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Fares Please! Retired Transport Workers' Oral History Project

Interview with Spencer Gilchrist Biographical Notes and Timed Summary

Background

Spencer was born in Campbelltown New South Wales in 1931 and grew up around Manly and the northern beach suburbs of Sydney. He left school when he was about 14, around the end of the Second World War, and after working in various local jobs joined the Royal Australian Air Force. He served as a Steward and reached the rank of Sergeant before he left the Force.

One of Spencer's many postings in the Air Force was to Canberra for about 12 months in 1949. At this time he met his future first wife and after two years in Darwin, he left the Air Force and returned to Canberra to get married. During the 1950s and 60s he worked for the Canberra Steam Laundry, Dunlops, the Canberra Workers Club and BP. Several of these jobs involved driving. Spencer joined the Transport Department, starting in the Trucks section on 22 September 1970, and retiring from his position as bus driver at the age of 79, 23 December 2010 – 40 years and one day since he started. His move to Transport took place after the death of his first wife. He married again in the early 1970s.

Spencer's first work at Transport was driving a Bedford tipping truck mainly doing work for Parks and Gardens but he soon took up the opportunity to train as a bus driver. He started on the Ainslie route working from Kingston Depot and then worked from Belconnen Depot. For many years he had a permanent shift on one of the three buses featuring images of dinosaurs. His bus was no. 967 and he was fondly referred to as 'the dinosaur driving the dinosaur'.




HMSS 0367 "Fares, Please!", Retired ACT Transport Employees Club Oral History Project

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Over the time of his employment, Spencer received commendations for his courtesy as a bus driver and was awarded a Customer Service Award. On his retirement a fellow driver put together an album which includes his certificates and commendations.

Spencer's work for Transport, starting before the ACTION period and continuing until the end of 2010, spans a period of expansion and changes in management in ACT Transport as well as changes in the workforce more generally. His interview provides a glimpse of changing attitudes to work, including the employment of women in this area of the workforce, but he sees the work of driving as remaining the same, whatever organisational changes might take place. His interview also highlights issues of retiring after a lifetime of work and, through his long experience of working in Canberra, reflects changes in Canberra itself.

The interview was conducted at Spencer's home in Downer and includes looking through the album made for Spencer on his retirement by a fellow driver.

Note that details of Spencer's Customer Service Award were not found in his album and not recorded. A photocopy of this would be a good addition to the interview.

Interview Summary

Track one	0:20:33
0:00:00	Introduction. Birth and family background. Joining the Air Force. First experience of Canberra. Return to Canberra and jobs in Canberra: Canberra Steam Laundry, Dunlops, Canberra Workers Club, BP.
0:05:05	Joining Transport. Previous driving experience. Circumstances of getting job in Transport. Starting in trucks – driving Bedford for Parks and Gardens.
0:10:29	Trucks to bus driving. Training details. Ainslie routes. Various arrangements of shifts and runs between Kingston Depot and Ainslie from set shifts to varied runs. Work as a 'spare'.
0:15:21	Retirement at 79. Changes over time: truck management; Department of Interior to ACTION; depots. First work at Kingston and then Belconnen. Reputation as a bus driver. Permanent shift and bus 967. Impact of organisational change from permanent shift and bus. Relationship with mechanics.
0:20:33	END
Track 2	0:12:48
0:00:00	People at Transport and early supervisors. Women drivers. Union membership and issues. Strikes and stop work meetings. Fortnight's strike in early 1970s.
0:05:00	Management of arguments between workers. Changes in management. Nicknames. Memories of mechanics. Physical separation between different sections and jobs.
0:12:48	END
Track 3	0:25:13



0:00:00	Looking through album made on retirement. Shifts and timetables. Depot managers. Belconnen Depot. Canteen provision
0:05:00	Bus cleaning. Staff profile of Spender in ACTION Newsletter 2005. ACT Customer Service Award. Earlier and later practices of cashing in process and practical jokes this involved. Spencer's retirement barbecue. Workmates. Other areas of depot. Bus washing. Certificates and commendations. Driving for 'specials' and school runs.
0:14:47	Certificates and commendations. <i>Canberra Times</i> article 'An ACTION dinosaur who still can't see the end of the road'. [looking for customer service award details – not found]
0:20:37	Reflections on and experience of retirement. Lack of contact with former workmates. Different attitudes to work of more recent employees. Changes in Canberra – especially growth of suburbs. Work on 1950s building projects.
0:25:13	END



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