

## **Ashlea's Memories of Camden Toastmasters**

**The Flyer** – In my letterbox, here in Carrington Village was a flyer announcing the fact that a Toastmasters Club had been proposed for the Village and the first meeting was to be held on such and such a date. All residents were invited to attend.

*What on earth is a Toastmasters Club*, I thought and threw the flyer into the bin.

I was in my late sixties at the time and being a very shy person, I was not one to frequent clubs.

A couple of weeks passed and one morning I received an unexpected phone call from our Village Manager, Helen Lanyon. *I hope you are coming to our inaugural meeting of Toastmasters tonight*, she said, in a “No Nonsense” tone of voice – and I didn’t have the nerve to say, *I have no intention of coming*.

I later heard that Helen was a member of the Campbelltown Toastmasters Club and she was of the opinion that a Club here in our Village would be a wonderful interest for the Residents.

**The Inaugural Meeting** – The meeting was held in the old Paling Court section of Carrington. A group of Campbelltown Toastmasters had driven here to explain how a Toastmasters meeting is conducted.

When Table Topics was introduced, I wished I could slip quietly down under the table so I wouldn’t be asked a question.

The Campbelltown people attended regularly and were most helpful and encouraging and the Club was officially formed a few months later, members mostly being Carrington residents.

Jock Wylie was elected as our first President. He was an ideal choice. A man accustomed to working on Committees.

Our first Treasurer accepted the position reluctantly and when she was advised that it was time to collect the semi-annual dues, she protested strongly saying *You can't expect me to ask people for money*, and resigned forthwith.

Nearing the first Christmas of our club, I wrote a humorous Christmas story about Santa getting his beard caught in a winch and presented it as a speech.

The following day, Village Manager Helen phoned and asked if I would give that speech as part of the entertainment at the annual Carrington Christmas dinner.

The Village was much smaller then. Even so there would have been approximately 160 people present. It was another challenge for me.

**The First Changeover Meeting** – Besides being a member of the Campbelltown Club, Helene Buckman also joined Camden Toastmasters as our club was named. She was a very experienced Toastmaster and she asked me if I would stand for President. I protested strongly, telling her that I was too inexperienced to hold such a position. However she assured me that I would receive any guidance I needed to carry out the role and so I reluctantly became the second President and I must admit – enjoyed the experience.

The first couple of Changeover functions were held at a little café in the Picton area called “Over the Road” – so called because so many times when visitors called to see the Proprietor, whose home was opposite the café, they would be told, *Oh, he's over the road!*

I remember four of the Changeovers were held in Toastmasters private homes, one in a Camden Hotel (very noisy) and a few in the Coffee Shop in Camden. Then it was decided to hold them in the newly built meeting room.

**Speechcraft** – Jock Wylie and I arranged with the Principal of Picton High School to conduct Speechcraft sessions in the school. This was an arm of Toastmasters. We would drive down to Picton each week. From memory, I think we conducted two groups of children and it was very rewarding to see the children grow in confidence.

Other Toastmasters conducted such courses in other schools. Sue Davis and Leonie Jackson for example, and courses were held for adults as well.

For a time, Jock and I also attended meetings in Moss Vale as the club there was struggling to meet the 20 members required to officially become a Toastmasters Club.

We found that the members there were conducting their roles in a slipshod manner, so unlike our Camden members.

**A Carrington House Member** – There was only one person who became a Toastmaster from the Carrington Hostels and her name was Shirley Clarke. She had been the Post Mistress in the little town of Douglas Park in her working life.

I would call for her each meeting night and drive her to Paling Court. She began working her way through the Competent Communicator manual, regaling us with hilarious stories about the goings on in the hostel by some of the residents.

She had given her ninth speech when she was informed that she had only a short time to live.

Shirley was determined to give her tenth speech as so earn her Competent Communicator award – her CC.

I was advised when she was ready to give that speech. A nurse helped her into my car and I drove up to Paling Court. The agenda was altered so she was able to give her speech as soon as she entered the room. Of course she was given a standing ovation. She bade the Toastmasters farewell, then I drove her back to the hostel, having earned the most deserving of CCs. She passed away 9 days later.

**Fishers Ghost Festival** – Our Club was invited to submit an entry into the Fishers Ghost Parade to promote Toastmasters.

Charles Dunn was carrying a sign which read *Spooked by Public Speaking – Join Toastmasters*.

I was seated in a wheelchair with my arm in a sling and looking as if I had been in an accident with a Campbelltown Toastmaster standing behind me with a sign *Toastmasters is Not This Painful*.

**Special Occasions** – We enjoyed many Special theme nights over the years. One such night was a Court Room scene, complete with Judge, Jury, the Accused etcetera.

Our librarian Toastmaster introduced poetry in her Table Topics questions as it was Book Week.

There was a *Back to School* night. I borrowed one of my grand-daughter's Camden High School dresses. Yes I could fit into it!

At a Speech Contest, held at Paling Court with winners from other Clubs visiting, we ladies, checking the arrivals, were dressed in ancient Roman type garb.

During Melbourne Cup time, at our meeting, we held The Camden Cup. Ladies attended wearing decorated hats and some of the men arrived in sporty attire.

When I was the Table Topics master at one such meeting, I tacked horsey photos on the fronts of the tables and called each member either a horse or a jockey, then asked a question of the “horse”, then a “jockey”.

**The Special Occasions Night to Top them** all – was the wedding of Dave to his fiancé, Mabel. “Dad and Dave” was a humorous radio serial (before television).

Millions were glued to the radio each week night to listen to the joys, trials and tribulations of the Rudd Family and their neighbours in an imaginary farming community.

Toastmaster Jean Reid, the bride Mabel, was beautifully attired in a white wedding dress, whilst the groom, our dear Jock Wylie, in younger days (he died last year aged 97) look a real “hayseed” wearing a tattered straw hat with crumpled trousers, at half mast.

The Father of the bride, Gordon Stewart, in contrast, was dressed immaculately in suit, tie and hat.

As one of the guests, I wore a black fur stole over a blue dress, small black hat, knee high stockings with bare legs showing above. It was an hilarious night.

**My Favourite Speeches** – I have heard many wonderful speeches during my time in Toastmasters. Informative, touching, serious and humorous and I have met many wonderful people.

Two speeches in particular – the ones I remember best – were given by Jock Wylie and Charles Dunn.

At a Humorous Speech Contest at another Club, Jock told of his reasons for considering that God had made a few errors when He designed *the cow*. Having been reared as a country boy, I considered he was well qualified to present such a speech.

The second was given by Charles Dunn, He presented it at another Humorous Speech Night, in our own Club Room. He had a table filled with props and he recited *The Man from Snowy River*. He would snatch up a prop, quickly put it down, snatch up another prop – and so on. It was a belly laugh from go to woe. Unfortunately Charles was disqualified for not declaring that he was not the author of the poem and furthermore his speech ran overtime.

**My Personal History** – I have taken part in all the different Speech Contests over time, both in our own Club and have progressed to speaking in other levels of Toastmasters on occasions.

My favourite contest is the Humorous, followed by Tall Tales which is no longer contested at higher levels, although we have held a Tall Tales Contest, just in our own Club.

On two occasions I have won at our own Club in the Humorous and have progressed to the Area, then District Levels, through to the finals. Firstly with the speech “My Friend Bertha” and secondly with “Nearly Ninety”.

The finals for “My Friend Bertha” were held in Wollongong in 1998. I asked grandson Benjamin Reece if he would drive me. He was a Learner driver at the time and happily agreed.

At the dinner the Toastmasters and guests made a great fuss of him and he was presented with a Toastmasters ribbon for “Driving his Grandmother” to the Contest.

The finals for the “Nearly Ninety” speech were held in Batemans Bay in 2016. I said to my somewhat anti-social son David *Would you drive me to Batemans Bay for the weekend, I have to take part in a Speech Contest.*

*Oh I don't know about that!* He replied. Daughter-in-Law Janice immediately said *Of Course we will.*

I booked the newly renovated motel for our overnight accommodation which was over the road from the Club where the Contest was to be held.

At dinner Jan and David chatted easily with the other guests at our table. (Previously they had only heard me give the eulogies at Family funerals!)

I did not gain a place in either final Contest, however I enjoyed the experiences enormously.

When David was bringing in my overnight bag when we arrived back in Camden, he said *I really enjoyed the weekend. Thank you Mum.*

Toastmasters has opened up many interesting and unusual experiences that I would otherwise never have known. I am so grateful to Helen Lanyon for insisting that I attend that inaugural meeting of Camden Toastmasters.