

Ruby Lila Kwijas

**Born, raised and lived all her
life in Lilydale**

Research by Joy Gothe

Ruby Kwijas (nee Humphries) 1937-2019

Ruby was born Ruby Lila Humphries on 17 February 1937 at Lilydale Bush Nursing Hospital to Arthur Henry and Melba Maud Humphries.

She was the second eldest of 8 children, and the eldest girl so found herself always helping her mother with the chores from an early age.

As a child she lived and grew up in John Street Lilydale, and played in the “back paddock” where the Lilydale Marketplace Shopping Centre is now. This was a popular place with the children of the area for playing, celebrating Guy Fawkes Night, fishing and rabbiting.

Ruby completed her education and her schooling at Lilydale Primary School and the Lilydale Higher Elementary School.



06072 Ruby Humphries in front of the family's vegetable garden at 46 John Street Lilydale in 1955.

Working at the Lilydale Telephone Exchange

In February 1951 at the tender age of 14, after passing a spelling and arithmetic test, Ruby began work at the Lilydale Telephone Exchange as a trainee telephonist with the Post Master Generals Department, before taking on other jobs.

Ruby's training while at the P.M.G. was an interesting and busy time for her. Standard phrases had to be learnt, "Hello" was a real "no no," even though they were known as the "Hello" girls. Courtesy, service, speed and accuracy were paramount, followed by posture and punctuality.

There were five switchboards, and it was a manual exchange. To contact the operator the subscriber would first turn the handle briskly on their telephone then lift the receiver and wait for the telephonist's bright "number please?" response. At the switchboard they would see a hinged shutter drop down revealing the subscribers number, the girls would then plug into the corresponding jack, obtain the required number then connect with the corded plug and contact was made between parties.

Ruby's younger sister Claudia Humphries also became a telephonist and her brother Arthur worked on the counter for a short time.



Telephonists at Lilydale taken on the lawn just left of the Post Office about 1954. Left to right, Flo Burns (nee Cummings), Val Thomson, Ruby Humphries, Betty Davies. (Courtesy Ruby Kwijas)



06088 The Humphries home at 46 John Street, Lilydale in the 1968. The enclosed verandah had disappeared as the family had all grown up and left home.

Marriage and living in Lilydale

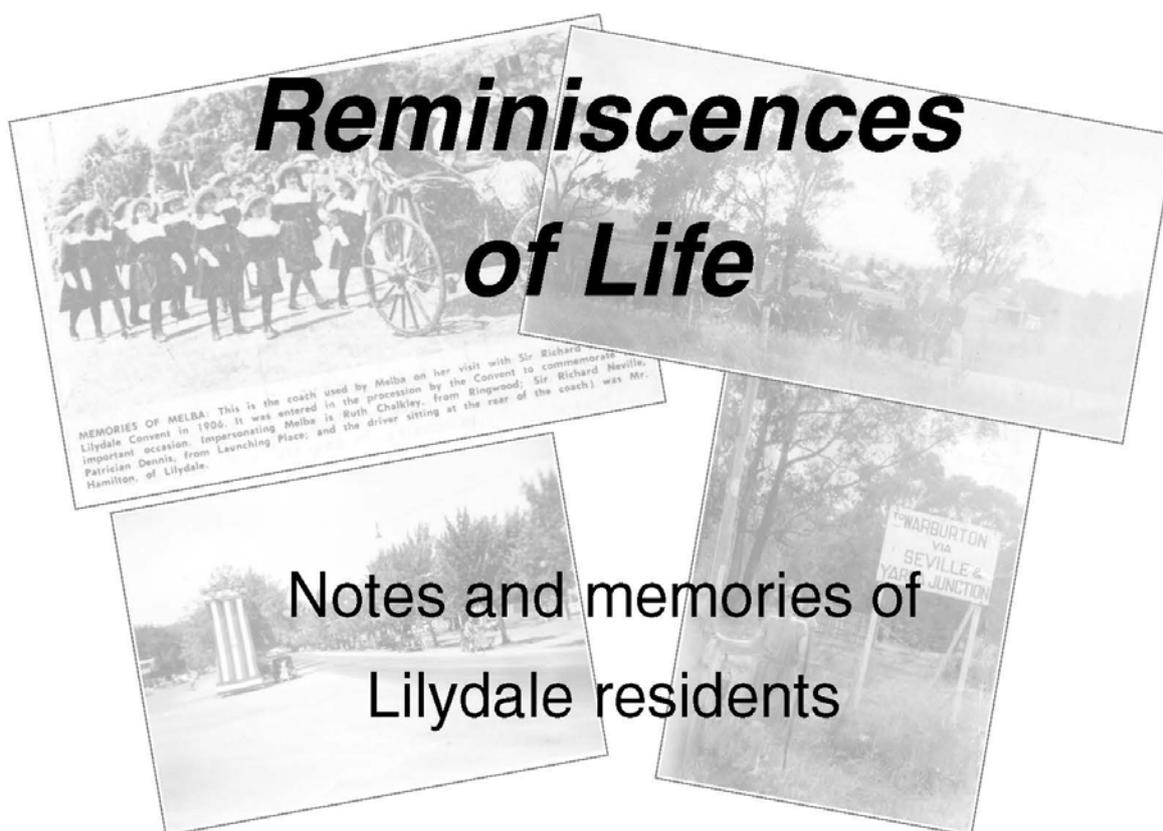
Ruby married in 1955 to Horst Kwijas who had immigrated to Australia in 1950 from Germany, they had met at the Lilydale Picture Theatre at the Athenaeum. Their son Andreas John Kwijas was born in 1956. They eventually made their permanent home in Victoria Road. From her front verandah, Ruby witnessed the winds of change of her beloved Lilydale – from a small country town Lilydale grew street by street and house by house to a big bustling town on the edge of the Yarra Valley.

A Love of History

In 1992 Ruby joined the Lilydale & District Historical Society at the persistence of Kath Davis a long time member. She started to learn a great deal about the history of her birthplace, its pioneering families and the significance and the stories behind the old buildings.

The society and the museum had been running series of successful Twilight tours of Lilydale Cemetery. Ruby soon became involved in conducting these tours and also organized day tours. Together with fellow member Keith Lithgow they produced Volumes 2 & 3 of our Lilydale Cemetery Tours Booklets featuring historic stories of important and renowned past residents.

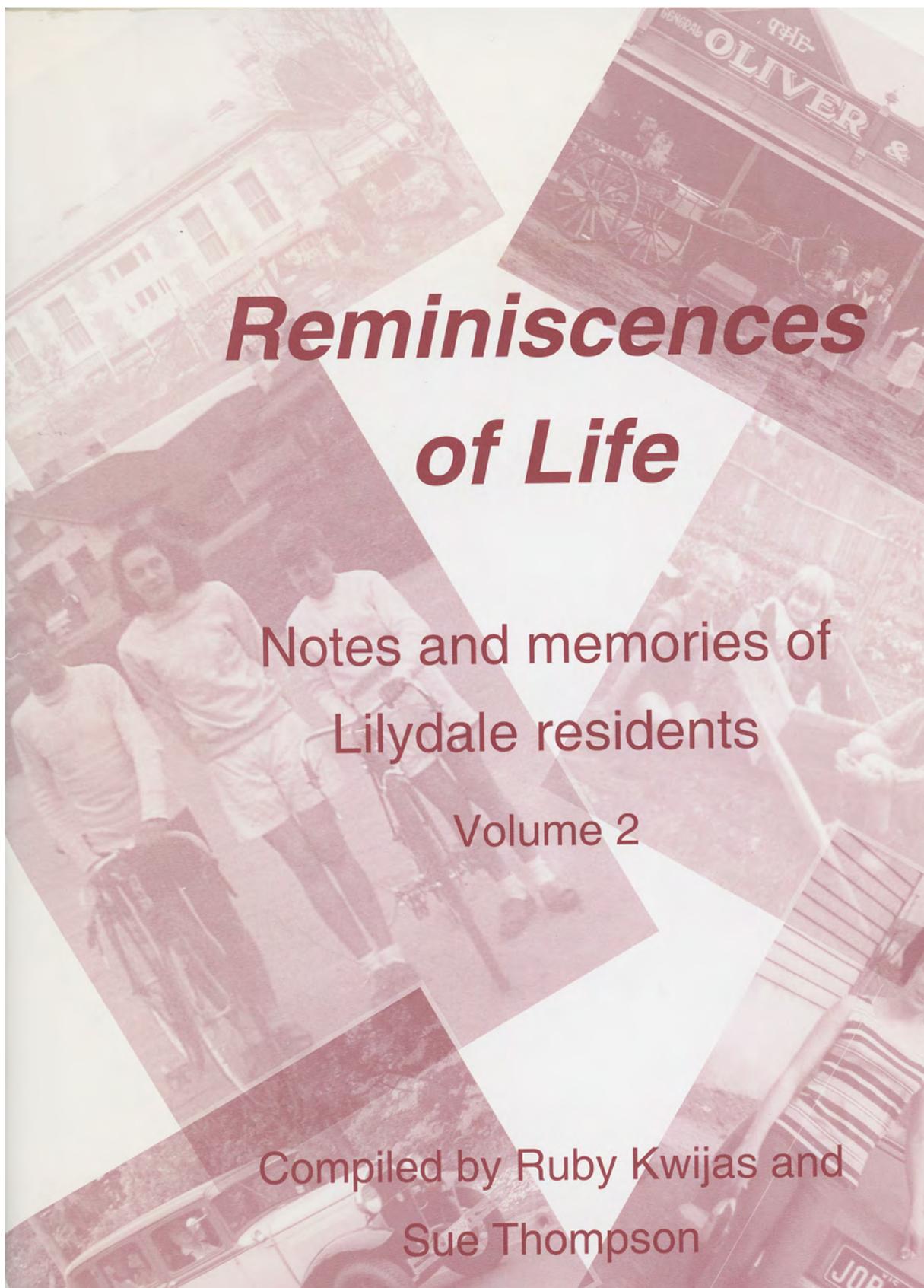
When realizing the importance of recording the older resident's of Lilydale's stories of their life growing up here, she became committed to begin the project herself and produced two volumes of Reminiscences of Life Notes and Memories of Lilydale residents. She contacted the residents and often helped them with the writing up of their story. Today, those books are key references in our society's library.



Edited by Sue Thompson & Myrna McBain

Lilydale and District Historical Society Inc.

Lilydale & District Historical Society website: www.lilydalehistorical.com.au email: info@lilydalehistorical.com.au



Reminiscences of Life

Notes and memories of
Lilydale residents

Volume 2

Compiled by Ruby Kwijas and
Sue Thompson

Gun Alley Project

After those two publications, Ruby decided it was time we wrote about the workers of Lilydale and our Gun Alley project was the result. Ruby was again at the forefront. She gathered the people and their stories and made sure we had photographs as well. These are now in our photographic collection. As the society secured a Federal grant for that project, we created the Gun Alley section on our website which has text, images, audio and video from several of the residents. The launch of our award-winning Gun Alley project was a highlight for Ruby. She felt the stories of the town's working-class people had finally been recorded and recognized.

Our local Federal Member and a lover of history, Tony Smith launched our book, while Ruby, the driving force behind the project, launched the website.

The Gun Alley Website won the Victorian Community History Award in the Multimedia History Section in 2014.

GUN ALLEY

*The Forgotten Story of Lilydale's
Back Streets 1880 to today*



Compiled by Sue Thompson
From the stories of the families of John Street



Lilydale & District Historical Society Inc

A Font of Information

It was to Ruby we turned when we needed information about this family or that family. If she didn't know them personally, she knew someone who did and we were able to complete our research.

Ruby was Vice President of the Society in 2000-2010. She became a Life Member in 2004.

Ruby was 82 years old when she passed away on 21 February 2019 surrounded by her family. At her funeral it was standing room only and she would have been so pleased to see so many friends and family gathered to celebrate her life.



Horst and Ruby Kwijas February 2008.

(Courtesy Ruby Kwijas)

Books Ruby was involved with:-

Lilydale Cemetery Tours – Volume 2

(Ruby Kwijas & Keith Lithgow)

Lilydale Cemetery Tours – Volume 3

(Ruby Kwijas & Keith Lithgow)

Reminiscences of Life Volume 1

(Research Ruby Kwijas, edited by Sue Thompson & Myrna McBain)

Reminiscences of Life Volume 2 (2012)

(Compiled by Ruby Kwijas & Sue Thompson)

Gun Alley

(Research Ruby Kwijas compiled by Sue Thompson)



Lorraine Smith and Ruby Kwijas wait for guests to arrive for the Memories of Melba concert at the Athenaeum Theatre in May 2011.

Research Sources

Lilydale & District Historical Society Archives.

Now & Then Newsletters,.

Gully Alley Book

Reminiscences 1 & 2.

LDHS Photo Archive.

Research by Joy Gothe