

Storm Stories Transcript

Helen Rawle

JULIE: This is Julie Christie interviewing Helen Rawle of Kilaben Bay about the storms of June 8-11, 2007.

HELEN: My name is Helen Rawle. I live at 109 Kilaben Rd, Kilaben Bay.

JULIE: Helen, can you tell us about what happened on the June long weekend?

HELEN: Yes I can, and I don't think I'll ever forget it because June 8 was my birthday. So a whole 62 and in the morning round about 8 o'clock we realised we had no power. So my husband said, oh that'll be alright we'll just do a Webber for your birthday, we'll put a chicken in the Webber and that'll be fine. So one of my steps sons came around with his little boy and Garry put the chook in the Webber and I did all the vegetables and had them all ready to go. And we were watching the water coming up and it was pouring and we thought oh gee this is rough isn't it? You know really wild. And all of a sudden Garry said oh I think the, the Webber's gone out, I musn't had enough gas in it, so he said I'll just go up to Jake's at the Bottle Shop and I'll get another, another gas bottle. I said oh I don't know that you should really go out this, this is, this is really wild. Oh it'll be right, Matthew said oh look I had trouble coming round here the car was sort of swinging around on the road, oh no I'll be right he said so away he went up to the bottle shop. And as he drove out, Matthew yelled out OH there's water coming in through the laundry door, and quick get some towels and I thought well I don't think the towels are going to stop it if it's coming in through the laundry door. And, within... oh, seconds I walked from the laundry through into the ensuite in our bedroom which is at the other end of the house and the water was coming up through the drains in the ensuite. And the whole house was underwater, it was just within seconds, unbelievable.

Anyway so flooded we were and with brooms and everything else we could find we were trying to sweep the water out, it surprisingly went down very quickly, about as quickly as it came up, it tended to go down. Um, Garry came back from the bottle shop and found that no his gas bottle was alright but the water had come up so high it had washed it on its side and all the things in the garage had floated across to the other side of the road, dog bowls and things that we have in, in, lying on the floor in the garage. He said on the way home coming back from the bottle shop the car was almost floating and he couldn't determine what side of the road he was on. He, he, we used to live in another house further up Kilaben Rd and he said he recognised that gate but couldn't tell where the foot paths were, it was right up over the gutters and he said he realised he was on the

wrong side of the road. And had to sort of swing it round until he, and he said he just edged his way home. Um, so all of the carpet was just saturated. We have slate in the back part of the house and we have a slow combustion fire so we had it going thank heavens. Cause it was quite cold. And that, when we started to sweep all the slate, sweep it all out, and, and mop it all down, it dried off fairly quickly. And we moved the big furniture that we could, we moved everything so it wouldn't seep up through the bottom. But the carpet was just totally, totally saturated and because I have a daughter with cerebral palsy it created a bit of a problem because she gets around the house on her knees. And...I couldn't have her crawling around the house on her knees and I thought what on earth are we going to do? So it came to go to bed at night and I, I got her into her pyjamas and put her on the bed and... took her socks off and wiped her feet, put a towel beside the bed and said now get into bed but if you need to go to the toilet your going to have to call me and I'm going to have to come and try and walk you through into the bathroom. Um, so we, we tucked her into bed and we did the same, we had a towel either side of the bed and just sort of wiped our feet when we got into bed. But all the dog beds and things were all wet so we ended up with a cat and 2 dogs on the bed with us through the night [laughs]. So it was a bit of a, you know, an interesting night.

But we could hear as, when we were going to sleep I can remember Garry waking at some stage and sitting up in bed and saying My god, what was that? And you could hear this thoonk thoonk and it was all the trees coming down in Kilaben Park, there were million of trees down there and in the, a uh a, down Jarrett Street, um you could just hear them falling just this heavy, dull thud. And it was, it was quite scary. Um, and knowing they were all gum trees, we have a very big gum tree in our backyard so I was watching that like a hawk but, for some reason or other it was alright. It sort of withstood everything and seems quite good and quite healthy but there was so many of them came down here. And, and Garry looks now over at Kilaben Park cause he often used to walk across with his fishing line and walk onto the jetty and, and fish in the afternoons, late afternoons or early mornings if he couldn't sleep. But the jetty's completely washed away and, um it ended up down on Dr Mansfield's jetty, um, and they apparently dragged it back and you can see it all submerged but not, not any good to fish on anymore, they have it roped off.

And in the morning when we got up all of the people in Kilaben Bay were all out, Garry went for a walk and he said everyone was over at the park, looking and talking, and you know all, all just horrified to think that it could have happened. But I think there must have been... um, some sort of a front just in this area because it seemed to be hit quite badly and a lot of, all of the houses on either side of us were all flooded, some worse then others. We were quite fortunate; the people on the other side of us were in Europe when it happened. And um, we tried to peer in through the door to see if their house was alright, and it appeared to be what we could see but then their children came the next day and it had all been flooded too. And Yvonne next door is still in a mess she, all of her place, had just led, one thing led to the other because theirs came up. She came in here and said oh ours is worse then yours because its come up over the architraves so it got into the, the timber and they've had to redo ensuite and

panels of walls and yeah. And they had corked tiles and of course they all became swollen and were dreadful.

But the next morning when Garry came back in we had some friends up the road um, [?Garry and Lynn?] Wilson and they came down to see how we'd fared and... they brought their daughter and son in law and, and my other step son came and they, the young ones helped pull up all the carpet because we just thought well we can't leave it like that it was hopeless for Belinda to try and get around on and we thought we'd be better off at least to have it dry. So we pulled all the carpet up and stuck it in the garage and thought well we'll get on to the insurance companies and then they can tell us what to do with it so... we did that. And they, they of course had no power cause nobody had any power for about 3 days. But they had nothing to cook on and we happened to have a gas barbeque, as well as having the slow combustion fire so we had something to heat up for coffee and we had um, something to be able to cook lunch on. So they all stayed for lunch and [laughs] we had sausages and steak and bread. And um, that night Lynn's mum still had power so she cooked up a great big pot of soup so we went and got her and she came round and we all had cold um, hot champagne [laughs] and hot soup [laughs]. But we had well we had a good night, it was a, it was a wonderful thing to see how everybody in the community pulled together and tried to help one another. Um, everywhere you looked all the houses that, that and all the people that you spoke to, ah everybody came from everywhere to try and give you a hand but once they realised what was going on, uh, and I did hear that a lot of Coal Point didn't have water as well, at least we had water, at least for 3 days. It was starting on the 3rd day, I can remember going in and having a shower and my husband said to me, how can you do that? The waters freezing [laughs]. But it was, um, at least, at least it was clean and we had water, which I would hate to have not had that.

JULIE: So how long were you without water?

HELEN: Um, water we had for, for the whole 3 days but we were without power for 3 days. It was getting a little un, unpleasant at the end of the 3rd day because by then Woolworths and Coles were on generators and they were running out of things too because people had been panicking I think and after um batteries and, and things like that for torches. We had plenty of candles, we were lucky, we, we just brought out lots of candles, and it all looked very romantic. Ah, and, and straight away my husband thought of getting batteries and we put batteries in Belinda's old stereo and we got onto the ABC and the ABC were marvellous! They had the best um, radio program and they kept everybody up to date on what was happening and who was in trouble and where people needed help and it was, it was really, really good. So we just had that playing the whole time and listened to that to see what was going on.

It, it was, it was interesting but I, I would have been quite frightened had the water been any higher because with Belinda being in a wheelchair I don't know how people would have got out. Because she's too heavy, she's 33, for me to

carry her... would have been very difficult and then you think well where do you go? Because my husband said to me, well look if this came up any higher, we'd have to get out. And I said well where do you go with 2 dogs and a cat and a handicapped daughter? It creates a bit of a problem, we could have gone up the road to our old house, because it was, um, it was built for Belinda so it would have had the facilities to handle us. But the fellow we sold it to, who has become a good friend, was actually up in the Gold Coast. And the key was with his cleaner who lived at Blackall's Park... and she couldn't get from Blackall's Park to here so we were, we were really stuck. Um because you can't inflict people with animals, and you couldn't leave them, ah I couldn't have left them, they're like, like children to me so I couldn't have left them. Ah, so yeah, it was um, it was a very interesting time. Not a time that I think anybody would like to relive in a hurry. But, and for us we were only very, we weren't inconvenienced much at all compared to so many people, you hear some horrendous stories. But, but our friends were wonderful and everybody, everybody gathered round and our other step son came up from Cessnock and um brought a generator for us, and there really wasn't, by that stage, we were, it was already the second day so there wasn't a lot that, that could help us with so we ended up letting him have it cause by then his power had gone out too. But he said on the way home, he found a car that had gone into a ditch and it was all full of water and the water was coming up to the windows and there was an elderly couple in it and they couldn't get out. So he got out of the car and had, he had an old, um, rope in the back of the car, not a proper towrope but an old rope and he tied it on and he actually managed to pull them out. So you, you do hear some pretty horrific stories but ah, we were alright, and we were luck, we were, actually it was interesting because we, our house insurance was due that week and my husband shopped around a little bit and he said oh we'll change insurers because we can get it a little bit cheaper. We were with CGU, I don't know whether you can mention names or anything, but yeah we were with CGU and he said oh no we'll go with AAMI because, um, we can get it a little cheaper through AAMI. So we changed insurers and the policy arrived from AAMI the day before the flood and I felt so sorry for them I thought gee they've only had one lot of our money and, and here we are claiming already, you know. But they were wonderful, you do hear stories of people being very disappointed in insurers but they were wonderful I couldn't speak highly enough of them. Mind we were only, we only had a small claim because it was only really just the carpet and the, and the um, the food that we lost in the freezer. But I wouldn't have even thought of the food in the freezer and the lady on the phone when I rang, she said oh did you lose, loose food in the freezer? And I said yes we did, and she said oh how much worth? I said oh I don't know, she said oh 2, 300 I'll send you a cheque tomorrow. And the cheque arrived for the carpet within... oh I would say, within a couple of weeks. But we were fortunate in a way we had, oh well, and not fortunate because we had replaced the carpet nine months before and... the carpet people still had all of our measurements. So all I had to do was ring them, they had to look it up and it did increase slightly in price but they could fax them straight away the quote. So we were lucky that we were one of the first ones to get it back down because I was quite happy to have what I'd already chosen so I didn't have to go through that. But you do hear some bad stories but ours was, we were very pleased with

the insurers and we'd stick with them.

Also around the corner from us in Jarrett St which is only a couple of hundred metres, um one of the ladies usually does family day care and the trees all came down, there were about 6 trees in Jarrett St all within about a distance of 3 houses and they all came down and they, they acted like a dam for the water and the water just built up and in her house the water was up to about chest height and she really panicked because she couldn't reach her, I think that the little girls only about 6 or 8, something like that, and she couldn't reach her in the back bedroom. But they've, of course she had to, couldn't do family day care and they had to rent a house for about 3 or 4 months before they could get back into their home because everything was just ruined.

JULIE: How high did the lake come up?

HELEN: I don't know. I don't know, because that was across the road I don't know. Ours was all from the drains. I think too because this area here on the corner, cause I've lived here since I was 22, this used to be a watercourse and the council put all drainage systems or the water board, who ever did it, put all drainage systems through and I suppose when water flows this is its natural way to the lake. I can always remember my first husband saying, oh cause I said when this land came up for sale oh I wouldn't mind having a house down there that's a, that's not a bad spot, right near the park. And he said to me don't be silly Helen you know it's a water course, why would you want to do that? But even when this house came up for sale years down the track, when we bought it, I still liked this area and was happy with this. I knew and I was quite aware that they put all the drainage system in, but obviously it just couldn't, couldn't cope with it all, hmmm because all the houses round here were flooded so.