

TOM JORDAN AND JORDAN'S BAKERY

Interview with Rosemary Phillis: 22 June 2012.

THE EARLY YEARS

My Dad had a bakery in Urunga for 27 years. I was working in the bakery from about four years of age, before school and after school. I used to stand on an old wooden sultana box and help cut out the doughs and bread rolls. I probably wasn't all that helpful at four years of age, but Dad loved me being there, I made my first batch of bread, (with the help of my sister), when I was in sixth class.

I chose to go into the bakery business and left school when I was fifteen and started my apprenticeship with Dad. I worked for him for four years and then in December 1967 we sold the business. Dad was retiring, he was close to 70, but I didn't want to take it over, because it was in the sea-side town of Urunga and it was just too hard. The town had 800-1000 people and at Christmas time we'd have 3000 plus and it was just work, work, work. There wasn't enough money in it for the work that you had to put in. Winter time was too quiet and you didn't make enough money to live, so you had to live on the money you made at Christmas time.

It was different from when Dad started 27 years earlier. He was earning ten times the award wage at the start. There was more profit in the 1940s. They worked very hard, from before daylight to after dark. When Dad started baking, there was no electricity, so you'd work the daylight hours and make the bread for the next day. They'd make their doughs before they went home and they'd ferment overnight. They'd go in before daylight, light the candles up and get started. They used to make their own candles out of flour bags and fat.

BRANCHING OUT

I did some rubber work for McLeod's Tyre Service and moved to their shop sales then out on the road. I didn't like sales, so I transferred into the office where I did some clerical work. They were behind the times, it was cold and miserable. I had plenty of ideas, but they just wouldn't run with them. I left there and went to work for WD & HO Wills. I worked there for about 12 months. They taught me everything in the office, I became the relief person. After the three months of relieving they gave me the job of stock controller, you usually had to be there for over twenty years before you got that job. I stayed in that position until I left.

BONDI

The burning passion in my heart was to make pies and bread, so in May 1971 we bought a shop at 50 Mitchell Street, North Bondi. It was a one man operation. One man operated it with his wife and a couple of casuals. We took over and built it up. It was taking \$320 per week and within twelve months we were doing \$1600 per week. It was almost unbelievable, but the customers kept coming and the business boomed.

At that stage our family consisted of my wife, Julie-Anne and two children. Karen was two months old and Susan a year and a bit. The business had a two bedroom flat upstairs and the shop and bakehouse underneath. My uncle put in a microphone up in the kid's bedroom and put a speaker down to the shop so we could hear if the kids woke up or if they made any noise.

My wife used to work for my Dad in the bakery at Urunga on a Saturday morning. At Bondi she would come down and work in the morning, help ice the cakes and then she'd come back at lunchtime and help out. We got a couple of school kids after school to finish the shop and clean up.

Originally we worked five and half days a week, but after we were there a couple of months we were coerced into opening Sunday and selling bread rolls and that was where the big money came in. We had queues of people lined up outside the shop. We were just opposite St Anne's Church and when Mass came out they'd queue up. People would be driving past, see the queue, wonder what it was and join it.

We ended up taking over the barber shop next door. We expanded, which in hindsight I wouldn't do again. It wasn't a financial success, in one sense we did alright, but in another we would lose control because we'd bake in one shop and not be able to hear what was going on in the other. We felt we'd lost contact with people. Also there were no queues, which meant that there wasn't that added attraction to people passing by.

We were at Bondi until October 1977. One reason we left was because we had another two children while we were there and the flat wasn't big enough. There were only two bedrooms and a small concrete yard at the back. I also had the desire to buy a freehold bakery in the country, to get out of the concrete. The main motivation for the move was for the kids, to get them out into the country.

TOTTENHAM

We found a bakery at Tottenham, the geographical centre of New South Wales. We landed out there in October '77 and stayed there until March '82. It really was a great time for the kids, there was great freedom, they could walk out onto the street and go to their friends place, there was great safety.

There were only about 250-300 people in the town. We serviced and made bread for about 2,000 people. We sent out the bread on mail runs, the school buses.

While we were there we instigated an apprenticeship for the first female apprentice baker in Australia. Her name was Glenise Jarvis. Up until then you could only have male apprentices as a baker. The girls were only able to become pastry cooks.

I wrote to the department of Labour and Industry and said to them, why is it we can't employ this girl as an apprentice baker. Anyway they approved it and we had the first female apprentice baker in Australia.

Tottenham is a great place. There is a lot happening there. We recently went out there with a group from the Servants of Jesus to provide support for one of our friends out there. As a child I was taught that prayer is the most important thing in the world and I'm starting to believe that now. You don't always comprehend these things at first.

We knew before we went to Tottenham that bakeries were a dying business and that there was a limited life for them. We could see the big multi nationals coming in. At that stage bread was price controlled. Sid Einfeld and Neville Wran were known as the housewives' friends as they stopped the prices of bread, milk and a few other things going up. While we were there we took on the Government on this price control. We had so many price increases ourselves that we weren't able to pass on, it became impossible to stay in business. There was one guy in Wollongong who started baking bread on a Sunday (which back then wasn't lawful). He did this to try and survive. They fined him and he went to jail rather than pay the fine.

This brought things to a head. We had a secret meeting of the bakers from Western New South Wales at Tottenham (without letting the bread manufacturers find out about it). At that time the bread

manufacturers of New South Wales were basically controlled by Buttercup, Fielders and Tip Top. What was happening was that they were pricing their flour out from their own flour mills to their own Bakeries at above market prices, expecting the government to increase bread prices.

We broke away and formed the Independent Bread Manufacturers of New South Wales and with the help of the independent member on the South Coast, John Hatton, we ended up getting the industry changed.

We left Tottenham mainly because of the children. Our eldest daughter was in sixth class and looking to move into High School. We got to know a couple of women who had come to the town as teachers or to work in the bank and married local farmers. Years later we could see that they became so lonely as they weren't country girls, but their husbands wouldn't leave the land.

I decided that as the children were nearing the age that they would be entering into relationships, that it was time we moved back nearer to civilisation, as Tottenham was just so far from our parents and other members of the family.

WINDSOR

My brother had wanted me to go into business with him for years, so in March '82 I joined with my brother and other partners and we bought the Bread Shed at Windsor. It was a good sized business, one of the good hot bread shops in Sydney, it was doing \$3,400 a week turnover when we took it over and within six months we had it up to \$10,000. We were doing \$6,000 retail and added \$4,000 wholesale as well. We were employing sixteen people, including some part time.

On one hand it was a great relief to have partners, as you didn't have the sole responsibility, I could take time off and things were OK. From that point of view it was good. The drain was the emotional side. My brother and another partner in the business had ideas for future of the business which weren't heading in the same direction as my ideas, so I decided to get out of that business and look for something to operate myself.

RIVERSTONE

A fellow who lived in Riverstone, Joe Potter, knew me and worked for us in Windsor. He kept at me about coming to Riverstone to look at a business which was for sale. I said I wasn't interested as it was too small and I was already in a bakery which had sixteen employees and I didn't feel that I wanted to go back to a one man operation.

However, as it was going to take some time to wind down my involvement with the Windsor business with my brother, I decided that I would come to Riverstone and buy this business. That was in 1985 and it cost us \$20,000 at the time.

The business was owned by Catino and Anna Costi and was known as Roma cakes. They had started the shop in the same premises about three years earlier. He got sick, so for health reasons he needed to sell.

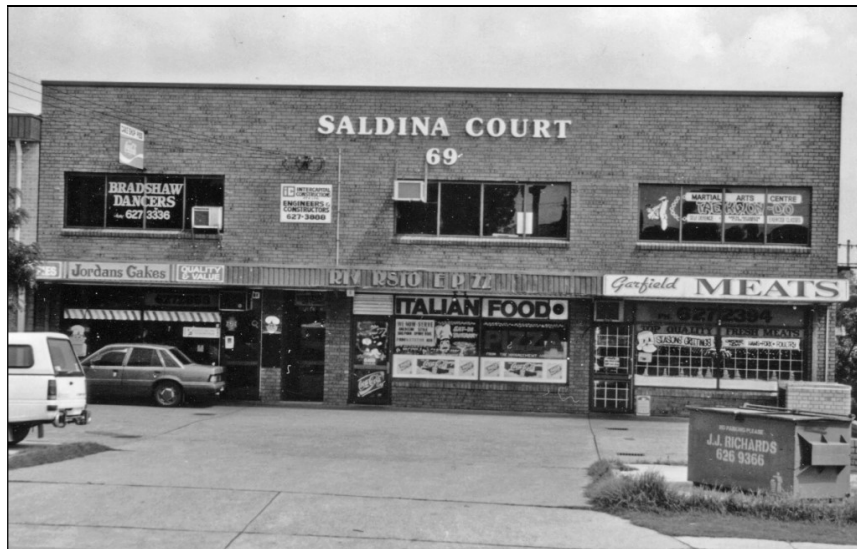
I decided that while I was winding up the company with the Windsor bakery, I would buy the Riverstone business, spend two years there, double the size of the turnover and then buy into a bigger bakery.

When we took over we were doing \$1,300 a week. After three years of putting a lot of hard work and effort in, we had found that we couldn't increase the turnover. People had established buying habits

and we found that we couldn't change them. There was another cake shop in the Marketplace which had their cakes manufactured in St Marys and delivered daily and there was also a hot bread shop.

We started to build it up, but hadn't doubled it. I sought advice from Max Talbot who knew the industry. He told me to roll my sleeves up and get stuck into it as I hadn't done half of what this place could do.

Over a period of the next six months I felt a couple of times that the Lord was speaking to me and telling me to stay and it has been the same to this day. So that's why I'm still here 28 years later.



c1980s. Jordan's Cakes "Quality and Value".

A FAMILY BUSINESS

My wife Julie-Anne has always been involved in the business. She still does what she can including the books, but with sixteen grandchildren including the twins born a few months ago, she is now taking six months long service leave. Although we have had her come back to help when we have big orders of lamingtons.

All the children have worked in the business. Susan has been with the business from the time she left school and is still there. Our second daughter, Karen trained and worked as a hairdresser then came and worked there for eighteen months until she started her own family. She was a great person for the business, she has a great personality and boosted the business greatly.

Tracey worked at McDonalds and MBF and wasn't really satisfied and asked if she could come and work with us until she started to have her family.

The next surprise was when our eldest son Wayne asked if he could leave school and come and work for me. I sent him away to seek advice and think about it. He came back the next day and worked with us for five years. He did his apprenticeship as a baker and pastry cook with us. He then did twelve months with the Servants of Jesus Youth Ministry team spending a period of that time overseas. He then continued on with them for fourteen years. Wayne asked to come back for a year or two to spend some time with me and is currently in the business.

After Wayne's first five years with us, Nathan, our second son, came to me and asked if he could come and work for me at the end of year 10. He hadn't shown any interest up until then, so he did his apprenticeship with us and he is now working at Costco in their bakery getting valuable experience.

We went into computers in the early days. Originally when we came into the business in Windsor in '82, we bought an Apple Computer. You used to have to put the disk in, load the program and we got that up and running and it saved us hours and hours of time. A few years later as computers became more complicated, we lost a lot of time trying to work it all out. We've learnt from that you have to keep things simple.

We still struggle, as because we are a small business, we need to keep things simple so as not to spend too much time on data entry. We have a good program on our cash register called Goalpost, but unfortunately it isn't supported any more and the new ones are too complicated.

CAKES AND BREAD

We haven't diversified much over the years as I'm an Australian baker and my Dad's father came out from England and he learnt the baking trade. That's all we've known. Basically the pie recipe is still the original recipe we've always had. We make it all from scratch. There have been improvements with the ingredients we buy, so you can't say things are exactly the same. The margarine is far more refined, better suited to the task and more consistent.

We use the basic ingredients, salt, pepper and quality meat. We used to buy from Country Wide meat until they closed down and now we buy from Harvey's who have really looked after us and given us great meat.

Is there one thing I like to cook more than another? Yes, I would have to say bread, but we don't have the space or machinery to effectively produce bread on a large scale. Because we are more of a cake shop than a bakery, for a period of time we didn't bake bread. We used to sell Tip Top and Buttercup in the shop.

When Wayne came to work with us, I thought we'll try making the bread by hand to see if it is worth investing in machinery if it took off. We found that we wouldn't get enough sales at a price to make it worthwhile with the other competition around. We didn't go down that path, but I decided that we would continue making some bread, as I missed it so much in the years when we didn't make it. So we make a few loaves of bread a day for special orders. We mix it in the mixer, but mould it by hand.

When Wayne leaves next year the average day will see me starting at 5.30 in the morning and I'll go through until well after lunchtime. Susan will stay on and continue to sell things and then tidy up the shop.

GINGERBREAD

Around seven years ago, Pamela Monk, the wife of the local Anglican minister of the time came to see me. She asked would I make gingerbread houses for her church with a recipe that she had.

I said no, but she started telling me how she would have to go home and make 360 pieces of gingerbread because she wasn't going to buy the product she had last year because it was terrible, it was like cardboard, out of shape etc.

She made me feel sorry for her, but I thought maybe God's in this. Maybe if you bring the recipe around and see if we can convert it into our language, with our methods and whether we can get the industrial ingredients. I told her that there was one condition, that you come with it. She brought the recipe around the next day and a week later we tried it and it worked perfectly.

We made her 70 houses. She came back the next week and wanted to know if we could make a thousand dollars worth for her sister's church. We did, again on the proviso that she came and helped. Next came her mother's church, so that first year we made \$3,000 worth.

The second year we made \$6,000 worth for a total of six churches. By the third year we knew what we were doing and Pamela came to help us again. We sold \$30,000 worth that year. About 60% of our turnover is now gingerbread, which is done in a six week period. It all ties in with our lifestyle and spreading the Word of the Kingdom of God and I've seen this happen through people who have been invited along to make these gingerbread houses and hear the Word

I belong to an ecumenical group the Servants of Jesus. I've become an area pastor for them at Bligh Park. We see our mission to be a bridge between all mainstream churches. When we went back to Tottenham to visit, we went to the Presbyterian Church there. They had a visiting group of missionaries from Kazakhstan.

Through the business we have been able to support local church and school fundraisers through things such as making the lamingtons. They aren't quite as popular as fundraisers now, as it is hard to compete with the boxes of fundraising chocolates. Last month we sold one church fifty dozen lamingtons which they sold out early.

THE FUTURE

My plan for the future is to continue on with what we are doing. I've got all those grandchildren. I don't believe the word retirement is in the Bible. I'm a committed man of God and want to continue to do God's will. I believe in a sense if you do God's will, every day is retirement, as you are at peace.

I still have a desire to buy a freehold bakery, the future may contain a freehold bakery which doesn't involve retail shopfront, perhaps involving internet sales and delivery by courier. I'm still thinking and planning.



2012. Wayne, Susan and Tom at work in the bakery.