

GROWING UP IN CAMDEN THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD

Written by Rev. Dr. Clyde Morton Dominish AM 2012

I grew up in a small weatherboard home at 3 John Street, in the lower area of the flood plain in Camden. The house had one bedroom and a kitchen. The floor was compacted dirt, my mother covered the floor with rugs to keep the house warm. We did everything in the kitchen, we had a wood stove for cooking, it would warm the house. When it came to bedtime, I was packed away in the corner on a small stretcher. We had a pan toilet, and a metal tub in the outhouse for bathing.

It was only later when the family started to grow that my father added further rooms to the house.

My first memory of growing up in Camden is watching old Reg Fordham coming down John Street on his bicycle, swinging his lighter rod and lighting the gas lamps in the street, piercing the darkness of the night with little shafts of light. I used to wait for Reg to come along, he seemed such a friendly happy old bloke and I loved to talk to him. He worked at the local gas works. He was retired, but he still rode around on his bicycle and lit the gas lamps. He seemed to be very old (I was a small child), and I can remember him riding his bike.

My life was made up of the people I knew in John Street, where I lived. There was George Armour across the road. He was a bee keeper. I would watch him drive away in his big truck laden with bee hives. George would appear every now and then back with his load of hives and would spend the next few days getting the honey out of the hives. My mother would send me up to George's house to get a bottle. It was the most delicious honey I have ever tasted. It was fresh and clear, and had the smell of the gum trees.

On the other side of the road lived George Franklin. He was married to a woman who was a fastidious dresser and wore a pinafore apron when she was in the garden. They had no children. She must have loved her garden, as she would always be in the garden cutting her blooms. I would watch her, but she never spoke to me.

Next door was old Tom Webb. He was a tyre retreader. He worked around the corner in a great big shed lined with tyres and rubber. I would stand at the shed door smelling the rubber cooking as he retreaded the tyres. He would speak to me sometimes: "Come and see what all this hissing and steam is about, kid!" He was a big and strong man. He rarely smiled, but I still felt he was friendly. I would go into the shed and watch the sizzling monsters in their covers baking the rubber on the tyres. "Don't get too close or you'll get burnt!" he would yell above the hissing. There was a huge boiler, he would stoke it and steam would burst out through the pipes. He wore an old shirt, overalls, and he sweated profusely. He drank water furiously out of a pannikin, which was on the bench. He always wore a hat.

Down the street on the edge of the flood plain lived old George Burnell. He was a character! You could hear him half a mile away roaring at the cows to come up and be milked. The words he yelled were indecipherable, I couldn't make head or tail of what he was saying. They were just huge sounds. I watched them come up in a long line to be milked. The milking was done by family members, while George did all the yelling. I would watch the cows being milked through holes in the fence. He was the only man I ever knew who chewed tobacco. Mrs Burnell, who was the kind-hearted lady of the

house, took quite an interest in me. When I was a little boy, she took me to Parramatta to go shopping. As a child, this was a wonderful experience. Mrs Burnell gave me sixpence to buy something for my mother.

My Uncle Charlie (Dominish) and Aunt Jane lived in Broughton Street, Camden. Uncle Charlie had lost his right hand in a rifle accident, and this made life difficult for him. He would sit on the front verandah of his home and watch the world go by. We would often go to his house to visit, and collect a basket of plums. It was my job to climb up the tree and pass them down to my father.

Over the road near the tennis courts lived the Davies. They were a very sophisticated family. On occasions Mrs Davies would appear all dressed up with hat, gloves and coat and she would walk to the old Chevrolet car and get into it. She had a chauffeur who would open the door, put down a mat for her to step on, and she would go to Whiteman's or Maloney's to shop. She had a daughter who seemed to delight in pulling faces at me. She was Llewella Davies, one of Camden's most prominent characters in later life. I never dared speak to Mr Davies who was the local town solicitor and was always dressed smartly in his suit with hat and gloves. He had a matching bag and cane, and would often walk to his office.

My father on occasions, would borrow a horse and sulky from Fred Doust over the hill and he would take my mother and me for a drive. It was always exciting when my father saddled up the horse and took us for a drive in the countryside. We mainly went out to Cawdor where we visited the Campbell family. They were so gracious towards us and Mrs Campbell would always provide a scrumptious afternoon tea. It was a memorable time for me.

The first Christmas I can remember we received a basket of fruit and groceries sent to us by Ms Faithfull- Anderson. She was the owner of the large property in Kirkham lane called Camelot. This gift of fruit and groceries became a yearly custom, and I can remember my father sitting down after every Christmas and writing a letter of thanks to Ms Faithfull-Anderson. Fruits, chocolate, sweets, cakes and all kinds of delicious surprises were in the box. It was such a treat!

My father (Elmo Dominish) was a bootmaker; he learnt his trade at Ludovichi's in Sydney. He set up a bootmaker/repair shop in Camden, and was the only shoemaker in town at the time. His business started to prosper in the early days but, as the Depression era began, he found he could no longer afford to keep his business going. He then moved to a shed at the back of our home at 3 John Street, where he would repair the shoes/boots of the servicemen parachuting into the airfield not far from the house.

During the Depression, life was difficult. I can still remember my father going to the police station to get 'food relief'. He would get a 10 shilling food relief ticket and we would have food in the house once again.

Frank Stuckey at the local Bakery was the kindest man I had ever known. He always had a kindly word to say to me as he wrapped the loaf of bread for me to take home to my mother. Sometimes he would even give me a small fruit bun to eat on my way home.

The Camden Public School was just up the road from where I lived. I was an inquisitive child, and one day when I was only two and a half I wandered into the classroom of Miss Thornton. She invited me to take a seat, and from then, I began my schooling. I remember she gave me some coloured pencils to draw with.

Rev. Dr. Clyde Morton Dominish AM
1926-2017



*Clyde Morton Dominish
(Circa 1928)*



*Clyde Morton Dominish Aged 10
(1936)*



CLASS OF '36

• This picture of combined 4th and 5th grades from Camden Public School in 1936 will no doubt revive memories for several long term residents of the region.

Front row: Enid Barrett, Elaine McEwan, Pauline Hansen, Doreen Farden, M. Richer, Lola Wheeler, Eileen Holly, Phyllis Dowle;

Second row: Joan Goodman, Helen Barnes, Leila Mills, M. Grant, Doris Bradford, Margaret Smart, Betty Staniforth, Shirley Roberts, Gwen Eldred;

Third row: Joan Hutchinson, Myra Gander, Valda Clissold, Heather Murdock, Shirley Doust, Muriel Keith, Margaret Brooker, Phyllis Watson, Pat Sidman, Betty Channel;

Fourth row: Roy Henderson, Jack Dunk, Lester Peck, Don Tildsley, Fred Rideout, Jim Curtis, Mr. Garner (Teacher), R. Rooth, Clyde Dominish;

Fifth (back) row: Ken Gibson, John Hunter, Jim Smith, Norman Channel, F. Warren, Bill Stibbard, Cecil Smith, Philip Haylock, Les Kelloway, Bert Allen, Fred Straney.



*Elmo Morton Dominish outside his Bootmaker shop Argyle St, Camden
(Circa 1930)*



3 John Street, Camden NSW