

Diane Young - Stories Oral History transcripts

This is Julie Christie. I am talking to Dianne Young at New Lambton Heights. Its 13th August 2007. Dianne, can you tell us what happened on Friday night during the storm:

Yes, well we'd only just arrived back from Gilgandra. We'd been up there for a few nights so we drove back through a lot of flood waters and rain coming out of the hills anyway listening to the radio and hearing all the stories about what was happening in Newcastle, and hoping that we will get home, so we did get home at about 6 30. We raced inside, went to bed at a normal time exhausted and about 1 00am in the morning we started hearing this wind and then we heard a crashing sound.

Although, I couldn't have really described it as a crash, it was just a swooshy sort of a sound, and then we thought, oh what was that? Then we got up, went outside had a look and a tree at the front of our yard came crashing down, missed the house thank goodness but got the car. So we really just said to ourselves, thank goodness it wasn't the house. Then came out the back because we have a reserve behind us, wondering what was going on out there. So we came out the backyard, we had a look, there were trees groaning and creaking and shreaking all over the place and the movement was amazing. And we stood and watched it for a while and we thought, "this is stupid, let's get inside".

So we got inside and went back to bed and just listened all night to the storm, listening to the ABC radio.

"What happened the next day?"

"The next day we were up fairly early. I don't think we had slept at all"

"You've been in cyclones before, haven't you?"

" I have, yes. We lived in Darwin for 18 years. We weren't there for cyclone tracey but we were there for quite a number of other ones and that was just like a cyclone and if we'd been living in Darwin, we would have called it a cyclone for sure.

But then damage back in the reserve was amazing, we looked next door. He has a few big trees in the backyard and they were gone, he had skylights that were gone, had clothesline that were gone, various other things and then I knew the neighbours were away because their son had rung me the night before to say "let me know if anything happens to dad's house. I had to ring him in the morning and say "yes, something has happened to dad's house. So they lost skylights and there was water in their kitchen and everything. Luckily we didn't have that to contend with. Just a car.

"And you were without power?"

"We certainly were when the tree went down, it took down the line from the road

into our house so nothing. Then whole street was eventually without power. I think that was probably another hour later that that went off. We can tell because we had been out at the car with the torch at 1 30 in the morning seen what damage had been done and then we were actually without the power for about 5 days. The power came on into the street about 3 days later but we talked to the energy Australia people that were in the area and they said "hasn't anybody told you that you need to have a whatever on the front of the house to connect the power to because that would have been ripped out with the storm."

So I had to get the Electrician to come and put that in so that delayed things a little that on the 5th day, the power was re-connected.

"What sort of inconvenience was that?"

"I was glad I wasn't terribly old. My next door neighbours who were in their 80's they actually went to stay with their daughter through through the day and then one night it was just too cold. The daughters were without power too but at least she was able to look after them, they booked themselves into Executive Inn down at the League s Club because they couldn't stand the cold. And I think that was the worst of how cold it was. And no lights of course, was about the shortest day of the year so it was dark soon after 5pm. We did have a gas heater but we ended up where there was nothing much to do anyway so we weren't sitting in front of a gas heater too long.

We had a BBQ on the back verandah that barbequed the meat as it de-frosted from the freezer and we had a side burner. We were able to have cups of tea and cook porridge for breakfast from outside which was quite exciting. We had a lot of candlelight dinners but we had a lot of early nights. While we were without power, I didn't realise how cold the wind was until then, and I have a firm belief now that even the lights in the house must keep your house warmer because it was just bitterly cold because their were no lights on at all through the evening or we just had so many clothes on trying to keep warm so we went to bed early mainly to keep warm.

"Dianne, when did the clean-up start?"

"We had to start the clean-up immediately on the Saturday morning to get our car out from under the tree so we have a chainsaw cut back enough of the trees so that we could move the damaged car and get the other car out of the garage so we had a vehicle so that was done fairly early. The family came around to help do that. It was probably 2 days later that citylake came around late with the team and they chopped up the whole tree back to about 3 metres from the stump, cut it all up into logs, stacked it on the footpath. Then some fellow and his son came along with the trailer to say "can we have your firewood?" so they took away 2

trailer loads of woods for firewood which was good as we didn't need it.

And I have been onto the insurance company at about 8 00 on Saturday morning and they were excellent. I have told them about the car and how much damage there was. I told them about the power being ripped out. We lost our letterbox and quite a few things in the garden and they sort of were very helpful and I said "Yes just keep in touch and ring the storm team and that sort of a thing which we did and probably Monday afterwards they were onto me again asking about the car what sort of damage it was and arranging for a tow truck to come and get it. I thought they were arranging for a necessitor to come but the tow truck came and the tow truck driver said to us on Wednesday when he took it, I will say goodbye to the car because I think you will be getting a check in the mail and a week later we had the check.

"That's terrific."

"That was really good. And with the household things, I was able to claim for food lost in the freezer and things like that because we had power lost for 5 days and I bought a new letter box and that covered for that, and they payed me for that and in clean-up we've had their contractor was the tree expert to remove the rest of the tree and that became a bit of aand probably 4 weeks later, the team turned up and chopped up a lot of the timber and mustard and took that away but I still had this stunt with its horizontal landscape sitting out in the front yard. There was a little bit of a problem with it because it was right on the boarderline next door to our neighbour, so we both had issues there with our retaining wall, the crooked letterbox and another powerpole that had been bent and eventually the insurance contractor sent along who ground out the stump and doing so of course, he cut the telephone wire and the waterpipes. I was so thankful that none of that none of that had been damaged when the tree was uprooted but I knew that would happen because we could see the pipes through the roots in the trees but that was only last Thursday and last Friday I had Telstra and a Plumber here reconnecting all the services again.

"So you didn't have any water for that time?"

"No, I didn't lose any water until last Thursday when they were grounding out the stump so that was re-connected and everything's pretty good."

"What about since that time, how have you felt?"

"To be honest, I have felt a bit stressed which is not normally me. I only just came back the Friday before the storm from the big overseas trip so gave it a week and a two off working and we were just gently getting back into life and in fact on Wednesday night before the storm, we had a phonecall at an elderly Aunt of his that died out at Gilgandra, so we thought we'd better go to the funeral. He

was her favourite Aunt so we drove to Gilgandra and back so that's what we were driving back in all the rain from, so that wasn't a major trauma. She was 90 so we were expecting that really but it just put us out of kilter and then when we got home, we thought alright, we've got the next weekend now before he goes back to work on the Tuesday and then the storm hits so we just feel like we are never really got on top of things and it's probably only the last week that I kind of feel I have gone back to normal.

But it's just been stressful dealing with insurances, and dealing with contractors and dealing with neighbours. I haven't really been out chatting to the neighbours much. I just feel like I don't want to and I stay inside but our tree in this street was really the only damage in this little culdersac so all the neighbours have been interested and they have all been hanging around and chatting and coming up to sticky beak and coming up and looking at the car when it was and damaged, all that sort of thing and then I think I withdrew a bit.