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Fares Please! Retired Transport Workers' Oral History Project

Interview with Jene Baker
Biographical Notes and Timed Summary



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

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Interviewee: Mrs. Dorothy Jene Baker

Occupation: bus conductor (1941-1943)

Year of birth: 1916

Name of Interviewer:... Barry York

Number of Minutes: Track 1 is 36:36; track 2 is 32:14

Date: 15 January 2010

Restrictions on Use: None

Biographical summary: Dorothy Jene (known as Jene) Baker was born at Marrickville, New South Wales, on 10 April, 1916. She worked as a bus conductor in Canberra from 1941 to 1943.

Counter (time)	Subject matter
00:00 Track 1	Introduction by interviewer; Mrs. Baker responds to question about family background; parents were English; father first came to Canberra around 1914; father (John Harold Saunders) worked as groomsmen for General William Throsby Bridges at Duntroon; father then worked as fireman in Sydney; mother was "in service" with Lady and Sir William Cooper (and came to Australia with them from England); Jene recalls her schooling in Canberra at Telopea Park; recalls Canberra "back then"; father employed as a driver by Sir John Butters of the Federal Capital Commission; recalls initial accommodation in 1925 (Hotel Ainslie); first house (workmen's cottage in Acton); row of 15 cottages since demolished because of 'the lake'.
06:30	Describes Canberra in late 1920s; recalls Prime Minister Stanley Bruce opening the Commonwealth Bank in Canberra; recalls attendance at opening of provisional Parliament House in 1927; further description of old Canberra; more about Telopea Park school; then went to Ainslie school (as she lived north of Lennox Crossing); wanted to be a typist; father worked with Transport Section (Department of Interior) during the Depression; Jene left school aged 15 during the Depression; looked after baby sister while mother was in Sydney for surgery; father only worked one week in three during Depression.
14:15	Had to leave school (five children in family); went to work at the Hotel Canberra (now the Hyatt); unable to become typist; moved house from Acton to Kingston; memories of the Depression in Canberra; recalls Assyrian hawker in Canberra during Depression; mother made bread during Depression; recalls swagmen from Sydney, Queanbeyan and Yass; occasionally saw Aboriginal people in Canberra back then (Aboriginal settlement at Yass).
18:55	Father's work for Transport Section (as Leading Hand); recalls others at Kingston Depot; resided near Kingston Powerhouse; father also drove Members of Parliament; father retired around 1953 (was in full employment with Transport Section from 1933).

22:04	Jene talks about her own employment in Canberra (first worked for the Commissariat in hotels); joined the Transport Section during World War Two in February or March 1941; among the first three women so employed; married in 1938; husband (Jack), a fireman, enlisted in Army; father suggested employment in Transport Section; husband from Musselbrook, New South Wales; recalls her rate of pay as a conductor; attitude of the men to the introduction of women on the buses.
28:14	Other women on the buses during the War; Mrs. Baker retired from Transport Section after three years as she was pregnant; husband returned from War and rejoined Fire Brigade; husband in ill-health and Jene obtained work as a teacher's assistant at Telopea Park school.
33:40	Responds to question about first day as a bus conductor; recalls bus route, hours of work and tasks; money bag and tickets; the women made their own uniforms (due to war-time rations).
36:36 End of Track 1	End of Track 1
00:00 Track 2	Track 2: . Continues talking about uniforms for female conductors; work breaks at Kingston Depot; cost of tickets; extent of use of buses; school runs.
05:40	Bus routes back then; shifts; relationship with passengers; recalls trouble with American servicemen on the buses.
10:03	Canberra was "dry" back then; memories of Cowper Street shelter; Campbell Street depot; would have tea-break in the bus.
14:03	Joined the Transport Workers Union; recollects attitude of the then president of the union toward women in the union; walked out of meeting; union leader later became a reconciliation commissioner; recollection of buses in Canberra prior to her years working on them; Barton buses.
19:02	Residences in Canberra and bus stops; memories of going to school by bus from Acton; in 1925 bus would drive through the Molonglo River (prior to Lennox Crossing bridge being built); couldn't go to school when river flooded; Kaye's dairy; popularity of Queanbeyan as a shopping centre back then.
23:41	Relationship among the workers in the transport industry ("a good group to work with"); growth of Canberra during War years; grew in "leaps and bounds" and "became very social" after the War.
27:44	Opinion about the future of the Kingston Depot.
32:14	End of track 2 END OF INTERVIEW