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Fares Please! Retired Transport Workers' Oral History Project

Interview with Eddie Vestjens
Biographical Notes and Timed Summary

Background

Eddie Vestjens was a bus driver for ACTION from 1987 until 2010. He was born in a small town near Amsterdam in Holland in 1954. His family migrated to Australia in 1956 and came directly to Canberra where Eddie's Auntie was already living. Eddie's father got a job with the CSIRO working with wildlife and although he was not trained as a scientist his knowledge and experience were respected within and beyond the CSIRO during his long employment there.

Eddie had one sister, born in Australia in 1957. He went to school at St Mary's in Civic and then to St Bridget's in Davenport Street Ainslie when it opened in 1959. In 1963 he went to High School at Daramalan College in Dickson and left after completing year 12 in 1972.

Eddie's first work after school was as a labourer for a Sydney company putting in traffic lights in Canberra. After the company went broke he got a job at David Mackay's hardware store in Mort Street. After working there for about 18 months he began work at the Canberra Airport with TAA. He started as a baggage handler and then became a clerical worker in the cargo section. He left TAA after 13 years when he got a job as a bus driver for ACTION in 1987. After he was diagnosed with Depression in 2005/6, he worked part-time. He took a redundancy in 2009 at the age of 55.

Eddie married in 1977. He has two daughters and now lives with his second partner.



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

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Eddie has had little sustained contact with his home country. He and his mother and sister lived there for a year in 1962 while his father worked for the CSIRO at Macquarie Island, and he decided at that time that he didn't like it. His father considered returning there in 1975 but largely due to Eddie's mother, he decided against it. Eddie's father died of lung cancer a few years later in 1979. A further tragedy for Eddie was his sister's suicide not longer after their mother's death in 2004.

After his mother's death Eddie discovered that her experience of migration was referred to in *The Dutch down Under 1606-2006*.

Eddie has had a passionate interest in flying since discovering the airport as a teenager riding his bike around Canberra. He learned to fly after leaving school and for some years had his own plane.

Eddie's interview records working for ACTION from just before ACT self government in 1989 through to the present. It covers changes in the management of ACT Transport and industrial changes including the move to Enterprise Bargaining and the diminishing role of the Transport Union in the workplace.

The interview took place at Eddie's home in Kaleen.

Track 2 0:36:04	
0:00:00	Introduction. Birth and family background in Holland including father's World War 2 experience. Decision to migrate to Australia and process of migration. First accommodation in Canberra when arrived in 1956, including sharing a house with a Polish family in a Riley Newsum house in Fairbridge Crescent Ainslie. Story of how father got his job at CSIRO.
0:05:20	Details of father's work with wildlife and promotion to Experimental Officer. Schooling in Canberra at St Mary's, St Brigid's and Daramalan. Mother's experience of migration. Return to Holland for a year in 1962.
0:10:06	1962 experience in Holland. Return to Australia. Father's interest in returning to Holland. Father's death in 1979. Work after leaving school. Interest in work at airport from teenage years. Work for TAA.
0:15:12	Decline of work in cargo for TAA with loss of domestic air freight as a result of the Hume Highway upgrade in mid 1980s. Process of getting job at ACTION. Early work and training. Receipt of bus driving license February 1988. Training details including interruption by Instructors' strike
0:20:15	Driving training including learning the runs. License test and paperwork. First shifts. Move to Network 88 shift system with weekly alternation of night and day shifts. Working permanently from Belconnen Depot. Various runs on shifts around Belconnen. Closure and reopening of Woden depot.



0:24:59	Typical daily routine. System of having your own bus and methods of keeping this for weekend work. Loss of cleaning time for drivers results in losing own bus system in 1990s. Issues of bus cleanliness since then and contrast between new approach and old days of taking pride in your own bus.
0:29:15	Changes in ACTION in 1990s because of the need to save money: longer runs, less time between runs and resulting stress for drivers. Advent of Enterprise Bargaining and change from compulsory to non- compulsory union membership. Lack of support through EBA when ill. Decision to leave. Difficulty in getting Depression diagnosed and issues contributing to Depression. Recent diagnosis of Diabetes and driving regulations concerning Diabetes.
0:36:04	END
Track 2 0:28:16	
0:00:00	Changes in industrial relations. Enterprise Bargaining Agreements and beginning of part-time shifts. Own move to part-time work in 1997. Enjoyment of morning shift. Lack of light duty options. Earlier strikes and management of disputes since Enterprise Bargaining.
0:04:01	Changes in work environment during 1990s. New training system involving recruitment of drivers through agency and initial part-time employment. Wages. From friendly work environment to not knowing each other. End of work barbecues and get together at work. Change in driver attitudes to work. Different depots. Changes in system for collecting fares and tickets and management of money collected.
0:09:18	Aspects of job enjoyed most. Relationship with passengers including school children. Difficult aspects of job. Women's employment as bus drivers.
0:15:07	Issues concerning women drivers. Memories of supervisors and drivers. Practical jokes and stories. Different nationalities in the workforce. Retirement after 22 years. Acknowledgments of service. Last day at work.
0:20:50	Occupational health and safety issues for drivers. Reflection on work. Enjoyment of first 15 years. Changes in work environment. Nicknames
0:24:44	Changes in Canberra. Teenage years as member of youth group. Rural quality of 1950s. Growth of suburbs. Long term residence of Kaleen. Retirement plans.
0:28:16	END

