

INTERVIEW WITH JO YOUNES

This is an interview made with Jo Younes on 18 September 2013 at his home, 72 Harold Street, Middle Park, by Anne Miller for the Middle Park History Group. Jo was born on 24 August 1913 and recently turned 100 although he claims to only feel 80!

Jo has always lived in this house which his parents purchased in 1910 paying £1400. Jo's father was Anthony George Younes (subsequently referred to as Father) and his mother was Maria, she was French (subsequently referred to as Mother). Jo still has cousins in France but he himself has never been there. Jo is uncertain why his mother came to Australia. Jo did have an elder brother who lived in Perth but he died a few years back. Father had a jeweller's shop in Swanston Street initially but following a robbery there he moved to Elizabeth Street where he sold Church goods, watches and jewellery, including rosary beads, prayer books, Bibles and pictures, for about 30 years. Jo's younger sister, Carmel, who was a chemist (pharmacist) opened a shop in Bourke Street. She was the first person to make an ointment for acne so everyone used to go there. Carmel had planned to be a doctor but following a nervous breakdown she became a chemist. She was very smart and had many customers including the bookmakers and doctors, she had one of the best shops in Melbourne and made a fortune. Carmel is not still alive. She left Jo \$1,000,000 which his other sister will not give him. Jo has barred her from coming to the house. Aged 94 she went for her driving license which she failed but she has a brand new car costing \$72,000.

Jo's early days.

Jo went initially to the Carmelite convent on the beach (Beaconsfield Parade) at approximately age 6 where the nuns taught them and then to the Christian Brothers in Danks Street where they were taught by the Brothers who were very strict. Here they wore a uniform of white and blue check shirt with navy pants and a navy pullover with a V neck. The Christian Brothers site was subsequently bought by the Hare Krishna thanks to a private intermediate buyer. Together with a few boys from the Christian Brothers Jo then moved to Victoria Parade (Parade College) and finally to Xavier. He was keen to go to Xavier as he wanted to play football and also as the school offered rowing. Jo was good at football. Later he was asked to play for Collingwood. When he was told they were paid 30 bob (shillings) Jo thought this was low pay as they played in teeming rain and when the grass was snow white, so he declined the offer. Instead he took up motorbike riding on a dirt track. There was one at the Motor Drome and one at the Exhibition Buildings where they received £5. A girl, Fay Taylor, from England used to wear a brace to protect herself, asking Jo to tie it up as she thought the others were dirty 'pervs'!

The Motor Drome was in Punt Road where they play soccer now, past the Tennis Centre. There was a tunnel that used to go out to the arena which had a crack in it. Two of the motorbikes

collided on the crack, but unfortunately one rider got killed so they pulled it down and only had the third track there. Racing on the dirt track was very popular with thousands of spectators. Jo had 14 motorbikes. The Police Commissioner would be there and would comment to Father that Jo did not seem to be 18, but Jo claimed to be George! Afterwards he woke up!

Jo did play in the Xavier football team, he was mentioned in the when they beat Scotch for the final. He kicked 3 goals in 10 minutes against the wind, they said he won the match for them! Jo thinks this was in about 1928.

Attaining 100 years

Now that Jo has had his 100th birthday some of his relatives ring up to question his health which rather irritates him. Jo did go to the Bowling Club for a birthday celebration, where some of his mates were surprised to see that he was still alive.

Leaving Xavier College.

Jo went to work for Jackson & Spring who were Customs Agents, based near the corner of Flinders and Spencer Streets. On one occasion when Jo was at the races barracking for his horse one of his employers asked him what he was doing there on a working day and promptly sacked him. Jo did not object to this. This employer then came crying to Father that he could not get his goods off the wharf as it was nearly Christmas. Jo knew the fellow in the Customs Department, who happened to live up from the corner near Jo, and when he put the bill of lading on the counter the next one goes over it, thus Jo was able to get the goods straight away, otherwise they had to wait 4 or 5 days. Jo agreed to go back if he received £15, which he was subsequently paid – a tremendous rise from previously when he received £6 weekly. Jo only worked for Jackson & Spring for awhile and then he became a free agent and was his own boss, collecting goods off the wharves on the Yarra river. Jo borrowed £2000 from Father to buy 2 trucks. The man who drove the other truck died of a strangulated hernia which meant Jo had to find another driver. This proved difficult as not many people had licenses as there were not many cars. Jo would go to the bank who paid the exporter and obtain the bill of lading before going to the stevedore. The stevedore had to be paid £2 stevedoring fees and they would then unload the goods onto the trucks. Originally horses and carts were used but these were superseded by the trucks, Jo never had a horse and cart. It was very busy down at the wharves. But Jo could not get another driver and it was necessary to have 2 trucks as some of the goods were long and the trucks had to be joined up at the back. Jo had to sell one truck and continue on his own, working from Father's shop in Elizabeth Street.

For years after this time Jo didn't do anything, he helped Father in his shop by doing the banking and getting the imported goods off the wharf. He had plenty of spare time.

Meeting Betty Yvonne and marriage.

Jo met Betty at the St. Kilda Town Hall at a dance when she was 17 and he was 27. She only died

about a year ago (Jo produced a photo of her taken in Adelaide where they had been visiting their daughter who still lives there). Following their marriage they went to live with Betty's mother in Mary Street, West St. Kilda. They only stayed here for a couple of weeks before moving into a big rooming house called *Elanora* on the corner of Fitzroy Street and Beaconsfield Parade. Jo wishes he had bought this property which although big was cheap in those days. *Elanora* is still there. Then he wanted to buy a big solid brick, cement-rendered house on the corner of Danks and Armstrong Streets, Middle Park where the kitchen was right at the back. This dissuaded Jo from buying this house. They next moved to a big 9-roomed house in Canterbury Road which included a snooker room with a snooker table. From here all of the girls got married and left home until there was only Jo and Betty at home. Betty and Jo had 6 children, 5 girls and 1 boy. Betty thought that house was too big so they moved to 72 Harold Street which was vacant at this time. He bought it for £21,000 although Jo thought this was a bad move. It took them 6 months to get the paper off the walls and to paint it, costing \$800 per room. There was no stove here, except a wood-fired stove. It cost Jo about £30,000 to do it up which he was crook about as they could have stayed in Canterbury Road. About 10 or 15 years ago that house was sold for \$2,500,000. This was 149 or 249 Canterbury Road, running right back to the lane. It had high ceilings and a big veranda around it. Here at Harold Street Jo's name is supposed to be on the title, although Jo's brother-in-law who worked at the Titles Office, altered this. Jo was not aware of this for years and the brother-in-law died before Jo had time to fix it. Jo thinks his sister poisoned her husband. Jo was himself in hospital at this time. He thinks this sister is a fraud, she has not been to see him recently. Jo is presently in good health.

Middle Park shops.

Moran & Cato used to be in Canterbury Road, opposite the Middle Park station, at the back of the hotel, they had shops everywhere. There was a garage there too. Jo recalls that condensed cream was a halfpenny cheaper at Moran & Cato so Mother would walk around to Moran and Cato specially to get the cream. Jo used to go to the Middle Park Hotel.

Jo also went to Cunningham's the grocer on the corner of Harold and Erskine Streets. They would fill up a large bottle of port every Saturday night. This port was much better quality than that obtainable now. It was stored in an oak vat and was beautiful port. They would then go over to the park on Sunday and drink it, as well as playing football.

Jo recalled the rationing and coupons and how the housekeeper of a local millionaire would go to Cunninham's and expect more tea "because they are millionaires". This millionaire lived on the beach in a big mansion with a yard at the back. In here were a lot of old cars – Hispanos and others. On Saturday nights Jo and his friends would pinch them, pushing them to start. This went on for about 9 months before the owner woke up and sold them all.

Jo used to go to the Danish Club on Friday and Saturday nights where they served beautiful food.

Jo was a member there, when people took up their membership they were given a small glass of 'rak' (schnapps) which you needed to swallow quickly or it would burn you. Big knobs used to go there, it was packed on 2 levels.

In Hambleton Street there used to be 3 or 4 shops – Baileys, the butcher and a grocer and possibly a hardware shop. Baileys sold beautiful meat which is unobtainable now. Betty used to shop here. Jo cannot remember that they made sausages in those days but does recall that they sold half a sheep for 30 bob (shillings) which Betty's cousin would buy.

In Armstrong Street there was Watkins the butcher on the corner of Richardson Street. There used to be 3 or 4 shops in Richardson Street – a grocer who won Tatts Lotto, a greengrocer owned by Paddy Walsh and a delicatessen. Paddy was dishonest as he would add 2 or 3 shillings to everyone's bill. In the room there were jars of 2 shilling pieces.

Local bookmakers

Paddy died about 10 years ago. He was a bookmaker as well, collecting the bets when he went around (delivering). Every pub had an SP bookie, Snowy was the copper (policeman) who would say to Jo when he worked with an SP bookie at the Victoria Hotel in Kerferd Road to 'Finish'. Snowy said he would even book his mother! Snowy finished the SPs. When they were caught they were fined and Jo went to work for the Middle Park bookie. Then Jo went to work for a chap he knew who was an SP bookmaker in Collingwood. He was a bad payer so a friend of Jo's there together with Jo would put £1 or £2 on the last winner. Years later the bookmaker found out. Always the last winner was the 'roughie' coming in at 20 to 1 or better. The coppers would come round to the SPs requesting a £1 on the last winner which shows how cunning the coppers were. After the SPs were finished they received a gaol sentence if they got caught a second time so this was the finish. Jo enjoyed all this. There was a bookie down in one of the Bay Street Port Melbourne pubs, Curlie Brooks, who would take a boy and shout him a couple of pots (of beer), which shows how much money he used to make. This was the pub opposite Ferguson Plarre. The bookmaker's mate used to work in the pub down further, he used to wear a diamond ring on his finger and a diamond tie pin. He promised Jo a diamond tie pin when he retired but he got caught, went to Sydney and never came back.

Jo's motorbikes.

These were all sold or traded in. The back room in his house used to be his workshop where he pulled them down. This was all before he was married.

The first motorbike he bought from a turner and fitter, who lived at the back, for 2 shillings per week. It was a Norton with a belt drive, they didn't have chain drive in those days. Jo didn't know that he was supposed to put oil on it and seized it up. The man who sold it to him showed Jo how to pull it down. So he pulled it down and this is how he started as a mechanic. This man taught Jo all he knew about motorbikes – how to make them go faster by putting bigger jets in the

carburettor. To shave the head off he would take it to the Repco workshop in Elizabeth Street near the market (Queen Victoria Market) where they did repairs. The fastest Jo would go would be about 100 miles per hour.

Later he imported a BSA especially out from England, it cost £120. It was only a 250 (ccs) but it used to beat the bigger bikes that had been specially brought out by Bob Finley. That was in the crash at the Motor Drome, Jo has never seen it again.

Jo used to go down St. Kilda Road, a shirt over the back number plate, and the big fat coppers would be on a Lancia Lamba with a sidecar and big batteries on the back. They were not able to turn left fast but Jo could turn left and come down Sturt Street doing about 90mph, with the police way behind. He would drive down to the house, through the open gate to where he had a pile of packing cases, throw the packing case over the bike and the coppers would try to find it. The only one they didn't open the bike was under! Two doors away lived a Police Commissioner who thought that Jo was not yet 18.

War service in the Air Force.

Up the road lived an Air Vice Marshal. Jo went to join up during the war but was described as a foreigner because of the name 'Younes' and was rejected. He saw all his mates go to Singapore but only one came back. One day the Air Vice Marshal suggested he should go into Queen Street to the Air Force where he was taken in. He went down to Cerebus to do his 'rookies', then he went back to Laverton where he was secretary to the Medical Officers there. Here he would type up all the records and take the patients up to the beds. They only had a few nurses. When Jo was at Cerebus they had beds that pushed down and they would race in and knock them all down at 5 o'clock in the morning. Eventually they were caught and were required to run with full packs on around the big oval, if they stopped to walk they had to run around again!

From here Jo went to Laverton where he was based for years doing the postings. This involved ringing up with the overseas postings. After Jo complained that he was bored he was posted to Canada. He was waiting in the plane on the tarmac to go to Sydney but was delayed and missed the plane to Canada so he returned to Laverton until he was posted overseas. He ended up firstly in Port Moresby until they needed someone with medical experience at Merauke in Dutch New Guinea. He was there for 2½ years. [From later] Jo also unloaded ships as he could drive trucks. He used to go down the creek catching prawns and take them back to boil up in the kerosene tin. There was also a supply of big fish and eggs which the natives gave them. They would give the natives bully beef in exchange which they really enjoyed! The servicemen only ate the bully beef for the first week as the cook put onions in with it. The river was full of crocodiles so they asked the army to come down and machine gun them. The natives took these away to eat.

This base used to get bombed every day, it was Jo's job to sound the siren. He used to stand beside the trench and he could see them coming. He would give a commentary while the planes

were about a mile away. When they were a ¼ of a mile away Jo would jump into the trench. They did kill his little pony which it had taken Jo 4 weeks to catch.

From Merauke Jo was sent to Townsville as they had no medical staff there. After about a year he complained that he had done his time but instead he was sent to Charters Towers. Here there was a chap who had not been relieved for 3 years. Here the CO showed Jo the work to be done and the typewriter. Jo had learned to type at the South Melbourne Technical School (corner Albert and Canterbury Roads). Jo was able to finish the work in ½ a day, work that had taken the previous fellow 2½ days which impressed the CO. Later back in Melbourne Jo was crossing Flinders Street to go to the railway when he saw the CO who said how he hated people putting things over him.

From here he went back to Townsville and to Bowen, which he remembers for the beautiful oysters on the rocks. The servicemen there had made a special tool for opening the oysters, some of which they swapped for a slab of beer at the pub. Back in Townsville he went again to Charters Towers where it was suggested that Jo fly in a small plane to Brisbane but he refused as it was raining so he caught the train back to Melbourne.

Back in Melbourne he was wanted out at Heidelberg (Repatriation Hospital) where Jo worked for 2 months when one of the doctors told him he would be there for 5 years! The injured servicemen arrived commenting that they had no injuries even though the injuries were visible. These men thought that they would be kept in hospital instead of going home but Jo explained to them that they would not get compo (compensation) unless they told the truth. Finally Jo was discharged as 'medically unfit' even though this was not the case. On discharge he was given a suit and a pair of shoes. Jo enjoyed it at Heidelberg.

When he was at Laverton they used to play with the girls who they met at the canteen. Laverton was an enormous station with people from the army, air force including Yanks. (Some repetition follows that relates to life in the services rather than in Middle Park.)

Jo claims that the Yanks won the war for Australia, they caught 100 Japanese planes on the ground

at Wau which was only a 2 hour flight from Merauke.

At one time while in Dutch NG Jo wanted to be a dental mechanic, he went over to the hospital making dentures on the gas fire there but was soon called back to his position as a medical clerk.

Jo had some dealings with a Warrant Officer concerning the records that Jo had requested from Australia. Jo would not salute the WO when he saw him at the station.

Learning to type at South Melbourne Technical School.

Jo learnt to type at night, the school offered accountancy and other subjects, including a workshop. Jo went there by himself, not sent by the air force. He wanted to do accountancy but the class was full. The tech had many students, Jo claimed it was the best school out! Many apprentices studied there, classes were held day and night.

Jo's long life.

When Jo visits his doctor he says his longevity is due to laughing and joking. Jo used to go to a doctor in Fitzroy who could be bribed into giving sick leave.

