

## **Oral History: Brenda Alley interview.**

**Transcribed by Janelle Monnox: 1.7.2010.**

**RACHEL MALLABY:** This is Rachel Mallaby speaking with Brenda Alley from Lifeline at Cardiff in relation to the storms that swept Lake Macquarie on the June long weekend 2007.

**BRENDA ALLEY:** [pause] Well, I was, my husband was late picking me up from work he was due to be here at 4.30 [p.m.] and had he got here on time, I probably wouldn't have been stranded here. But in that, sort of, next hour, that was when the waters came up and, no, and it did happen so quickly and I was actually sitting out here in this part of the shop, quite oblivious to what was going on at the front of the shop and in the main street. He rang me back again just after five and he said, it might be nearer half past five, you know, half past five came, I gets another call and he said, I can't get to you, I'm trapped, he said, the other side of Munnibung Road, I can't get to you. Your just going to have to sit tight, he said, the roads are flooded. I said, oh god are they, you know, so I sort of walked, because I was doing some paper work out here, so I walked out the front of the shop. And I've looked out and thought, god, you know, and I could see some, people around, and well I eventually, I went, I came back and got the keys and unlocked the front door. And went out and had a look and it just started, basically with one lady out the front, I could see actually down towards the pub, there seemed to be a lot of people, they seemed to be on the road between the jewellers and the Post Office, just in the middle of the road. Anyway, this one lady, she was a cabby, and like owned cabs, not the car out the front, wasn't a taxi, it was, um, she actually owned them, and she had a little computer, she was saturated. She like, she came up that way, Macquarie Road which was like a river, I've never seen anything like it, I mean, and, so I said, sort of said, to her come and get something dry on, and um, basically that's how it started. And then, I just this succession of people, come through, some had lost their cars, had gone under, like down, you know, on Macquarie Road, one poor guy had lost his, his car was parked near the pub, he had a brand new car he'd picked it up that morning, he was devastated. He was in his mid thirties. But everybody, just, come in, just like drowned rats. They were just saturated, you know, so I was just giving clothing and that away, so in, in one sense, I guess it was lucky that I was caught here myself, but dry, you know, we were fine, we, we didn't look at any time like we were going to be flooded or the water was going to come in here. Ah, because it seemed to be, further down, that a way.

**RACHEL:** Yep.

**BRENDA:** Towards Macquarie Road, and up towards the hotel, but I just, I just had a succession of people, you know. Some came in and lost cars, there were some that were quite distraught, um, some that sort of, you know, and, their phones, they'd lost everything, so they didn't even have mobiles they could contact, so they were using the phone, and that, and I was just making tea and coffee and clothing people. And, but it ended up, there were about thirty odd people over the period of the night and it was about, sort of, nine thirty, or something before, um, we were able to get out. An, then, you know, they started, about quarter past nine, and that sort of started to ease. In addition, some people just sort of made a, like a, you know, just said look, we've got to go, we've got to attempt to get out of here. And, and, sort of they did and then, um, my husband, and I rang him, actually, then I Look I can probably, get out, I said I, he said, well I can't get to the shop to get you. He said, I'm, your going to have to swim, walk a way, is more the point, up the hill towards the station. And that was the closest he could get to me. And I, so I had to walk, so I just had to, take my shoes and socks off, roll my pants up, and um, took, there was one jacket left on the rack that was waterproof, that was, you know, all that was left, [laugh], because I had given all the others, sort of, to people. And I just, sort of, had to wade, part, across, you know, across the road, and past the pub, and like, and the water was probably up to about there on me, there, and it was just flowing in the door of the hotel. It was just, it was just, I could not believe it, just the amount of water, but I was, because I didn't know what was underneath or even, how deep and you know, like, I, I was treading, really carefully, like that, but um, it was scary, it was very scary.

**RACHEL:** So how long did it take you, to get up near the station?

**BRENDA:** Ah, not, not all that long, probably only, you know, probably ten minutes, which I suppose for the given amount of time it is, well he, he actually got, you know, where the Skin Cancer clinic is just up on that corner.

**RACHEL:** Yep.

**BRENDA:** He parked just up there, so I was able to, I didn't have to walk as far as the station, which was, which was alright. But it was quite dark, because we still had lights on this block, but across the road was all out. And down further (car noise], to the pub, was out, they had no lights.

**RACHEL:** Oh, OK.

**BRENDA:** So it was a bit, was a bit scary [laugh]. It was quite dark.

**RACHEL:** And how did you, um, manage to get, get home? Were there any troubles with traffic?

**BRENDA:** Oh, oh, yeh, it was a long way home. Um, it was a long drive home because, when my husband came, he said, where gonna, I'm gonna try and get to Tim, our son, who lives at Broadmeadow, right behind the Entertainment Centre, which copped it really badly. He said, I want to try and get over there, they're flooded, he said. I don't know how, you know, how close we'll be able to get but he said I want to try and get over there. So we couldn't get anywhere near his street, you know, he's in Broadmeadow Road. Every, every road, every where we turned, it was blocked or flooded, so, you know I think, it was, it was after eleven, probably eleven thirty, before we actually got back to our place at Lambton. And um we were sort of in the old drive-in site. So, that wasn't too bad there it wasn't flooded.

**RACHEL:** And, and did you have power when you got home?

**BRENDA:** We had power, yeh we were, we were lucky. But we lost the power here, um, that night when the, when the big storm hit, like, you know, half past one or whatever, we lost power in the shop. So it obviously didn't open the next day. So they had no power, I think, for five days. And, you know three foot up at the back of the house and that water came in, into the back room and their garage, you know, it was up, sort of, more than half way up the walls, and..

**RACHEL:** And how has it been, around, sort of, Cardiff, has the shop keepers pulled, pulled together, a lot.

**BRENDA:** Yeh, it's a real little community Cardiff, I think it's got quite a strong community feel about it. The next week, the tattooist down the road he even brought down his BBQ set up a BBQ out the front of the shop and was feeding people, you know giving people sausage sandwiches and what not. We actually had a meeting here at Cardiff the other night, um, trying to decide an action plan what we need to do to revive the district because there are close to fifteen businesses I think that haven't come back.

**RACHEL:** So it was the Chamber of Commerce was it?

**BRENDA:** No, no, not the Chamber of Commerce because the Cardiff Chamber of Commerce amalgamated with the move to Glendale and apparently they haven't been that supportive of Cardiff um but this was just basically an action group of concerned shop owners and managers.

**RACHEL:** And have you found that um donations have increased?

**BRENDA:** They have, they have, and probably customer level particularly that first fortnight after, customer level was a lot higher because the Salvation Army store was wiped out on the corner so people were coming here and because also they couldn't take donations there they were bringing them in to us we were trying to get them, encouraging them take them to our depot.