their special emergency helpline on the Saturday night, they advertised it twenty four hours and when I explained the circumstance I was told that no, they don't cover tree lopping. And when the guy came it was \$1,800 up front before they'd touch anything and I thought well this is going to hurt. But as it turned out they not only covered that but we only later discovered that the shade out the front had actually flapped itself loose and pushed those poles right over they covered that. And then they offered to cover the loss of food but we explained that whilst it had thawed it wasn't actually lost because we had a party for everyone and they'd eaten it up. So I think some weeks later they rang back again and said look we were checking through our files and note that you haven't claimed on this food loss in your fridge. And I said, again, no we are not going to do that because we didn't actually lose it. Blow me down, about two weeks later they rang up and said, look, you're about the only one that hasn't got this, we are making an ex-gratia payment, its not a claim you're just getting the money and I thought that was above and beyond. So I

sent a letter off to the insurance company saying that I thought they treated us, not only fairly but quite generously, that's good. The other thing is, like most Novocastrians we tended to listen to the ABC and we had the transistor on and it was a grand source of reliable information about where we were going and what was happening. Yeah well I don't know if local radio has done that before but I have little doubt it'll do it again.

BRONWYN: You said ABC.

ROSS: Yeah, 1233 ABC, yeah, thanks.