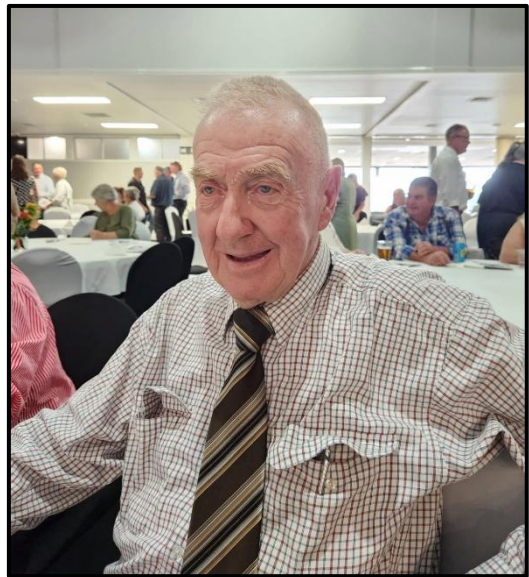


## Peter Sheppard

I was born in Oberon in 1944 at Nurse Fox's hospital. My parents were Lucy Stapleton, or Lucy Sheppard, and Clarrie Sheppard. Dad came to Oberon from Casino with his dad to help build a house for his sister Girlie and his brother-in-law David Jamieson at Edith. Then he helped on the old church at Isabella, and that's where he met Mum. Her mother and father had the post office at Isabella for many years. Christine Stapleton, my aunt, was postmistress there for many years. Mum had a lot to do with it. We spent a lot of time out there as kids, at Grandma's place. So, Mum and Dad met out there at Isabella. They lived in Oberon when they married. I was the youngest of five kids - Mary, John, Michael and me. They lost a little boy, their first born.



I was educated at Joey's (St Joseph's School) up to third year, and then went to Stanny's (St Stanislaus) for fourth and fifth year. I still appreciate what Dad did because he sent me to boarding school and it wouldn't have been cheap. When I failed the Leaving Certificate the first time, he said, "You'd better go back and get it. You might need it." So, I went back and sure enough, got it next year. I just so appreciated Dad doing that because he would have done it hard.

Dad was on Oberon Council for 17 years, he also built a lot of houses in Oberon, and he kept building while he was the undertaker. Mum and Dad did the undertaking together. They did a lot of funerals. Dad had the business set up in Queen Street, with a shed down the back where he kept all the equipment and a freezing room for the bodies. Of course, Mum was a great asset. She was very well-connected - knew everybody, and everyone knew her. They worked at undertaking for a long, long time. Freddie Morrow helped a fair bit and Kevin Ryan was another one. Mervyn (Dwyer) came in later on and helped them and when Dad died Mervyn took it over.

Mum also used to take boarders. She looked after them, and she looked after us kids too. But she always kept a sense of humour. The boarders were money for her. There was not much money around in those days.

There were two tennis courts down behind the church and Mum used to look after them, and she was in a tennis club. She also used to do a lot of catering for the balls. They did all the cooking down underneath the old Malachi, and it was hard work. They'd be doing roasts and beef and stuff, and they used to do the sweets.

They would buy all the stuff they could at Mawhood's, and Shafto would say to Mum, "Well, do you want orange jellies?" And Mum would say, "No, I want the green!" Because of the orange with the Masonic Lodge and the green with the Catholics. Shafto used to have great fun with that.

There were other balls as well, a Masonic Ball and a Show Ball, all at the Malachi. They'd all come with their long dresses and the blokes would all be dressed up in their bow ties. Tommy Richards used to be the MC.

I had hopes of being a school teacher when I left school. That's why I went back to repeat the Leaving Certificate, but I didn't have a high enough mark to get into the teacher's college so I

worked with my brother John, planting pines. Then I went cutting pines with the Forestry, back in the horse-drawn days when they used to snig the logs out with draft horses.

After a while I wanted to join the police force. Mum took me down to Redfern. It was an eye opener, going into that place. These little old bush kids, bush mother, and Redfern right in the heart of the city. Thank heavens Mum knew her way around. But you had to be 11 stone 7 pounds to be accepted, and I was only 11 stone. The training officer said, "Look, you go away and have a big feed of bananas. Come back after lunch. You'll be right." But I never did. It's one of my biggest regrets. Mum wanted to get away, she didn't want to stay around.

I came home and started working with Bob Cowe on the grader in the Kanangra area doing the fire trails. Lance Armstrong was fully involved, and he did a great job. I worked with them for four years. Then I went and worked on the Council - Bob Hooper offered me a job. I started grader driving, then I went to engineering assistant, and then I became an overseer, then a work supervisor.

I saw a lot of changes. Bob Hooper built Oberon up by doing a lot of new things. He was a town planner, but was responsible for a lot of work on the Bathurst Road. A lot of heavy work, including the Bathurst Mount in 1974. That was a big engineering work, and it's still going. There's very little patchwork done on it now, after all these years. I did most of the work on that. Bob just came down every so often to see what was going on. Then there's the Goulburn Road, and the Caves Road out through Edith. That was done in 1969, the year I was married (that's how I can remember it). I worked mainly on the grader and a bit of supervision work.

Billy Connell and Bruce Harris were the main earth workers, and the Council blokes - Jack McSpadden, and Bill and Ted Gorman. All good blokes to work with.

I just stayed with the Council and saw a lot of projects. A lot of bridges were being built, including the one Bernie Jamieson built across Wiseman's Creek. That was a unique bridge. Then there was the O'Connell Bridge across the Fish River, the little bridge at the pub at O'Connell and the one at Eight Mile Swamp Creek, at Bolton Vale. We built the Goulburn Road right out to Black Springs and down to Little River. I was involved very heavily with that, and the Oberon to Tarana Road.



Installing pipes on the Emu Valley Tarana Road. June, 1988

Bob Hooper used to have a meeting every Wednesday and we'd go around and check all the jobs going. He was a good boss and a fair bloke.

Then John Dryzyga had come along, and Alan Benson. Benson did a lot of the curb and gutter work in Oberon. I had 28 years on the Council. I saw a lot of jobs come and go, and a lot of blokes come and go, top blokes.

I married Sharyn (Armstrong) in 1969, during the time I was at the Council. We had four great kids. That was the highlight of my life - watching the kids growing up and being with Sharyn. Melissa became a hairdresser. Emma went into education - became a schoolteacher, then a psychologist. Chad became an electrician. Amelia joined the police force. She's still out at Mudgee in the highway patrol.



I've got eight grandkids. Chad's got a little girl, three years old, but they are in Perth and I've only seen her once. Melissa's got four, Emma's got three and Amelia's got none.

After I took redundancy from the Council I bought the Oberon Delivery Service. I had four years with that. You had to work at it, but it was fairly lucrative. Thankfully, Sharyn was just so

good on the paperwork, and she wasn't too far behind to get in and push the furniture about either, if you needed that. And the kids helped a lot. We used to cart the milk out every week from Dairy Farmers in Bathurst, and every Saturday we'd have to take the milk crates back. We might have 400 or 500 milk crates - a truckload of them. And the kids - Emma and Chad and Amelia - used to come and help me. They hated it, but they got it done. Then I put it on the market and the Hotham boys, Darren and Marty, bought it.

Then I was sort of unemployed. I saw Martin Barlow one day and he asked me what I was doing. I said, "Not much at the present time." Seven months later I was down at the Corrective Services Academy in Sydney. I did 12 months down there, staying at the Barracks. I was 55 and I thought I knew all about the world. But holy moly, I had me eyes opened. I was the oldest bloke there, and they were very good to me. It was pretty heavy training. Weapons - the 38 revolver and the Glock, and the shotgun, and the 323 rifles. And then how to handle inmates and all the laws - the pros and cons of what you can do and what you can't.

When I came out I was posted to the Young Offenders Program at Shooters Hill. I had about eight years out there. I found the blokes pretty good. You had the smartarses, but if you treated them as people you were alright. Occasionally they'd bar up, but you'd say a nice word or something and they'd settle down. I quite enjoyed it, the Young Offenders Program. There was a lot to learn.

We used to do three shifts a day. We'd have a day shift, then an afternoon shift, then a night shift, rotated around. The night shifts were long, but they were pretty good. There were only two of you on. That's when you expect a bit of trouble, but we never had much at all. I was very lucky actually. The afternoon shift was a bit hairy sometimes, particularly on a weekend, because they'd get their drugs in from the visitors. But again, I made some pretty good friends there and some of them I've still got - a lot of ex-inmates. An old Aboriginal bloke, if you had any trouble with the young offenders who were 18 or 19 and full of drugs and grog, you'd just go to him and he would settle them down.

Then I got transferred to Prisoner Transport in Bathurst. We would pick up the prisoners from Bathurst Gaol and take them down to the courthouse, then pick them up after they'd been sentenced. They'd been on the yippie beans and they were full on, but there again I had very little trouble. I was working with some pretty good blokes.

We used to go to Sydney every Wednesday and Saturday, Sunday was Dubbo, Friday was anywhere. You might take 12 or 14 prisoners down and you'd drop them off at Lithgow, or the females at Malawa. And you might bring back the same amount.

Then we had this death in custody - the prisoner died on the truck. He'd been sent up from Long Bay in Sydney. He'd had a heart attack, and he wanted to go down to Mannus Prison, but he stayed in Bathurst overnight. We put him on the truck the next morning. They knew he had a bad heart, but anyway we loaded up 12, and we headed off. We heard all this noise in the back of the truck. We kept going - you weren't allowed to stop, because you wouldn't know who might be behind the bushes to get them out. Anyway, when we got down there, this bloke was dead in the back. There was hell to pay over that.

A couple of years after, they had a big coroner's inquiry. We had a week down there at the coroner's court, I was in the Telegraph and other papers, and I was on television a fair bit. Every afternoon we'd come out of the courthouse and the cameras were there, asking what happened. The prisoner should not have been on the truck, and the coroner admitted that Corrective Services had a lot of the blame, but he did blame me too.

All that was a bit of a low light in my life. That was one of the things we were trained on – deaths in custody. We had a couple at Shooters Hill, but I wasn't involved. It was one of your biggest fears, and then all of a sudden, you were there. I left Corrective Services after that.

Then I was working with Phil Campbell on the water cart. I had about 12 years there, and I enjoyed it. Every Monday morning it was just good to see the Council workers - they'd give me all the gossip, everything happening around town.



Council road works at the top of Falls Hill, The Reef

I am very proud to be an Oberonite, living my whole life here and seeing its development. From the thousands of pea bags loaded every night to go to Sydney, to the installation of the new Pyneboard factory in the mid-sixties. When the current MDF factory gate was installed, there was no factory building, just a big open paddock, partially a big swamp. Armed with four gravel trucks, a grader, a pair of pliers, and under instruction from the Shire Engineer and Shire President, we met officers from the new factory and cut a hole in the fence for what is now the Oberon Borg Factory. It was a proud moment in Oberon Council's history, and to think I played a part, I am proud of every time I drive past.

I am proud of my dad's history as an Oberon Councillor too. When there was not a lot of money for machinery or roadworks, Frank Wolstenholme, Ernie Cunyghame, Pat Gearon and Dad and others spent wisely and gradually got a good network of roads.

I am very sad at the break-up of the big holdings into small acreages – it is called progress. A lot of the old hands that worked so hard to build and develop Oberon would turn over in their graves.

(February, 2026)