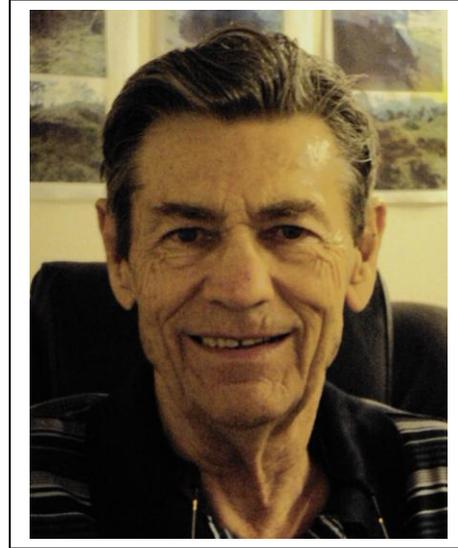


George and Gloria Ashman

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Interviewer: Margaret Cook



I joined the mining industry when I left school in 1950. I was about 15 and I was going to go on to College. I was in the Boy Scouts and Ted Dixon, who was connected with the Boy Scouts, was looking for a young man for the mine office. He offered me a job at Rhondda. I was from a big family, so my father really encouraged me to take the job, because we needed the money.

Following that I embraced a lot of evening education, studying accountancy at the Technical College. Every day I went to work I learnt a lot and at night I studied a lot of business at College.

For the first few days at Rhondda, Peter Robinson shepherded me around. He was in the office at the mine part.

I worked in the town office quite often and there were a number of us including Donny Barrett and Frank Murphy. Rhondda steadily grew until they had three, four and finally five clerks in the office.

The town office was Mining and Hardware, Ipswich Suppliers, in the main street (Brisbane Street). It was like a big hardware

store and sold mining and hardware supplies. Naturally they supplied a lot of supplies to Rhondda and others. The offices were above the ground floor.

When we were working at the mines, the Manager that ran the office in Brisbane Street, occasionally he'd come out to the mine and see how we were going. We did what was required by the Managers and whatever was going at the time. We did what we were told, and as I've just said, occasionally someone would come along from Ipswich and just swap us around.

During that period when I was in Ipswich I had a bicycle and old Mr Haenke picked me as being the guy to go and get the mail each day. I'd wait around while he opened the mail. If he decided there was a little note to be sent back, he'd want me to go back to the office and give it to someone – a clerk's job. And he picked me to do that. I'd use my bike and I'd run down town for him on messages.

I used to ride out to Rockton and to the Rhondda mines from my home at One Mile. I was pretty fit and I played sport at night when I wasn't at College.

I worked at Rhondda until 1963. Then I saw an opportunity to broaden myself, and I left for a job with an American company and I moved on. Gloria and I and our children, all lived overseas for periods.

We saw the buildings at Cooneana being built in 1962/3, because we lived at Redbank just off the main road, in a little workers' cottage. We saw the main building being built, so George said, "When that building's finished, I'm going to apply for a job there." I said, "Don't do that. We're so settled here. You're at Rhondda. I mean, you've got a job here for life." They were lovely, the bosses.

Max Hertrick was the Senior Clerk. He was Manager as such. Then others came on board, but I felt it was time to move on so I told Gloria to just have faith in me, and we'd go and work in the USA for awhile. That's how it went. I ended up Vice President of the International Division of the company.

Interviewer: What were the tasks in the Rhondda office?

Coal wagons would come up from the mine in preparation for loading to the Queensland Railway for weighing and invoicing before being sent to the prospective buyers.

Once all the coal wagons were weighed, whoever was on duty would have to go down and take a cheque and write notes, and process the right payment from the people that were buying. Then we'd have to turn them into dollars. We took them into town or into the office at the minesite, if that's where the work was being done at that time. Most of the heavy billings were done in town.

We were responsible for pays. We always had to have an escort from the Police Department on payday. You had to go and

pick them up and drive them. People were still paid by cash in envelopes. We used to hand it out at the door. A door (painted green) was cut in the office door and we handed the pays out like a bank teller.

One thing I did before I left Rhondda was getting involved in developing the equipment. We introduced the Kalamazoo System which was very modern for its time. It was an accounting system. The Kalamazoo system was installed partly at Rhondda, partly in town, depending on what they did. Before we had the Kalamazoo system it was the old ledgers and we'd write everything in them. Kalamazoo was like an early computer system.

Rhondda got busier and there were things happening all the time around the place. There were salesmen coming in because Rhondda technically was up and going and selling a lot. They had mechanised a lot of their equipment. Mechanics would come along and do the big machinery, and that's where the work was happening.

The machine was the size of half the room. We still had to do a lot of pencil work in entering, but the system was set up. It was the transition between the old ledgers and the book work to the computerisation.

Then all that came with the equipment we used. We picked up the weights from the Queensland Railway weigh-bridges. We had to have trust in the Railways, but it all came together, you know. In the office we were doing the best we could for the company.

Interviewer: Who were your main buyers of coal?

It was processed and bought by the Bacon Factory on the Darling Downs. Queensland Railway was still buying coal.

Then after that there were quite a few new people that came in to the company because there were a lot more people being recruited. Different levels of people being brought in, tutored and growing with the company. They opened the open cut mines. We needed more staff.

I remember when I was in town all of the owners would come and sit in the room that there wasn't really any sitting place sometimes, and there were meetings going on at Rhondda. I didn't get to know Mr Haenke as much as I would have liked to, because he was a real gentleman. Mr Haenke was aging in this period, but he was a nice man. He didn't say much. Unfortunately old Mr Haenke died a very short period after I started work.

Peter Dixon took over. He was a bit of a character. Willis Haenke took over from his father and tended to get more involved in the day to day stuff and even in coal mining areas. He watched what was going on. Some owners tended to muck around and sit around the office area and see what was going in there day by day. Whereas Mr Willis Haenke, he would have said something if they were slacking off, like 'We'd better get together and talk a bit more about this.'

Willis Haenke would come out to the mines. As a result, more office space was needed, so I was given the job of getting some quotes to enlarge the office so the owners could say yes or no.

At the time an employee took one payment at time and then stepped away. The next guy came up – too many, some crook could take the money and go, quick. So they cut the paymaster's door in half, and it's still cut in half.

Emerys Jones passed away. Then there was a bit of instability for awhile. When Mr Jones died, his son Gwyn came in. out of the railway.

He worked in the railways as a hands on man. He used to get down and watch, do some work. Gwyn Jones, he became very interested in it with his father and they were going to the office. They had two or three people stay in that office (the long one) and they had many meetings. They really started to take a big interest day by day. But I was gone, soon after.

Interviewer: So it sounds like Willis Haenke really did build the place again, got it together again?

Yes, as time goes by. Mr Dixon, he controlled it strong and worked very hard for the real owners.

Gloria: His name was Ted Dixon. He was the Secretary.

Interviewer: He was the Company Secretary?

Yes, he got me the job.

Interviewer: So he remained the Company Secretary the whole time you were here?

He did, yes. Some things happened while we were living overseas. When we came home on leave, we liked to talk to people that were still working here, but Mr Haenke, Willis, he took an interest but it was a – he had shops in Brisbane, different things, and so he came and went. But he spent more time I think than what he had prior to enlarging the office. And, you know, they were accepted round the industry, that they had really implanted themselves.

Interviewer: They were a big company.

Yes, and as a result they ended on Boards of the Coal Mining Owners' Association.

Ted Dixon was like a manager. There seemed to be a trend in that Peter Dixon, the son came. I don't know why there was a mix-up in the office side of it, but there was, and they hired a guy from outside to do a lot of the office stuff.

But there was a time when the Office Manager, he resigned and, well, maybe they decided that they parted friends – I don't know.

Gloria: I think this Mr Dixon wanted to bring his son in and the others didn't like it, and a couple left, I think. I think that's what it was.

Peter Dixon became friends before he went off to university, and he came back for the 50th Anniversary. I don't know if you were aware that they had a big 50th for Rhondda. They had people from near and far around, the newspaper was out there snapping it away, and it was a great thing.

(Tape 2)

And Peter and I were invited, had to stay out of the way, but Peter and I got together. I had only been working for Rhondda for about four or five weeks, so we went down to the back. The marquee was out in the front, and we hid. All the day we kept away, but we got a couple of cigars out of the back there, you know, and we're out there---

Gloria: And there's another story about Rhondda, about a bottle of whiskey that only came out at certain times. What was that?

I had to make sure that those drinks were in the cupboard for when Willis Haenke dropped in.

While I was overseas I kept in contact with the place. I remained friends with Max Hedrick – he just died recently – and Peter Robinson throughout his whole life, you know. We were away for 15 years, but I kept in touch and some people would come and visit with us. We got some good friendships out of that, because we lived at Ebbw Vale, which wasn't too far from the mines. And in town as well.

Interviewer: So did you have much to do with the men, staff men?

Yes, staff. The company were good. They tended to make sure there was a spread of us keeping on top, while they give the chance to other people.

Gloria: And what about when you first went to it – they still had the horses in the pits?

Oh, yes. There were still horses in the pit – but they were phasing out. Underground mining was phasing out.

Interviewer: So how many men worked here when you were at Rhondda?

25 men worked at the mine. It was all manual. Towards the end it was getting a bit more mechanical, but they used to have to load the wagons coming out from Spitfire, and they would move them around and tip them off and get them moved along to the pit head, you know. You know, up in here they had railway tracks wheeling it and tipping it up there, and it went into planning and that. By the time I had moved to the

USA, they no longer needed it, because the open cut had taken it up.

Gloria: You were always also the Ambulance man.

Yes, at the pit, because I had clean hands and the little shed they had there, so I'd be called for. So I said, "Hey, I should get a little bit extra pay for, you know, me going and doing the exams for my First Aid training, and they went along with paying for my training.

I did a couple of different things at night time, you know, different courses.

Interviewer: Were you still riding your bike out here when you finished?

Gloria: No. He graduated to a little truck, and then he used to take another bloke, so he paid him petrol money.

Yes, we had about four in that first utility, which paid the payments.

Gloria: That was when we were first married, and money was pretty short.

Interviewer: What sort of wages did you earn?

I can't remember. The electrical people were coming in, too, and they were right ahead of the clerical.

Interviewer: You weren't in a union?

No. Just before leaving the Company I joined the Coal Miners Clerical Association. You were forced to join a Union and that was one of the reasons I thought it was something to get out of.

Gloria: I can't remember how much you made. I know we were pretty poor.

We lived in that time and I was always looking for a way to make a little bit of extra money.

The most important thing, or one of the most important, was that I stayed and I think I was called for National Service. I got called up, and then when it was finished I joined up voluntarily and stayed on, and then studied and got onto a Captaincy in the Army.

(End of Recording)