

Interview with Mr William Wehner of Waverley Street.
Conducted August 1984 by D. J. Runnacles.

I was born in 1905 in Westport in a private house belonging to Mrs Tommy Samuels, the maternity nurse. Her husband was the taxi driver. Her son was a great viloinist. My father was working in the mine at Seddonville, 30 miles from Westport. He was William Frederick Wehner.

By the time of the 1914 war he had come to Westport to work on the wharf.

My mother (nee White) died when I was seven days old and was buried at Mokbanui. I stayed with many different people. I was only 2½ pounds when I was born and I got boarded out. One ladies name was Mrs Smallbone. At another time I stayed with my maternal grandmother, but she died while I was still young. Her name was White.

I went to the State school at Westport. That was at the top end of town. My father married again after a few years. May Jansen her name was. I remember she took me, when I was about eight, up to the North Island for a holiday. I remember when it was time to go home we were travelling along on a horse and gig and the adults turned and I was gone. I'd jumped off. I hadn't wanted to go home.

My stepmother had three children - Les, Ernie and Hilda. We lived in Derby Street, Westport. During the First World War they sacked my father from the wharf because he was a German. So he took on painting. I was at school then.

There was a lot of that then. My first steady job was on a milk round in 1913 at Carter's Beach. I remember going into houses there when there were people lying stone dead of the "black flu'." A terrible lot of people died in Westport at the time. Dying like flies they were. Yet plenty of children including myself, were running around with no shoes on, with filthy gutters in the streets and we didn't get sick.

The milk round was before school in the morning and was by ladles, not bottles. I had a morning paper run for Atkins and Co. for a while too.

I left school at 14 and went to Karamea on the "Nile" an old tub, and worked on a farm for a couple of years.

Calligan's Bakery is now the oldest bakery in Westport. They supply Greymouth and Karamea as well now. Ryans used to be the oldest bakery back then. Tim, Pat and Jack Ryan ran it but it's out of business now. Jack Ryan taught me the banjo and mandolin.

I started at Syme's Bakery when I was 16 as an apprentice. I did my time there and then he went to Christchurch and I went there for a while too. I worked in Blenheim for a while and then by 1929 I was in Murchison.

Somewhere in there I worked at Calligan's. There were two brothers there. One is still alive in a big home near Carter's Beach. He must be in his 90's.

I remember seeing the old Newman's Cadillacs coming across the 'punt' on the Buller River about nine miles from Westport. Then when I was in Murchison they had the big earthquake. I was working at Les Hod(g)sons Bakery. Les Hodgson's father had a grocers shop at Wakefield.

I used to do a lot of shooting while I lived at Murchison. Sometimes I went on my own, sometimes with Phil Bonis or with other jokers. But Phil Bonis must have been the best pig shooter. Him and Bob Terry and I went shooting a lot. Phil Bonis had great dogs and was a great bushman. No matter how thick the bush, he could always bring you back to where you started from.

The first time I came to Nelson was in 1930. I couldn't get a job so I went back to Westport and worked in the bakehouse again.

Adam Days Bakery was the first bakery I worked on in Nelson. He had two bakeries. One a bread bakery and one a cake bakery. I managed the bread bakery for

a while before it was bought out. Ken Hart from Motueka learnt his trade there at Day's Bakery while I was still there. He's still there at Motueka.

After that I was working at Tapawera. I was married at this stage. We had our first child by the time I worked at Day's Bakery. My wife's name was Sarah Helen Kerr. Her family was from Wai-iti/Wakefield.

At that time I had just arrived in Nelson and was living at Wakefield.

I worked for Mick Howson at 'The Marina Tearooms,' where Louis Kerrs is now, next to Woolworths in Trafalgar Street. He had a bakery at the back of the tearooms. His tearooms were the only place open for food on a Sunday in Nelson then.

I had arrived in Nelson in the 1930's and walked up the main street looking for a job. People didn't want to know you if you came from the Coast. Mick Howson had a butcher's shop or two and the tearooms. Fairly regularly he drove out to Richmond in his van

and delivered meat free to the old age pensioners. He was a good hearted fellow though he liked to gamble a bit.

Later I was cooking at 'Kings Camp' at the old Golden Downs, not the new Golden Downs which is Tapawera. We boarded the workers for 22/6 (\$2.25) per week, while they were paid a 10/- (\$1.00) a day. No pay if it rained. That was while they planted the forest.

I worked for Max Hunter for a while at Kikiwa too. I've been about the place quite a bit. That was when they were putting in the hydro-electric plant. It was so cold then that I used to put the knives and forks in the oven so they could pick them up without freezing in the morning. I cooked for 25 men on a coal range no bigger than a modern domestic stove. I used to come to Nelson once a month. I used to drive a truck into town on my weekends off.

Then Max Hunter brought me into work for him at his yard in Richmond.

During World War II they were looking for tradesmen and if you were a tradesman working as a labourer or something other than your trade they 'man-powered' you as they called it, into the first available position in your trade. They put me to work in Freeman's Bakery, Nelson, near the Dominion Hotel. I was living in Washington Valley in a house I bought off B. B. Jones.

The first house I bought off B. B. Jones was in Seymour Avenue. People called him a shark but he always treated me very well.

He asked me how much I had in the bank and when I said £25 (\$50) he told me to leave £5 in the bank and take £20 round to him, and if ever I got into trouble to go and see him. So I got my house for £20 (\$40) deposit.

That was Noel Jones, the old man's son; he came and saw me when I was in hospital having my leg off and he's visited me since. B. B. Jones got his start from doing jobs like selling flowers from a wheelbarrow, so they tell me. I know he was a great

flower man. He built a lot of the houses up Vanguard Street but the government didn't want him to build too many houses up there and make too much money. So they stopped him and he got Bill Tidd, I think it was, to build them for him.

I got this house in the mid 1950's. Merv Rainey was already living next door when we came here. A traveller for Lever Brothers was living in the house before we bought it. But it was still owned by Stan Carston, a carpenter who used to work at Wilkes. That was who owned it before I bought it.

Mick Howson had his horse stables along where the Gladstone Road motor camp is and at the back in the row from the camp he had some paddocks. He often took his horses down to Richmond Park. He only had a few horses, not many anyway. But he was a great gambler. People can say what they like about Mick Howson but he was always a nice man.

I've seen him walk into the Railway Hotel and cut a pack of cards for £100. If he lost he'd say,

'I'll pay you tomorrow.' But generally he'd pay his debts. He was eventually fired and put out of racing over a horse doping incident. So he closed his stables down.

Sometime after, I think it would have been about a couple of years later, though I'm unsure of dates and times these days, he went bankrupt in Nelson and returned to Invercargill. Later on he went to Australia where he's a wool and skin buyer according to his own account. He and his wife live in a caravan and move round with his job. He came to visit me about the end of last year and we had a good yarn.

I bought the bakeshop in Richmond off an English baker, Gately. Very good he was too. Croucher's were still working in Richmond too. I'd been working with Gately for a while but his stuff was too flash for the locals who wouldn't buy it. It was him who showed me how to make these meringues that last indefinitely. You just keep them in a dry atmosphere like the hot water cupboard and they will last for another 20 years. These ones are over 20 years old already.

Anyway, so when he wanted to leave I bought the bakery off him. I ended up with ~~f~~^p6 and a bakery to my name. I had it about five years.

I always had a good relationship with the Health Inspector. From the start I'd told him I'd charge anything he said as soon as possible. The Health Inspector walked into my place one day and said 'I've got you this time,' he said 'you're wrapping your bread up in newspaper.' I told him that if he went upstairs he'd find last night's newspaper on the table and that's the only newspaper he'd find here.

Anyway he walked up to Croucher's and there on the bench was a whole pile of newspapers on it, cut up. The Health Inspector was a bit excited about all this but Albert told him, 'I don't wrap my bread up in newspaper. If my customers want to that's their business. I just leave the paper there for them if they want it.'

I always got on well with Albert Croucher. If ever he was short of bread he'd come over and borrow some, maybe 50 loaves at a time and he'd either return them the following day or pay for them if that was more convenient.

Jo Cross was Albert Croucher's baker and he was a real good sort of bloke; a good sense of humour. He tended to come out with a quick answer to make a joke out of anything anyone said.

It was funny but the only flour we weren't allowed here was Blenheim flour. They sent that all to Wellington. If you wanted any flour from Blenheim you had to get in touch with a baker in Blenheim and say 'get me a ton of flour will you?' and he'd store it in his place and you'd have to go over and get it.

Our flour came from Christchurch. It was controlled by the wheat board and for some reason we couldn't get flour from Blenheim. Though of course it was cheaper. A. S. Patterson were the local agents but the flour came from Christchurch.

Patterson's charged you top price as agents yet they never touched the flour at all. It was driven up from Christchurch and unloaded at the bakery and they never touched it. Sometimes they used to give you the bill before the wheat came and you had to pay it.

When I came here Bell Street wasn't there, let alone all the houses in the back there. It was all just paddocks and a bit swampy too.

While I was working in Nelson about 1930-40, I was working 60 hours a week for £4.7.6 (\$8.75). A bakers apprentice got 12/6 (\$1.25). We usually started at three in the morning and worked until three in the afternoon.

After that I sold the business to Max Lusty (Mavis' brother). I worked at the Stoke Bakery for many years.