

# Bluhdorn

*Janice Hood nee Bluhdorn*

*In 2022, AUSCOL the present owners of the former Bluhdorn Tallow Factory asked if the Historical Society could provide any information about the history of the factory as in 2021 it had been fifty years since they purchased the business. We were able to locate Janice Bluhdorn, who provided the following story in a phone conversation on 17 June 2022.*

My parents were Bernard and Hazel Bluhdorn. The name Bluhdorn is a German one, but my father and grandfather were both born in Australia.

Dad served in the Army during the Second World War and was a prisoner of war in Japan for 3 and a half years.

Before the war, men enlisting were told that their jobs would be held for them while they were away and they would be able to go back to them when they returned, but this was not always the case.

Dad met mum at a dance at Dulwich Hill. She was a good dancer and a popular partner.

They ended up running a piggery at Appin, with around 1000 pigs. Unfortunately a visitor from the markets introduced swine flu to the herd which had a devastating effect.

Dad went to the markets on a regular basis. One day a fellow named Greg McHugh told him about a place at Riverstone that was for sale, as the owner wanted to get out of the business.

The place was a tallow factory at Riverstone operated by Mr Jansen. The block of land was on the corner of Melbourne Street and Riverstone Parade.

Along with the factory, there was a home on the block as well. Mum and Dad purchased the business. Dad came over and lived in a room in the house while he learnt how to operate the business. Mum, my sister Robyn and I joined him in November 1959.

My parents worked seven days a week for five years building up the business, before they were in a position to employ someone else to help them.

The business was called B&H Bluhdorn to start off with, then changed to Bluhdorn Pty Ltd.

Robyn and I both attended the local School. At school, when I was asked what my father's occupation was, I was the only one who could say, "tallow merchant".

Dad started out collecting fat from individual households. People filled prune tins with fat which we processed at the factory. I remember my sister Robyn washing the prune tins so that they could go back to people.

We also collected fat from businesses such as the big cafes like Oceanic, along with fast food outlets, Henny Penny, McDonalds and KFC. The fat from the businesses was stored in 12 gallon Phytol drums.

As the business grew, we had two drivers going all over Sydney collecting the fat. Dad never forgot his individual customers though and continued to collect fat from them.

Mum and Dad were able to buy the remaining land between Melbourne Street and Loftus Street. This allowed the factory to be expanded and the entrance to be moved to the side street rather than Riverstone Parade.

Mum was the best at mixing the tallow grades to what the customers wanted. The oil was heated by a boiler and had to be kept at a particular temperature, if it got too cold it would solidify. To ensure that the boiler didn't go out, the men monitored it during the day and Mum looked after it at night. She had a banana lounge to lie on and the dog beside her for company.

Some of our biggest customers were Palmolive and Unilever. They used the oil to make products like soap and lipstick. I remember the big heated tankers from Brambles lining up in Riverstone Parade to come in and collect the oil. The tankers had to be heated to keep the oil hot and prevent it from solidifying.

One of the challenges was managing the smell from the plant. When the Meatworks was flooded, they used to hang the wet sheepskins on the fence along the railway line and people used to blame our business for that smell. Blacktown Council was always onto us.

Dad had a nervous breakdown, linked to his time as a prisoner of war. There were no counselling or support services back then. My parents decided to sell the business.

They sold in December 1971 to Gardiner Smith. I stayed on at the business, and someone came out from their company to show me how they wanted the books done. I continued to work there until my husband and I brought his parents auto wrecking business which we renamed Western Wreckers.

Mum and Dad moved to Caloundra in Queensland. Sadly Dad had a stroke and Mum nursed him for twenty years until he passed away. Mum passed away two and a half years ago.



**November 1971. View from tank on the property. Photo: Bluhdorn Family.**



**November 1971. Brambles tanker. Photo: Bluhdorn Family.**



**Hazel Bluhdorn in the new building under construction. Photo: Bluhdorn Family.**