

Singing at Anzac Services - Di Gavin

Rosemary Phillis

In the 1960s I was approached by Maurie Hawkins, President of the Riverstone Schofields RSL sub-Branch to see if I would sing at an upcoming ANZAC service. They were unable to find anyone else prepared to take it on and he had been told by my neighbour, Barry Crouch, that I could sing.

I came from a musical background. My mother played the drums (she used to practice on phone books thank goodness). Dad played the button accordion and my brother the banjo. I learnt to play the piano accordion and I loved it. My accordion was a Crucianelli brand and I think the model was one of only two that came out from Italy. It was purchased from Nicholsons at 416 George Street in Sydney and my grandmother paid it off.

The family performed as a band and I can recall playing on a Sunday afternoon in a park near where we lived at Earlwood or Glebe.

In addition to the accordion I also trained as soprano singer. I took lessons from a woman in Pitt Street in Sydney for many years.

Our family had a Riverstone connection through my father's parents. George and Georgina (called Jo) Morris who lived in Brighton Street. My Uncle Bob and Aunty Anne lived in Elizabeth Street. I'm told when I was a baby we lived at my grandparents place for awhile, as Dad drove delivery trucks from the Meatworks to the City.

Most of the time though we lived in rented places down toward the City. I spent many school holidays staying with my grandparents. I came back to Riverstone when I married Geoff Gavin, started a family and have remained here ever since. Now the City has followed me out to Riverstone, something I thought that I'd never see.

Geoff's Mum was involved with the CWA and had me go to one of their meetings and play the piano accordion. Next thing she had me play at a lunch at the Church of England. She'd mind the children while I played.

Going back to Maurie Hawkins and his request to sing at the service, I said that I would on the proviso that they would provide the music, which they did through cassette tapes. The lady before used to play a piano on the back of a truck. (Her son worked at the local railway station.)

Eventually I ended up singing for all three commemorative services, the Sunday and Dawn Anzac Services and Remembrance Day. There was one year I had to read the Lords Prayer as well as they couldn't find a church Minister for the day. I sang at the services for years, finally retiring in 2005 when I came down with the flu and they organised someone else to sing.



1993 Sunday Anzac Service. Di is standing at the right of the photo.

From video clip by Rosemary Phillis



1995 Sunday Anzac Service. Di is standing near the Memorial with her back to the camera.

Photo: Rosemary Phillis