Australians at War Film Archive

Olwyn Pickering (Pol) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 12th January 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1384

Tape 1

00:40 **Can you give us an overview of your life?**

I was born down in Woonona in 1919. I came

01:00 from a family of, I was the third child of six children; five girls and one boy. I was the middle one. My father had a grocery business and he was later on, after we left school. It was a mining area in those days, the 'Old Bulli' [Colliery] and the 'South Bulli' [Colliery]. Actually

01:30 Woonona was bigger than Wollongong on account of the mines. Then Port Kembla [oil refinery] went again, and of course, after we left school, my sister, older than me again, two years, Thelma, she had to come and go down the business with Dad. And then later on he opened another small business up on top of the hill. And I managed that

02:00 for him. They were two good business, he was there from I suppose 20 odd, nearly 25 years. It was like Anthony Hordens [department store], it had everything. And then of course, the war broke out and we did the, well we couldn't go, our men were taken, our driver was taken away, the men

02:30 who worked for us in the grocery business. In those days a grocery business was very hard work, there were no packages you had to weigh everything up. However, my sister then had to do the driving and delivering on the utility. And we went for miles, we went to Austinmer, delivery and right out to Corrimal, all around, and then we supplied

03:00 used to have to put in tenders for Bulli Hospital and we seemed to always be getting the tender and that was a big one, a big item again. And no computers, you had to do everything, and no typewriters, in those days, you had to do everything yourself, work through the day and you'd be doing the accounts at night. And when he opened up, of course, when the war broke out, well

03:30 we couldn't go, he was always wanting a son, well he got the son at the end. And 'cause his daughters came in very handy for him. So then I joined the VADs [Voluntary Aid Detachments] at Corrimal and it was through my older sister, she was speaking to a friend and she said, "Why don't you join up there" and they joined the, oh, it was the ambulance, working with the ambulance and they used to do that at weekends.

04:00 Driving the ambulances and attending down at there, and eventually, you had to do 113 hours before you became a fully VAD, that was in home nursing and first aid. Then they accepted you, and that was every Saturday afternoon. I would,

04:30 those days I was still working in the shop and I would open up the business at 8 o'clock, and close at 1 o'clock, race home and Thelma would then drive me up to Bulli Hospital and I was like a nurses aid, and eventually when I knew the grounds of the place, they

05:00 would allow me to go to the theatre and go around the place. I worked sometimes till 7 o'clock or 8 o'clock, and there was an elderly doctor down there, a real 'family doctor' he would always hop, or one of the sisters they'd always say, "Well we'll drive you home." And then they gradually, as the time went on, they opened up a recuperating hospital at Mount Kembla and for the chappies, the soldiers,

05:30 who were returning to recuperate, they'd have them down there. So we volunteered and they'd send an ambulance down and two of us would go up there. Not every Sunday, we'd all take it in turns, and that would be two. And that was an eye-opener because they were wonderful, but they never hesitate, they pushed you in to do everything.

06:00 And I said, "Well", they said, "We are having an operation this particular day and we are going to operate on a chappie, a soldier, here who has to have a tumour removed." "Oh no" I said, "I wont go in." "Oh yes you will." I remember going in and standing there and I could see, I felt dizzy and I had water thrown over me and they wouldn't let me go out, I came to, it was the most,

06:30 what I did see? It was most interesting. And then that continued and we'd go up here to Lady Davidson convalescent home [Hospital] opened, and North Ryde and there'd be different marches we'd attend, go to, those. And that went on and then

07:00 when the war finished, well everything just, threw everything down , that was just, and my sister, we were all in it, but living in a small town like we were, you knew one another and all the ones around our age were all away, some came home, some didn't come back. And then my sister was going to be married, so then Dad had to sell the top business and I went down to help

07:30 him out and I remained there until I met Ron, and I didn't know Ron during the war. And I met him and he had started a tile, floor and wall tile, business down in Wollongong. And Wollongong as I said, was just little, well it just went like mushrooms, houses were going up and their main thing was doing a lot of work with

08:00 the BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited] down in Port Kembla. Oh dear, and that went on and then, of course, he was in the fire brigade, my husband, volunteered. Oh, previous to that he had to do three months' national service and he hated it, yet his grandfather was a great man

08:30 for the war, he attended all the wars in those days. And years gone back and, so then Ron volunteered and they did great work, and they used to go down to the harbour and learn how to pump the water up into the cellars of the hotels, in case they were bombed. And he was about, word came through about Pearl Harbor,

09:00 they had to pack and go up to Darwin, everything packed and then, false alarm! They said, "No Port Kembla's small, you must stay", because that's where all the gas and all the big refineries are down there. So he stayed on and just kept working as a volunteer.

09:30 But I didn't know him those days; it was later on that I met him.

Can you share some of your early memories growing up?

We lived in a big home, well you can just imagine,

10:00 six kids. And we had a housekeeper and my mother used to go down and help my father do the accounts. She'd go down, and the older sister was more or less the mother to us you know, and oh, we had a lovely life. And in those days,

10:30 across the road from us was paddocks, and J Pendlebury had the brickworks down there. He owned all; the one in front of us was nothing but paddocks. And few miles, then across the road and down, Charlie Farrow had all the other paddocks and we used to get up there and play 'Cowboys and Indians', oh, it was wonderful. You know,

11:00 absolutely free, different to the life that kids have to have today. And we never wanted for anything. Of course when we were growing up there was no television, but you were taught music and singing and elocution, and dancing and all that, you know. Of course we had relatives, my father, there were three boys in his family, and

11:30 weekends, on a Saturday or a Sunday, we'd all go to one another's homes. And it was a lovely, however when we started to get older, my father wouldn't allow us to mix until we were well and truly left school. And then we were allowed to mix in with other people, other children, but it was a lovely life, and then

12:00 we had to go to work. But you had to work, it wasn't easy in those days. The eldest sister, she was very bright and she used to sing, used to go up to the conservatorium for her lessons. And Thelma, she was very mad on sport, but I was born very short-sighted, and

12:30 I was more or less never liked to mix because my parents wouldn't allow me to have glasses. My father used to say, "Oh they will right themselves", but it was wrong because I, you know, didn't have the education like the other girls. However, that's all proved out, in the end now, I can go without them really, with these new

13:00 lenses that they have brought over from America and I have had those inserted.

You said your father wouldn't allow you to mix? What does that mean?

Well, he said there was enough of us in the family for company and he wouldn't allow us to go out until we were a certain age. He was brought up, those days they were, oh, and then my grandparents, my father came from a

13:30 Welsh family. And he was born in Mount Kembla. And they came down to Woonona, and in those days they used to buy up as much land as they could. And little Woonona I think, was owned practically, with the Pitmans, the Molloys and some other family there, they were buying up all the time. The properties, you know. No, we had a good life and

14:00 education wasn't as important to my parents, as what it is, I can see, when I had my children. And it's a

definite, you must give them that good education today. However, we went with Dad, and Thelma and I went with Dad and Ray went into work

14:30 with, ah, Davis and Penny, they were wholesale merchants, she did very well there. And she did want to go through to teachers college, but at the time there was a lot of waiting. So she said, “No, I’ll go and work in there.” And the other two girls, they also went in to work with Davis and Penny. And my brother, we were all small, and he took after my father, a big fellow, about 6 foot

15:00 and all, for the surf and running. And he eventually took over the business when Dad passed on.

Your father’s views of mixing, you were not meant to mix with boys?

Oh his idea was, we had enough in the family to keep us company, you know, and as we grew, as we got older and knew what things were about, he said, then you could go out.

15:30 But as we were younger he said, “No you’ve got enough here in the family. There’s enough in the house”, well there was too, with a housekeeper and then the lady in to do the washing, then Mum. There was about 10 of us there, there was, and grandfather built the home. Those days the rooms were huge, it was weatherboard and verandas all around

16:00 and oh we had, it was very nice. But different today.

So at what age were you allowed to mix?

Oh I’d say about when we went into secondary school, that was the time when we started to get older and move on.

16:30 I went into, I didn’t go to secondary school, I went into what they call the, I did sewing, I did about 2 1/2 years at the Tech [Technical College] sewing, and then I did all the course and I had to come home and go back into the shop. Well I think the family and of course, we all had to live and you couldn’t get, well you could get staff, but Dad preferred to have his own.

17:00 **So what sort of things did you do with your family?**

Well we didn’t have a great time, because those days, you see, the business, when you opened your doors at 8 o'clock, and then you would close your doors when there was hardly anyone around. And then it came

17:30 in that there were set times. And that was different, and we lived behind the premises when he first started the grocery store. Then we moved up onto the corner of Stanhope Street in Woonona. And that was the big house. My father was a very lucky man when he was, when his father passed on he was given the building his father he built for him,

18:00 and the house we lived in and another two houses. And he was the youngest, so the other two got the same.

So you were reasonably well off?

Oh, comfortable, yeah. We weren’t rolling in money, but we were comfortable compared to the majority of people . But he had a very good business because the miners those day, I never knew of a strike, only with the miners, when they’d go on strike, they’d go out about

18:30 6 or 3 months or a couple of months. And Dad was a very good-hearted man, he’d just let them add up and he’d give them credit. Then they’d go back to work. But when they were working, they’d buy, they were wonderful customers, they’d buy everything, but

19:00 when they came on strike.

So did your father ever get in trouble giving credit that wasn’t paid back?

No, well he would have been a wealthy man if they would have paid back all the debts, but Dad never worried about that, while he was helping people he was ‘right. He’d send the different ones that would come in, he’d send them up to my mother and say, “Well now, the children, what clothing or shoes? We must help this family out because

19:30 they are struggling.” Some people patronised Dad right till the last, other’s wouldn’t, they’d move on. No, he was very good-hearted in that regard.

So did your family, your father, have much standing within the community?

Yes, he was great sportsman. And he used to be wrapped up in the soccer and in the end

20:00 he was on the board, I think there were three of them selecting the players and it was in Bulli and Woonona that the soccer was played. But of course, as it expanded and the people start to come down the coast, well now Sydney’s got it, well it was only Woonona, and they’d bring all the overseas people, players, down to Woonona. And it was wonderful and he was on the board for that for many years.

20:30 **He played himself?**

Yes, in his younger days.

Who of your sisters and brother got the sporting abilities?

Yes, Thelma, they played sport, all played, but Thelma more of less, the second eldest, she was very keen with her swimming and tennis, they all played, I played tennis ,but only, not the same as Thelma did, she played in the

21:00 championships down there.

So your father was Welsh in origin, where was he born?

He was born here at Mount Kembla. On the Illawarra Range, up from Wollongong.

Did he or your grandfather have any service in the previous war?

No, no. On the other side, my husband's father,

21:30 he was, actually the Pickerings came, I think theirs was the second boat to come to Australia and they came over for stealing a loaf of bread or a pig or something like that. You read about that, not those days, but you've read about what happened, well they were the one of the earliest, on the second boat load that came through. And there was a big family of them out at Oatley.

22:00 And my husband's grandfather was known for going to quite a few wars. Eventually, his photo was in the Hurstville Council [chambers], it was hanging up there for quite a long time.

So what did you know, growing up, of the First World War and Anzac day?

Oh just

22:30 what you were taught at school. My father wasn't interested in war at all. He'd fly if he heard a bullet fired or anything like that. And it was just what we taught about and when we eventually went to school and mixed and had our friends and that, that's when we learned a lot more.

And your memories of your grandfather? Your Dad's father?

My grandfather,

23:00 oh they were short, real Welsh people, they were very religious in the Baptist church I think. He built the church that I have the photo out here. He did a lot of building, I don't think he could write, but he could design and build things, isn't that strange? Left Wales, I think he left school, my grandfather, when he was about eleven or twelve.

23:30 And those days they had to go to work as young boys, my grandfather and grandmother came from a more comfortable family. And when he married her, he said, "Well we'll leave and go to a better country." And they came over here and they had about three or four trips back to Wales. He was a great worker, short, little, short man, with a ruddy complexion

24:00 with a white moustache, beautiful white hair.

Were you close to him at all?

Yes, we used to live next door to him. Until he became very ill and he had to go, he passed on.

What stories did your grandparents share of their pasts?

Not a great deal because he'd always come in to our place for the Sunday night meal, always. And then we had a gate

24:30 in the fence, which he cut, made, and we'd, the housekeeper would always cook his meal at night. And one of us children would have to go in and set him up after my grandmother passed on. We'd set up the table

25:00 and he'd have his meal on his own, dear old fellow he was.

You said he was involved with the Baptist church?

Yes, it was more my grandmother. She was very much, and she had us going there in those days. Used to go to endeavour, then from there you'd go to church, go and have lunch and then go to Sunday school, then go back and go to church at night, it was terrible. And then of course,

25:30 my elder sister, well she used to play the organ, oh we took a great part in the church on account of my grandmother and Ray would write, oh it was a big church inside, and they would put on beautiful plays. And they had to get help, to get the money and Ray would always play the organ of a morning and

26:00 sometimes they'd switch around, there were two people, and they would switch over, until we got tired of it, church, and of course, gradually broke away from the religion. They [grandparents] weren't on the

good earth to see it all happen, they'd gone.

So were your mum and Dad interested or involved?

Well Dad

26:30 used to go along, but then he could, see he wasn't interested later on, but he, just through his parents that he used to go along to the church, but he was a great fellow for helping people, when they were 'down and out'. Yes, he would have been a wealthy man, my father, if he had all the money that people owed him. Yes, you can be

27:00 too generous sometimes, but that was my father's outlook in life; help people as much as you can.

When you talk about church, what sort of memories do you have?

I taught Sunday school, I finished up by teaching Sunday school until I got tired of it. And we used to have a social activities there, and there it went on and then it just gradually

27:30 just wore off.

Did the church put any rules or laws on you?

Oh yes, they didn't like you going to dancing, to socials, the Baptists were very strong against, of course all this is now, its

28:00 all wider in their views, they've got broader in their views in every way like that. But the Baptists were very, very strict. And they didn't believe in you going to 'the pictures', and of course, Saturday night was the one night that everybody turned out to go to 'the pictures', when you were young, then, it gradually came onto the Wednesday night though, a big theatre down there at Bulli, and we'd go down there.

28:30 Oh no, not the church.

So what would happen if you did go along and you were caught?

Oh, well it didn't matter. They, a lot of the 'oldies', they had their views, but you just went along and you did what you did. And they'd speak about it, oh not that strict, you know, but they didn't hold with it.

And the minister, what was he like?

29:00 Well, we had some very nice ministers, and we had some very sour ones too. The 'oldies', you know, but the younger ones, they could see the outlook and they opened up a lot. As the time wore on it broadened out and they weren't so bad. But we drifted away, well you do when you're younger and you meet your friends and go out and you are playing sport, it's entirely different. To play sport on a Sunday was a

29:30 terrible thing you know, well I think, it wasn't my religion, I think it was everybody's religion. And then, because I met Ron and he was Church of England and I was Baptist and finishing up, I went into the Church of England, because he had a lovely voice and used to sing. He used to sing at weddings and got two shillings.

30:00 Or a shilling I think it was, for singing at weddings, and wore the cloaks and that.

What sort of things did he sing?

In the church when they were being married, he'd sing while they were signing the registry.

So was there much religious tension between Baptists, Catholics etc?

Oh they were always, the Catholics, they were

30:30 all bitter against the Catholics, see how it's all changed. For a protestant to marry a catholic, oh that was a terrible thing. Oh, it was the talk of the little township, everybody was talking about it you know. And it's so silly isn't it.

So, if one of your sisters would have married a catholic would your parents or grandparents have been opposed?

31:00 I don't know, my second sister, they loved dancing and she loved sport and she was very friendly with a young chappie whose brother I think was a priest. And he used to take her off to these balls and she used to sit at the table with the priests and everything, but that didn't last for very long.

31:30 No in some ways some people get the wrong idea. I think.

The wrong idea?

Well, you've got to learn to, if you can help people, all well and good. You don't have to go to church to be a good person. I've been through all that. And now of course, I've switched over and I've brought Leslie and David up in the Church of England

32:00 and when they were finished, ‘that’s it Mum, we’ve had it’.

You said earlier that you were brought up with music, what sort of instruments did you play?

Piano, only piano and signing. And we used to have sing-songs then at our house. Different ones, friends that we’d know who had violins, well they’d come down

32:30 and we had a huge lounge room and we used to have evenings like that or when the family would go out, we all had something in it, they might have the violin or they might have the flute or something like that, you know. You had to for your entertainment, you had to make it yourself.

33:00 And we enjoyed it too.

What sort of songs of music did you play and sing?

Oh not ‘Waltzing Matilda’, we were further along than that, but it was jazz, we got on to the jazz then, you know. And I just can’t think of the names, the music, Ray used to sit on the, and we’d just play and play,

33:30 you know.

So that would be your parents’ social group?

That was, we’d entertain our parents’ friends or relatives, and then we’d have our own relatives. And of course, then as we got older we’d go out, have a boyfriend, and you’d go out and you mixed in with them

34:00 and then we’d bring them home. We were always bringing people home, we were a large enough family, but we were bigger again when we got our friends home, it all expanded.

So was your mum was the one who ruled the house?

Yes she was, my father was a real ‘softy’, my mother had the ‘cat-o-nine-tails’.

Can you tell me about your relationship with your mum?

34:30 Oh she was wonderful, she was five years younger than my Dad and she was full of life, as a young girl she was always on the go. And, like if we were going to a ball, well I remember my mother’s brother saying, if she wanted to go out, of course she finished up by being a dress maker, she’d have to have a new dress, and sit up till about 2 o'clock in the morning, sewing.

35:00 Different today, and of course, it came back onto our, she was always with us, Dad would go to bed early of a night-time and we’d sit up playing cards, or during the war, if we weren’t out at meetings, well we’d sit at home in the winter time around the open fire, knitting socks for the soldiers

35:30 and things like that. And we’d always have friend with us, those days, in our early days we were on our own, but always had different ones in the home.

You mentioned that you learnt sewing?

Trade School they used to call it.

Had your mum already taught you that art?

Oh I think we inherited it from her, she had a flair for it and I think it just naturally came to us. And we

36:00 wanted to do it. The eldest sister and myself we were more interested in it. Thelma the second one, now she is, but those days she was more for her sport, she wasn’t interested in doing anything like that. And the younger ones they weren't interested.

36:30 **Did your mum expect all the girls to cook or clean?**

No we weren’t allowed in the kitchen, because when we had the housekeeper, she was there, she would sleep there. And weekends she’d have off, and my mother would come in, she was a wonderful cook, and she’d say, “I’m too busy, get out of my road” and we weren’t allowed in, because she said, “I have no time to teach you,

37:00 you’ll have to find that out yourselves, I’ve got to do a certain amount” and then of course, our housekeeper she was a cranky old devil and of course, we were never allowed in there. She couldn’t be bothered with us, oh Mum, she would now and again, but you could just imagine she just had the weekends, and those days you never had electric beaters and everything you had to do everything by hand. And she started

37:30 on the fuel stove and then had the kerosene and then they eventually put in the electric stove.

Can you describe the kitchen, the layout?

The layout, well that’s where we seemed to more congregate, a huge kitchen, and a matter of fact, my brother has the round table up at his place,

38:00 that's a history too. And we'd sit around that round table, I think there would be about 15 of us I think, on that little round table, and we'd never move from there. And we'd eat and play cards and games. Eventually we, people that we knew very well, we'd stay there, but then we'd move into the lounge room. But Dad was always, he wasn't one for sitting up at night.

38:30 He liked to go to his bed.

During dinner conversations, would everyone talk?>

Oh yeah, we had a big table then, of course as we got on, we had, in the dining room we had the table set up. When we started working we'd have that set up and we'd all sit around there and after dinner we'd just sit,

39:00 if we weren't going out, we'd sit there and have a great old talk what went on through the day.

Tape 2

00:41 **Can you tell me more about your kitchen?**

Well this round table, my uncle, he had a second-hand store,

01:00 the same shop that Dad had the grocery business. And I think it was this table that he sold to my mother, then my mother had it then passed it on, David my son, he's go it out on the front veranda and this little round table was in the middle and there was an ordinary, just one bowl sink along one wall and then the kerosene stove

01:30 along side that, well then eventually that was taken out and then electric, and then all the rest of the place was cupboards, and the other side it was all sliding windows opening onto a veranda.

Did the house have electricity?

Oh no we always had electricity, always.

02:00 No it was always electricity I think my husband had the gas lights and things.

What were the type of meals that were cooked for you?

Oh, just pain meals, nothing like today. You know, you'd have your baked dinner every Sunday, a hot baked diner and through the week it would be cutlets,

02:30 oh we were always well fed you know, never, no shortage on that table of ours. The poor beggars during the war, they were rationed on butter and things, we had plenty, because it was coupons too, the butter and I think it was, butter and sugar, butter and tea, I can't remember. No

03:00 plenty of vegetables, the same old thing and casseroles, that was all, but nothing like today. When you are cooking for a big family, although there was more girls than there was boys, it would be a kettle of fish, because they would eat more meat. But those days you never heard much of chicken, you know chicken came in

03:30 at Christmas time and the turkey and the roast pork, you never had that through, it was only at Christmas time then eventually it gradually came, now, now you can go and buy chicken and turkey.

What are your memories of Christmas?

Well memories were that

04:00 we used to go to our grandparents, well we'd congregate with our grandparents and then when they left the earth, we had it on our own. And then when we eventually got married we'd still come home and have Christmas dinner with Mum and Dad, until they passed on.

These days there is Santa and stockings, was that the same?

Oh yes, we all

04:30 had our Christmas stockings at the end of our bed.

There was such a thing as Santa Claus?

Oh yes, we believed in that right up, much older than what the children are today, still believe in him. And then they'd have special services at church, which we'd go along to on Christmas Eve

05:00 **Christmas trees as well?**

No we didn't go in for the Christmas trees. We had, my mother had a bit of Christmas trimmings in the hall and that, she never had time.

So what sort of things would you get in your stockings?

Well, when we were kids you'd get dolls and

05:30 blocks an games and things like that. And as we got older, Thelma would get a tennis racket and then you know, what ever was, at our age, it all depended on the ages. But we always had plenty, we never went without. Not like some poor kids.

What about plumbing and toilets in your house?

There was only one toilet and that was down the back, until

06:00 they eventually put in the sewerage and then we were able to put that in, and still there was only one toilet at the back of the house. And there was only one bathroom, and went we first started off, it was just a 'chip heater'. And we, my father had the butter boxes in the grocery, the butter used to come in lovely

06:30 pine boxes, well the carrier would bring them up, when he'd garage the truck at our place. And we'd unload that and we'd just have a little tomahawk and just chopped those up and light the heater.

Where was the heater and how does it work?

Well it was like a little heater that

07:00 you put your fire wood in and your paper and just put a match to it, and it would come through the pipes and then you could get your hot water, only for the bath. Then later on I think Mum put in a kind of a Dimplex, I think it was, instant water came through. No we did it the hard way

07:30 when we were growing up and as we got on, grew up, later well then we had plenty of hot water. But only one bathroom. Nothing like I've got here.

How did the toilet operate before the sewerage went in?

Well they'd have to come around once a week and they had

08:00 containers that they would seal off and then they lay it onto the, there was name for it, I can't remember, we used to say the 'dunny [toilet] cart' when we were kids. But that used to come around regularly, once a week and then they'd take it down to Bulli Point I think it was,

08:30 and they had a place down there where they would dispose of all that. That went on for a long time. It was wonderful once they put the sewerage through. And a lot of people, there were quite a few people who had septic tanks.

Explain that to me?

They were very expensive in those days, septic tanks, you'd be just one in a hundred to have one of those.

So how did a septic tank operate?

09:00 Well I remember when we were first married, we bought a block out of Wollongong, called Mangerton, and my husband built it and it was a big cement, and it was channelled into divisions and it would go in, and the water would wash all the stools through, and then

09:30 take it, it had to be all dislodged and then into liquid and then it would flow into the, with pipes, taken away. And sometimes it would flow out of the bottom of the yard, that's how it was. He put it back in because they didn't have the sewerage on, when we built our first home. It was wonderful, it was clear as can be,

10:00 was beautifully built. But all larger than that concrete and it would be all dug out and it had little divisions where it would go through all the cycles then eventually come through, clear water into the garden.

10:30 **Did you have rules in respect to hygiene with the outhouse?**

Yes, you had to, she had disinfectant down, it was long way see, in those days they had the toilet a long way away from the house and we had a lot of steps in the back of our house. You had to go down those and then you still, if it was raining it would be sopping wet down in this little place,

11:00 down here. But it was always very clean, she always used to put sulphur on the floor and have the little place, it was always painted out and keep disinfecting around it. Big difference the sewerage

When did the sewerage come to your home?

I think Mum got it on after,

11:30 might have been 1951. I'm not certain Michael.

It was after the war?

Yeah, about 1951.

What are your memories of the depression?

Well I didn't know much about it, because it was only the people, how they used to speak about it. But we were very comfortable, not compared to some, poor people

12:00 they lost jobs and didn't have work, and poor kids, they didn't have clothing or anything. And that's how Dad came to always giving parcels to different families you know. And then letting them run up their credit, oh a lot of that.

Did you have any school friends whose families…

12:30 Yes, we saw a lot of that, see we didn't go to any private school. See the father wasn't working so they just, well what they told me, I never went in there, but it was just basic the way they lived, very hard. I don't want to go back onto that, just that I heard that, but we lived very comfortable

Why do you say you don't want to go back?

13:00 Well I don't like the way some of the poor beggars had to suffer, had to deprive themselves from things. Some people, they just only had the bear food on the table and had one good meal every so many days, oh they were in a bad way.

13:30 Couldn't get work, see then when the war did break out, see that's why a lot of the young ones, all the youth, went, because they had no jobs. See this is why all the youth went bad, there was no work around and they were just doing nothing.

So even up to 1939 there was no work around?

No, no. They had to, and in the mines, that's why a lot of the young chaps went into the mines,

14:00 that's the only, or down to the steel works, there's a lot went down there, it was very, we didn't suffer, but some of them did.

So the fact that Port Kembla opened up didn't change the job situation?

It did in a way, but there was only so many that they could put on down there and then of course,

14:30 they had the three shifts, they had the day, the afternoon, and the night, used to work down there. How I know, because with our accounts, the miners, we used to say, "Oh this is pay week", and the steel workers that came ran up accounts, we'd call it 'back week', pay them back in the shop.

So were your father's creditors as good to him as he was to those that owed him money?

15:00 They never, the ones that owed him money, some paid him back, but others didn't.

I presume your father always had to pay for the stock he bought?

Yes, he was always, he wasn't a wealthy man after all, letting them have it, we would have been very comfortable, had they paid all their debts,

15:30 but never mind that's all gone.

You mentioned that your mum did the books?

Yes, she did all the books for him and that was all done by hand, no computers in those days. And all dockets had to be torn out, and sorted out, and everything.

How come you mum got that job?

Well she, I don't know,

16:00 she just though that she'd like to do it. She was smart enough to do it and he just wanted her to do it, and keep and eye on everything. Then it was handed down, as I told you, to my sister and then to me. And it wasn't easy to do. Doing the hospital accounts, I think was it every month

16:30 the accounts would have to be done. Well they were all on different prices and you had no computer to work them out, no dash, dash, dash. You had to do it all on your own. I'd be sitting up till about 12 or 1 o'clock in the morning doing those and I'd say, "Come on Dad, help me", "No, no, no," and he'd be smoking way at his pipe, "No you're alright",

17:00 it was hard work.

So who trained you with the books, your mum or Dad?

We just had to go in and tell us a few things, and he said, "If you've got any common sense you will make a good salesman." That's what he said, yeah. So we just had to learn by ourselves. We weren't sent away to do anything. As for kids, school holidays

17:30 we'd have to go down there, and he'd phone up Mum, Maud and say, "Well where are they and can I have a couple of them to come down and weigh up the dates or sultanas?" Those sort so things. And we'd have to go down and do that, that's if we didn't have Eisteddfods on or were out for elocution lessons and things like that, we'd have to go down and help Dad and help the,

18:00 there was two men on the order counter and there was a special place where Dad used to do all the weighing up, you used to have to weight sugar up and everything. It was, and so that was how we used to fill our school holidays.

So your Dad had his family working for him and also a couple of other…

We always had other, a driver, before Thelma, she used to work for,

18:30 at Dreyer [?] we used to have a cousin, a nephew of Dad , he was my cousin, he used to the driving. And then we had another senior man, he was on the order counter, and then we'd have another young girl working there and then there'd be Dad and Thelma and another couple of young lasses on the main counter.

So you had quite a big staff?

19:00 We did have a big staff and then they dwindled down and we tried to manage less.

Did you drive the truck as well?

No I never drove, Thelma drove.

Why was she given responsibility?

Well she was a better driver and she was more mechanical and it got bogged in these places where she had to deliver, she could get out and change a tire and things like that.

19:30 **You said your Dad opened a second store?**

I looked after that.

Can you tell me the story of how he gave you the responsibility and what it was like running the store?

Well it was the Palliers [?] owned this store it was in front of their home. And they had built a nice, he was a plumber down there, a well known plumber and he

20:00 had one side, the big work shop and then on the other side he built this nice shop. They eventually opened it up, but it wasn't a success. And I think they had a few tenants in it then, it was just left lying there and Dad one day thought he'd like to open a second shop. And he mainly took a lot of his stock

20:30 from the main business and they used to transport it back up the top, to my little shop, and I used to take it from there. We carried everything up there, smallgoods and groceries and ice creams and milkshakes and things.

Was it a big move for you Dad to give you the responsibility of the store?

Well that's how he trusted us. Mind you, if we made

21:00 a mistake, oh boy, we were 'pulled over the coals'.

What would happen?

Oh he'd give us a good talking to. But nothing like my mother. My mother was the head of the family. She had all the say.

So how would she discipline?

Oh she'd just give us a good talking to and tell us where we were going wrong. And that wasn't the right way to do things.

21:30 And we had to have this follow through what she just said. But we were, I suppose we were brought up, I suppose from when I 'cut my tooth' I was seeing people, you know, customers. Because we lived behind the shop, when Dad first opened, and I was only a little girl then. We were running in and out the shop, so I suppose it just came part of us. And then eventually

22:00 of course, we moved and expanded it all from the shop right back, took that as our packing storage, for all the tins and you know everything that came into the shop and of course we had a back entrance. Oh it was a big, a good set up.

When your father opened up this second store did you immediately manage it?

22:30 Yeah he put me into it straight away. And the, I think my sister came up, when it first opened, to help me with it. I just had to learn and that was it.

So how come you were given the store instead of your other sisters?

Well he wanted Thelma down at the bottom store, with him, because she was doing all the accounts then, and she was doing the top shop accounts. See we used to, we had customers who

23:00 lived up that way, who'd come in and they'd enter, put a credit through for them, and then Thelma would make up all the accounts down at the bottom.

Which meant your mum stopped doing the accounts?

She was getting on then, yes. She couldn't do it any longer. Her place then, we found out then we didn't want the housekeeper, then we only just used to have a women in

23:30 now and again to help clean, then we were old enough to help her when we came home.

So what year was the second store opened?

Gee Michael, I can't tell you that one.

Before the war?

Oh yes it was before the war. I think, when did the war start?

1939.

1939,

24:00 oh I suppose it would have been opened about three, I would have been in there about three years before that. Yeah, it wouldn't have been about, yeah 1937, 1936, I'd say 1937.

Can you tell me what sort of things you sold in the store?

24:30 **And how would you measure out proportions?**

Butter came, it was wrapped in pounds and half pounds, in a butter box, I can't tell you the weight of it now. And the sugar would come in a bag. Biscuits, they

25:00 came loose and they were in big tins, then eventually they came in packets. They put them into packets. Well potatoes and onions, then you had all the dried fruits. And flour, now I can't remember about flour. I think the flour was in, I can't remember that, all I can remember, it was

25:30 in packets when I started to work in the shop. But I think it came in about four pound bags and they were little bags, calico bags I think. And you'd have to buy the four pound, I just can't remember that. But when I started in the top shop, I had to, they came in one pound and two pound,

26:00 four pound packet, two pound packet, something like that it was. And of course all the preserved fruits, they came in tins. They were all in tins, sardines and salmon and all that. And of course we kept tobacco, oh there was a big demand for tobacco and cigarettes. Very big, 'cause the miners used to buy the block tobacco

26:30 and they used to chew it. Terrible. They did…

How would measure out weights and proportions?

Well you had your scales. You had quite a lot of scales, you had the big scales and they showed you how much, 'cause

27:00 I'm dealing with ounces and pounds then. And then they'd give you a price on it, on the indicator it would go through and you could work it out like that. You had to be damn quick I tell you, working it all out.

Because there were so many people or they were in a rush?

Oh well, it was like everything else, Michael, you might have a very quiet period, and then all at once

27:30 you'd get six or eight people in straight away. Some only might want a couple of things, others might want a big order, and they'd be ready to take it, you know, if we could assemble it all, and they'd take it with them. The majority, see, you used to have free delivery. You place your order, oh Thelma would go out, well before Thelma took over, Billy used to go out

28:00 and collect all the orders and then come back and assemble it, and that wasn't extra, they weren't charged.

Did you have problems with rats and cockroaches?

Oh, always having the place attended to and setting traps and things like that. You had to keep the place very clean and then, of course

28:30 Dad had a big produce shed he used to keep pullet and corn and wheat, and he used to deliver them by the bags. So down at the back of the shop he had another big building and he used to stock it all in there. Through the, we had a side entrance, and through the double gates would be

29:00 well, I think before the trucks came, they used to have the horse and the wagon, and bring it down. PDSD [?], they used to, from Wollongong, they used to deliver all the produce and bring it in big bags, and then of course they had those big scales, like the railway, you know, a flat piece and then gadgets up the top where you had your weights and you

29:30 used to have to measure it out. They'd have a indicator, a steel indicator and you'd put your weights, you'd have your squares of iron and then put your produce on that and then up on this other big steel

30:00 foundation would be these weights and things that you'd have to measure through, on that. That was what the senior fellow used to do, Roy Murphy, he used to do all that, get all the produce fixed up. Oh it was big business.

So what was the worst pest?

Rats.

Why is that?

Well see, they'd be all after the,

30:30 it was on a, I think it was the earth, no I don't know whether we had part of it floored, we might have had timber, but the floor and concrete the other. But they'd get in, 'cause the premises, there was other shops around and if you weren't clean enough, well rats will come in anyway, they'll come in after anything. But it was very hard you had to keep it always cleaned up.

31:00 **What sort of traps did you use?**

Oh the big ones, real big ones and little ones. I know when I first opened the top business, the opposite they had another old business had been there for years and they had sold out and they were going to demolish the whole building and when they did it,

31:30 oh dear, did we have trouble, because they had no place to go to, so it was always traps went at night-time to get the darn things. Eventually we cleaned them out, but nothing like today where you have the pest comes around and they spray, clean up, you never had that, you had to look after it yourself.

32:00 **How did you keep things cool? Like the butter and cheese?**

You only had ice. You had ice chests, that's all you had there was no refrigeration.

How did that operate?

Well you had big ice chests and it was a very, it was a brick building and it was very cool. And Dad would just keep it in the coolest part of the shop.

Can you describe what an ice chest is?

32:30 Well an ice chest is, that speaker, it would be two of those speakers put together, or you could get a double one, might be higher again, nearly up to the painting and you'd have one door,

33:00 there up top, would be divided and with nickel handles and you put the ice in there, and the other part would be where you'd store it all, and it would be enamelled, with steel, it wasn't, it would be steel shelves and you'd lay all your things in there, and you'd have a dish underneath or you'd put a whole in the floor and have a pipe going through and it would take it right away from the

33:30 building.

The excess water?

The excess, when the ice would melt, well it would come through.

So how often would you have to reload the ice?

Well it all depended how the weather was, down there on the south coast it wasn't as hot, like it is up here.

34:00 Oh you'd have your hot days. It just all varied, if it was in the summertime I suppose it would be every day you'd be attending to it. That's right.

Where was the ice manufactured and when was it bought?

Well they'd manufacture it, they'd have the ice works in the township and they'd come down and bring you a couple of big blocks

34:30 of ice. I don't know whether it was 1 and 6 a block, or 2 and 6, I've just forgotten the price, and they'd

bring you a big block and just stick it in there and put it into your ice chest.

Where there lollies and things like that?

Oh yes, remember the boiled lollies, my Dad always used to give the kids a couple of lollies and

35:00 draw a little pig on their hand, he was very artistic, loved sign writing and drawing, and he used to draw, and kids would come in and say, one day I said to a little girl, “Now I’ve got everything ready for you dear, are you right?”, “Oh no”, and I said, “What’s wrong?” and she said, “Do you think Mr Pitt could draw me a little pig with a curly tail?”

35:30 He used to love doing that, he was a real ‘family grocer’, you know.

So your Dad was a bit of a personality then?

Oh yes, yes he was, he was a lovely old man.

What about shoplifting and stealing?

Oh yes, we’ve had that.

Tell me some of those stories.

I was just telling Leslie the other day,

36:00 not so much at all, that I know of, but I remember after my grandparents went, they used to rent the house out. And I remember this particular couple coming to live there and she, the lady had a polio leg. And they had a dear little boy, gorgeous blue eyes and curly hair, lovely, but he was a devil of a husband, and I can’t think of their name

36:30 and my father felt sorry for them. And eventually Dad had words, to say would he appear at court and would he come in, that they had found out this Terry was stealing groceries from the back entrance. Low and behold, there he had to go, and he said, “I never thought I’d have to go to court and say, ‘Yes that’s him, that’s all my things

37:00 that he’s taken from my shop’.” And yet we used to give to them, I think he was in bad trouble, I think he was a bit of a gambler.

So your Dad had befriended him and he was taking stuff from the store?

Yes unbeknownst to us, until one day he said, funny, he said, “I though I had more than that”, and someone else said, “There should be more” and eventually

37:30 we tracked it down that it was going. Oh, Dad trusted people, he didn’t think they’d do nasty things to him like that.

What about other stories?

That’s about all I can tell you Michael, otherwise we never had much trouble,

38:00 no we never had, we were very, it could have been other things and I’ve just forgotten.

So kids wouldn’t steal from the store?

Oh yes, you’d have to watch them, they’d come in, if you left things on the counter… kids Michael, it doesn’t matter how good they are, they’ll have a go and see what they can get away with,

38:30 they’ll do all that. Yes, it doesn’t matter how good the kids are, it’s just devil, that’s just growing up, they are not bad, they are just trying to see what they can pull off. Yeah, that was an experience all right.

What about men and women when you were working in your store, did they try and take advantage of you?

39:00 No, no, they were, we were well known, and we, the customers were lovely people, every one of them. They respected us you know, I know when old Dad passed away, the funeral, oh goodness me, it just, the church was completely crowded out you know, and the cards, oh people wrote to him

39:30 from a long way away, and little notes, how they appreciated every little kindness all through the years, no he was well respected my Dad. He wore one of those big white aprons and used to use, and I cant’ think what they were, like a brass clip, a special name, and he used to clip it, and he used to wear that all the time.

40:00 Not a coat, he used to wear this big apron. Brings back memories, old Billy Pitman, they used to call him, old Billy Pitman, nice looking man, he was.

Tape 3

00:50 **Tell me more about the steel workers.**

01:00 **Was there a lot of migrant labour in the steel works?**

There weren't migrants like there are now, Simon [interviewer], no there were more of your own, 'dinky' [true] Australian and they played the soccer. And it was only a small circle then. Oh Dad used to referee then too,

01:30 he was mad, he was mad for his sports, he loved soccer, he used to watch the league, but he was more fond, he said there was more skill in soccer than anything.

Was that unusual back then?

Oh no there was a lot of followers, the miners and all that, they all followed it, they were, with their families, it was a real family game, you know, you go and

02:00 and all the families congregate on the side, cheering on their boys.

Would the mines and steel works attract workers from further afield, or were they generally locals?

Well they were generally locals who lived, Old Bulli, probably some of the people might have travelled, say from Thirroul, but I think more or

02:30 less they were around Bulli, Old Bulli and Woonona, and the same at South Bulli, they used to have the same, it was all the area, the townspeople.

You mentioned the strikes? Was there a strong sense of workers union amongst them?

Well those days they didn't have a board of

03:00 members on the board for strike, they just came out and they'd come out for such a long time. Until they got what they wanted, and sometimes they'd go to three months. And that's the only way they'd get it, see they never had the breathing, and things like that, masks on to go down to the mine, I don't know much about it, I only used to

03:30 hear what used to happen, you know.

Was it dangerous work in those days?

Yes you see, oh yes, they've improved a lot, to what it was.

That was well known at the time that it was dangerous?

Oh it was dangerous, yes. And say they'd take the ponies down, and they'd take them down in the lifts I believe, I don't know what they call them,

04:00 but they'd lower them down, and the ponies, down underground they'd be able to see better to go, you know around. Its just what I've heard Simon, I'd never taken much notice, oh it was a dangerous business. And there was a big explosion, oh many, I don't know when that happened, in Old Bulli, and I don't know what about South [Bulli], but I know Old Bulli had a very, and there was a lot of lives

04:30 lost there. Long before my time.

Are there any characters that used to visit the store who you remember fondly?

No, if you had asked me that about 30 years ago I might have been able to remember. No there was very nice

05:00 very respectable people came in. Always well mannered, now and again you might get a 'rough head' [trouble maker], but on the whole everybody knew you, we knew them, and they knew us.

So you got to see the whole cross section of the community, from working-class through to more affluent people?

05:30 There weren't very many 'well to do' people there, because miners did, well I think they get a better wage now, but they used to received a good wage you know, I can't tell you the wage, I've forgotten all that. I did know, but I've forgotten now.

Was it quite a communal space? Would people come and stop and chat?

Oh yes, they'd come in and they were never in a hurry, it was a real family store, they'd come in and have, I remember

06:00 when I left, Dad closed down the top business and I came down to the bottom business, some dear old

souls would come in and Dad had known them for years and years, “Righto Olwyn”, he’s say, “Fill out the form for Mrs Wynn and address the envelope for her and take her across to the post office”. Poor old things,

06:30 they were living on their own, or their husband might not have wanted to come, and Dad used to feel sorry, and I’d say, “Oh gosh, when do I do my work?”

You said the post office was?

Right opposite, the post office was right opposite Dad’s business.

How frequently would the mail come in those days.

I think you had a morning mail and an afternoon mail.

07:00 And then they used to work on Saturday mornings too. See it’s only the last, I don’t know, since it, the post office, closed down on a Saturday morning, like the banks. See the banks used to open on a Saturday morning too, and then they closed down. All around about that time, Simon, and I just can’t tell you.

07:30 **Was there a bank in your local area too?**

Oh yes, you had the ES and A Bank [English, Scottish and Australian Bank] on one side and you had the Commonwealth Bank, and then I think later on, no there was only the two banks, because Dad used to bank with the ES andA.

You must have had a long-term relationship with the bank?

Oh yes.

08:00 **Daily dealing?**

Daily, and it was better to try and get your banking up there every day if you possibly could, and especially at weekends, when they were paying all their accounts. It was very seldom cheques, it was always money they’d bring in.

Was there any problems with direct robbery?

I think there might have been, but I just can’t remember the instance. I think

08:30 there’s been a little and I’ve forgotten and, like I said to Simon, kids are kids, they are growing up and they’ll try and do what they can do, and some of them are not bad, but they’ll pinch an apple or an orange what was there, you know, and away they’ll go, they’ll grow out of that, some will some won’t. But on the whole

09:00 they came from good parents.

What were some of the other stores that made up the shopping district of the village?

Well right next to us there was, we were in the centre and on your left hand side there’d be the barber’s store, and then there’d be, well a greengrocer’s store, but he had serving everything there too. And then on, then there’d be a corner that

09:30 would go down to Campbell Street, and opposite that there was old people, they’d been there for years, they called it the Davidson Store, and the grandfather had built it and it had been inherited down, and it was a big complex, that was a very big complex. Oh quite a lot of stores,

10:00 cooperative stores they were on the other side. And on your right hand side there was another fruit stall and a dressmaker’s shop. Then across, then there’d be a break and there’d be a garage and that’s how it would go all the way up.

Was there a local butcher?

Yes, there were two local butchers. There was one

10:30 in the middle of, Illawarra Meats, and the Hutton family, two brothers, they started that, and very successful, they finished up by opening up in Wollongong, when Wollongong was starting to climb and then coming into Woonona from I suppose the south on the other side there’d be another butcher shop.

It was quite good dairy country down there too?

11:00 Yes, there was quite a few there. But further down, down near Dapto and that way, that was more the dairying down there, it was rather hilly where we were, we were in kind of a little valley there and then you had the mountains on one side and then of course, you had the

11:30 beach down the other.

What about transport in the ‘30s? What were the main forms of transport?

Well Dad had, he first started off on a horse and cart, then he transferred over to a utility truck. And

12:00 then he had his own car and he bought his car.

Was that quite unusual, to own an automobile?

Well, only about ten people on the road at that time, it was, to own your own car. It was heaven to be on the road, the roads were rotten, I can assure you, but it was much quieter.

12:30 **The railway network must have been important at that time?**

It was very important, and they ran and it was the steam locomotives and they used to have quick trains and they would only go as far as, in those days, they would only go as far as Wollongong, I think it was. And then you'd, if you wanted to go to… oh no, it went down to Port Kembla, that's right. And there was no more, down the Port Kembla and then straight through to Sydney.

13:00 They had fast trains, they put on a train that would leave Bulli Station, it was better for us to catch a bus or somebody would drive, whoever wanted to go by train, down to Bulli Station, you'd pick up a train about quarter past seven and you'd be in Sydney, it would only be about four stops on the way, and you'd be in there about eight or a little after eight, it was very fast that one. And then you'd get a fast train

13:30 coming home about five of course, and that would get you into Bulli about seven at night. I'd say it would be an hour and a half to two hours, and they were the old type you know, the old railway.

Did you have any memorable sojourns up to Sydney?

Oh we used to go up quite often to Sydney, 'cause as we grew, when we were younger we didn't worry, as we got older and we wanted to look around and see more fashion, they didn't have the shops

14:00 like Mark Foys and David Jones, and Grace Bros, and things like that and we used to do our own dress making you see. And it was lovely to go and have the day off and never stop for a bite of lunch, get that train about quarter past seven, and then 'go for your life' and then catch the train back

14:30 at night and we'd buy lots and lots of material. And come home a cut it all up, it was better to do that, we had a variety, they kept in down there in Woonona, Davidson's kept it. But it was better to go up to Sydney and get a variety.

Is that something that you would have liked to have perused, if you didn't have the responsibility of the store? To have pursued the fashion and dressmaking?

I would have loved to have done nursing.

15:00 I would have loved to have gone into nursing, but I was telling Michael, I had very, I was very short sighted and my parents said, "No", they said the study was too much. Those days, if you had to go into the wards, it's nothing like it is today. Start off, 'cause now my eyesight has been corrected with these false, these special lenses from America.

15:30 **Can you tell me more about how that affected your early life?**

Oh well, when you are growing up in a family with four sisters and not one of them wearing glasses and here I am with 'whopping' big, thick glasses you know like Coca-cola bottles, these real thick things, and you weren't as adventurous as they were, the others the girls were,

16:00 I used to feel very sensitive about it. And it wasn't until I married Ron that I had these, well like everything, everything has come far afield hasn't it, now. And Doctor Silver sent over to America and got these special lenses for me. Like a cataract operation.

You said your father wouldn't let you wear glasses? Did you have to wear them at the store?

16:30 Well I was wearing them then, when I was working. Working for him, but when I was going to school he said, no, no, no, he said, no. He was a good man, but he always said, "That will right itself." That was his idea, and I was always squinting and everything and he said, "No they will rectify", but they didn't, it was a big mistake, I should have had the glasses when I was younger

17:00 that would have helped strengthen them, the damage is done, so I've just got to put up with it now.

17:30 **Was the attitude, 'it will right itself', a common attitude towards health?**

Well he wasn't a man for running to a doctor he always said, "Oh it will right itself, it will all take care of itself", and of course, having the rest of them with all good eyesight and my

18:00 mother had good eyesight and he had excellent eyesight, there you are. There is always one marble in the bag that has trouble, isn't there.

Were you quite shy and reserved?

Yes, it wasn't until I got married that I had I came out, oh when I joined the VADs, that's when it was.

Did you ever have a sense of being isolated or a bit different because you were quite well-off? At school or in the community?

18:30 Oh no, we were brought up just like everybody else. We never, of course we had a housekeeper and a lady in to do the washing, we treated her just like one of the family, that's how my father looked to everyone, no-one was better than another,

19:00 it doesn't matter what they've got. You are all the same.

There was strong sense of values within the family?

Oh you see, we are very 'close knit'. Every weekend, the eldest sister had left this earth, but the four of us now were all in (UNCLEAR) with one another.

You said you moved away from the Baptist church, but did a lot of those values stay with you?

19:30 They helped, I think every child should be given a little bit of religion and when they are old enough they go their own way, every child should be brought up that way, not forcing them, but we were made to do it, whether we wanted to or not. And they had their own

20:00 way in life, what they wanted to do. That's what I think, and I think a little bit of religion doesn't hurt anyone when they are young because, and a child doesn't know, it's only what the parents put into the child. And what they learn from their little friends.

You mentioned your grandfather ran the first newsagency in the area?

My father

Oh your father?

It was my father that put the first newsagency,

20:30 my grandfather built the business, built the shop and then Dad went in, the first newsagency.

Did you sell newspapers through the grocery store?

No, no, as we got older no, there was always a newsagency, oh that was only when Dad was young man, they were married and had their first child, my elder sister and no,

21:00 that was always a newsagency up there.

What was your knowledge of current affairs and politics at that time?

Well my father was a strong Liberal, and that's all we ever knew, he was a strong Liberal man, but we all had, we've all grown away from all that and we all have our own ideas.

21:30 **Did you have a strong sense of what was gong on in the world?**

No, not until the war broke out and the war changed everything, broadened our minds immensely.

Was there a sense that war was looming?

Oh yeah, 12 months before hand, before it finally broke out they were going to, I think Churchill [Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister, 1940-1945] said, "No" and then I think it was stopped, and then

22:00 it broke out again, the following, I think my sister's… it was around about her birthday in September that it all happened and I remember, it was looming then to come to a head, and then it stopped an then it finally broke.

How were you kept aware? Was that through radio or newspapers?

Well we weren't notified very much, we got the shock of our lives. We weren't

22:30 notified, now and again you would hear briefings coming through, but not like it is today. Nothing like it is today. My eldest sister, she was married to a local boy from Thirroul, a lovely family, and like all

23:00 our friends down there and all the ones we knew, he joined the air force and he left. In those days, his father had died and he left early and he went into work with an insurance company, well later on, when things were getting bad, he wanted to go back and do his two years, which he used to do at night time, which eventually joined up the air force and

23:30 he then was transferred to Canada, then I think from Canada over to England. And then I think, I don't know whether he received his 'Wings' in England or Canada, well anyway he went into the Spitfires and he was with the Australian force, with the English force, and then they transferred him to the

24:00 Australian Spitfires and two squadrons were sent from England over to Australia for the attack on, when they started at Darwin, and he was brought down on the last raid on Darwin, posted missing,

never found.

We'll come back to that story later.

24:30 **But before war, did you own a wireless?**

Oh yes we had a wireless, no TV, we had, what are they, in the valves something like that they had, we had a big one, big standard one in the dining room, it was.

25:00 **As a family would you sit down and listen to it?**

Oh I'd sit up at night time with my Dad listening to the cricket, he was very fond of the cricket and we'd listen to that you know being broadcast, Bradman and all that would come over. And now and again we'd hear the news and things like that. And a lot of people were digging out for underground cover, to go under if the bombs were coming, because it was

25:30 close wasn't it.

People were actually digging? There was a sense that you could be bombed down there?

Oh yes, see Port Kembla had all the big refineries down there, the petrol storage and gas, all that down in Port Kembla. That's why Ron, they cancelled out him going to Darwin because they said, "No, what if Port Kembla's bombed?"

26:00 **Did you have any real sense of the danger yourself?**

No we didn't, it was so bad, I have learnt later on how bad it was, and they never kept us up, well I suppose there is a reason for it, isn't there.

Can you tell me when you heard about the outbreak of war?

Well everybody was really upset, 'cause they knew, I don't know

26:30 where I was, I just can't tell you Simon. But it did come as a big blow to us. A really big blow to everybody, you know, and of course families with young boys, they knew then they'd be going away and things like that, oh it was very hard, then it gradually started to take a toll on everybody. And

27:00 as it wore on my cousin went over, he went over to the Middle East. And another cousin, he joined in, oh lots, they came back very badly hurt.

Do your recall your father's reaction to the war?

Oh he was upset about it, he wasn't in the military or anything to do with war, but he was very upset about it.

Did he agree with the decision?

27:30 Yes. I think it should never have happened, I don't believe in war. I think it's terrible, it's all the youth that's gone, their lives are all finished.

Was anyone questioning Australia's involvement in the war at that time?

28:00 Well you took notice of the heads of Parliament, the government, in those days, didn't you. And they made the decision, oh I suppose there was quite a few people against it, but well like everything, I think you eventually come to the, in the end that it is the only thing to do.

Do you recall how people were recruited in the area?

28:30 Well not many of the miners went, it was a lot of the young ones put their age forward and they enlisted.

Was mining a protected industry?

I don't think it was protected, I don't think it was, well it would be wouldn't it, because it would be the coal.

29:00 It would be protected because they'd want the coal to get the electricity, it would.

You mentioned earlier there were a lot of unemployed people?

All over, even down the, all over Australia it was very bad I believe.

Were there any marches in the local area of lads who had joined the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]?

29:30 Oh yes, I've been, I went up a couple to times there with friends to see them off and it was very sad, the boats went and they were all painted a dark colour, no lights on or anything, they boarded the boats, oh it was awful. Then the Americans coming into Sydney, oh the place was

30:00 just swamped you know with military, every second person was in uniform.

Can I ask you about the mood of the boys who were leaving?

Well some of them, I don't think, they were going to 'see the world', and they were going to see different places, and I don't think it really, that it really affected them until they got over

30:30 to where they were going that they realised what was taking place. See there was, they were very young, some were in their middle 20s, they were in their middle 20s and they knew what was ahead of them, but others didn't. They went, I think for the sake of going to 'see the world', as the saying was. And others

31:00 were dedicated, they wanted to go and fight for their country.

Did you have a strong sense of wanting to contribute in those early days or months of the war?

Well we would have liked to have joined up, but then our father, we had to help keep the business going and all the men had gone so that's how it come that my sister then took over and she did

31:30 work very hard. And we just had to be home and the other girls were working, well they were at school the younger ones, but they had eventually left and they had to keep the business going.

Do you think if you had been a boy or you had been in a different situation you would have joined one of the women's services?

Yeah, see you couldn't, he wouldn't let me Dad, so that was that.

32:00 I though we were doing our duty by staying with Dad.

Do you recall actual frustration at being…

No, I just thought, that, and that's how I come to join the VADs, well you can do some voluntary work and help them out.

When did you join the Junior Red Cross?

32:30 I think it was 1941, I suppose it would have 1930, oh, about 1929, I think it was. We just had a group in the juniors, instead of going with the seniors and we had a group of our own, putting on garden parties and things like that, raising money.

So you joined the Junior Red Cross prior to war breaking out or after?

33:00 Ah, no when the war broke out we joined up.

What role did the Junior Red Cross play?

Well they didn't do much, they tried to make funds, so that they could send to the seniors, the senior people, and we enjoyed it, we had garden parties and

33:30 we had afternoons and things like that, and mannequin parades, and oh the three of us, my three sisters, the three of us were in it, and we had, it was lovely meeting up and having these occasions. But that gradually stopped, and as war kept on going we kept away from it, you know, we went

34:00 into other groups.

How did you become involved in Junior Red Cross?

Well we heard about it and we said, "Oh well we'll join up and just go along as a member and try and help out", and that was just in the beginning, but of course, the war broke out, I was just getting worse and worse. And that, well I think some of our members joined the land army and then they

34:30 went in permanently. But we didn't, I was voluntary, we couldn't leave Dad.

Was there a sense that there was a new opportunity opening up to women?

Well some of the girls, their parents had been in the First World War and then when they heard about

35:00 they were wanting their own, they though they'd join up and go in, the same as there parents did see. 'Cause there were a lot of English people in our area and they had been in the First World War.

The Junior Red Cross, did you have distinct uniform?

No, no just had a little badge, that was all, it was nothing, it was just like the seniors, a Red Cross they have today, there was no

35:30 special uniform and you were more or less was raising money, that's all it was, helping, to go for the chappies overseas.

Weekly meetings?

I don’t know if it was weekly or fortnightly, I’ve just forgotten, to tell you Simon, it was so long ago.

36:00 **You were working a lot of hours at the store? Six days a week?**

Well we opened on a Monday, we closed on a Saturday afternoon, the top shop at, Saturday afternoon and Sunday they was closed. And we opened Monday morning from half past 8, I’d open up and on right through till 8 o'clock at night

36:30 **Was there an increase or slowing down of business with the outbreak of war?**

No, people have to live Simon, and they have got to buy food, so they had to come in and get food.

There was not a sense of preservation? People spending less or tightening their belts?

37:00 Oh well they just buy what they wanted, like normal time. As it got worse, then of course, see butter and tea were rationed. And you had to have a coupon for half a pound of butter. And then as the war went on they brought in coupons for clothing, and we

37:30 all got a little book, and my family, I had, there was Ray and Thelma and myself, the middle one, and I had two younger sisters, and they were growing up and we had to give so many coupons to them because they didn’t, they were just starting to get into thing like stockings and things like that, well they all cost extra, so we all had to throw in to help them.

Can you explain or describe the coupon books?

38:00 What I can remember, Simon.

Where each coupon a certain number of points or a numerical value?

Yes, yes, they were, they had, I think it was two or one coupon, I think it was all one, I suppose it might be abut 4 inches long, it was a square I think, it was paper and I think there

38:30 might have been 6, so, many pages in it. And when you went to the store, well I think a pair of, oh dear, I’ve forgotten, I think a pair of stockings were two coupons. And you bought a skirt, that was so many coupons, oh gee Simon, I’ve just forgotten all about that one.

39:00 **Was it a tight scrape to get through with the coupon system? Was it very restrictive?**

Well with the, yes, because children’s clothing doesn’t last very long and we noticed it with

39:30 well see, my two younger sisters were still going to school, well they had left school, well now they were ready to go out to work, well they wanted more clothing see, they were in a uniform, so therefore they needed more coupons to build up their wardrobe. So we older girls would have to help them. Yeah it was,

40:00 I just remember what it looked like, but I remember we were always helping them to get clothes. And of course, they were young and tear this or something would happen, and shoes, you had pay coupons for shoes.

Tape 4

00:47 **I want to keep talking about the coupons situation?**

01:00 **Were you receiving coupons at the store?**

Oh yes, you would have to, you couldn’t buy a box of butter unless you had a certain amount of coupons and then you’d have to pass those in and I don’t know whether my mother used to go up to Sydney

01:30 and she’d have to wait to cash them to get money back. You’d have to go up on certain times, once a week I think it was. Once a week or once a fortnight when you had a certain amount of coupons there and you’d go up and get the money, you had to have a certain balance behind you, you know, you can understand, you couldn’t just work

02:00 on waiting for them. They were so slow. Now there was a certain place where she got those, where she had to go and I can’t remember where it was.

So the coupons were worth money?

Oh yes.

I assumed you needed to give money and a coupon?

No when you issued those coupons, you had to have so many coupons and then when you’d got the certain amount that came in, well we’d put those

02:30 in an envelope or whatever it was and Mum would go to Sydney and get the money for them.

And that's how they ensured that storekeepers didn't misuse them?

Unless she gave, no I think that's how she used to do it, yes.

Would she have to provide proof of the books?

Oh yes, you'd have to sign for them, and everything, it was all stamped on the book that was issued to you, and I can't

03:00 remember what they were like, I've cut out so many, but I can't remember, isn't it awful? I've just gone blank there.

I can imagine there was an opportunity for a black market in coupons?

Oh yeah.

Can you tell me anything about that?

Well now and again people would come in and they'd want to make a cake to send

03:30 to their son overseas. What do you do? You give it them without a coupon, I know it was wrong, they knew, if you would have been caught. But what can you do? You've got to give them something, yes I've done that a few times. And I think Dad must have too. But you can't, they want, their only joy is to get something made

04:00 and send to their only son or eldest son or youngest son. They've got to have a cake, and the only thing that keeps is butter, you can't send margarine. So that's what we do, it was wrong, I know. Oh there was a lot of blackmail went on. You could buy a book, they had them for double the price, you know, groceries, oh yes, now I come to think of it

04:30 you could buy these specially and all the black, a lot of that went on.

Who was selling them?

I don't know who they were Simon, never got involved in that one. But I heard a lot of tales of people…

Were you ever approached in your store to provide recyclable coupons?

No, I

05:00 always took the amount and our customers were wonderful. How they lived on half a pound of butter to one coupon, and you know how much butter goes, poor beggars, they certainly suffered on that, when you weren't used to it. Mind you it was a good thing, now the doctors recommend you to keep off all that stuff. But years ago it was

05:30 very hard.

The black market in coupons, you must have found your personal morals at contrast with the national interests?

No I can't think of that. I only

06:00 did it occasionally to some very dear friend I knew. I don't know what Dad did, I think I took it out of my own book. See we were all issued, even if we had a grocery store, we were all issued with these coupons, everyone. And I think that's what I did, I can't tell you exactly, but I think that's what I did.

06:30 **Your family didn't have to worry about coupons? You had the produce?**

Yes. That's something I forgot all about, that didn't come in until about the later end, you know, we weren't going for years and years on that. I don't know how long we were going on that. But it was a damn nuisance I can tell you, for tea and for butter

07:00 especially when you had to cut them all out. I don't think it went for very long.

Do you remember when it began?

No I don't, I can tell you I was cursing, because it was another darn thing up your sleeve you had to do, be prepared to do.

Your dressmaking skills

07:30 **must have useful during period of clothing rations?**

Yes, it came in very handy, the elder sister, we would at night-time she'd do all the cutting out and I'd do the finishing off. And those days you never had machines to finish off, you had to do it all by hand. Buttonholes and everything. Dear, oh dear, the work we used to do compared to what they

08:00 have today. Makes a difference doesn't it.

And the various techniques you learned at Tech?

Yes, oh they taught you how to draft a pattern and how to cut out and things like that, but I thought my sister had more skill, I'd do it and I'd say, "Mine is so home made-ish". I'd get Ray to do it for me. But we all worked in together.

08:30 And of course, my mother was a dressmaker in her younger days so it all stemmed through there.

So when rationing of materials came in were you recycling or fixing older clothing?

Oh yes, undoing old clothing and redoing it all up, its amazing what you can do when you've got to do it.

09:00 **That must have been when your skills were truly worthwhile?**

It was, I can remember oh, we were very handy in lots of way. And another thing, we didn't need a lot of material because we were small. If you were very tall, well that's where your problem would come, but we were very small, we seemed to take after Dad's side the Welsh people, you know, small.

09:30 And I wouldn't know, I bet it, I suppose I have discussed all those things with my friends, and I have forgotten all about it. As I said before Simon, when the war was finished, that was it.

There must have been something uplifting in making a new dress?

Oh yes, well those days you make your own and

10:00 create something that's entirely different to what the majority of people were wearing. We got that all from our Mum, she was a 'beggar' for that, she always had to have something different. Oh she was, taller than Leslie and about the same build, but always had to be well dress. Wore

10:30 high heels until she was about 82 years old. Not like me, I'm in low heels.

There was also a great sense of creativity, you liked to branch off and add your own bit of flair to the clothing?

Well we would design our own. We'd look at patterns and then we might go to Sydney, we might see a fashion, something in David Jones or Mark Foys

11:00 in those days were very noted, and sketch something down on paper and come home and copy that. Or we might have half the sketch and sketch in something that we wanted, oh we were always doing that. That was what was known, you didn't want to be dressed like the other person, you wanted to be something different.

It must have been a great focus to take your mind off work and the war effort?

11:30 Oh yes, yes, we were always knitting and then it came in making these little felt pictures. Now of course, a lot of people do it, but David Jones were selling them for about 5 pound I think it was, and we saw the idea and we came home and started doing that, buying the felt and copying it out

12:00 of a nursery rhyme in a book, 'Humpty Dumpty', and get all the little pieces and glue them or sew them together and then, we'd sketch in the eyes and the nose and the mouth ourselves, things like that. And then we'd frame it, and by Jove they came out good. Although I say so myself, they were darn good.

Were here any efforts in the community to make clothing for the soldiers?

We did

12:30 a lot of socks, we all knitted a lot of socks and scarves and balaclavas and sent them away and different ones send back, we wouldn't put our names in, like some people have done. Well it's up to everybody, everybody has a different way of doing things, we'd just knit them and send them on.

13:00 **Did you like that sense that they were going on a journey to the other side of the world?**

Oh yes, and sometimes we'd just do them up and jus give them to whoever, if there was a big bundle going from one of the groups, we'd include ours. In those days they knitted, well First World War they knitted during the church services. But of course we never attended church a

13:30 great deal during the Second World War and we'd knit at home. And of course, lights were out you see, you'd have to have all your lights dimmed and if you had windows, they all had to have sticky tapes, sticky papers plastered on them in case they broke and the threads of glass would go, we had to have all of those on our windows. And lights,

14:00 and the wardens would come knocking at the door if your light was showing at a certain time. That was towards the end, when they started coming, Pearl Harbour and Darwin, that's when it started when we were affected [1941]. And it wasn't a boat in Sydney Harbour or something like that.

14:30 **So you were working at the store, doing dressmaking, Junior Red Cross, you must have been**

absolutely exhausted?

We were, we didn't have much time to ourselves at all. No we were working, helping, our knitting and by the time you'd come home from the shop and you know, being out and in those days I had to walk to my shop and Dad always

15:00 walked from our house which would be, I suppose a good half mile it might be, longer, smoking his pipe and carrying his little suitcase with him. And you'd come home at night-time and you were tired. And by then my mother had no one, we only had a woman in to help clean the place then. So we all

15:30 had to help do a little bit at home then, and you were tired out.

Were people complaining much?

No, no, no. Everyone was trying to, you know 'pull in' and do the best thing to do. I wouldn't like to have been living over in England, that's all I say, terrible, with bombs going off all the time.

16:00 **Or in the desert?**

Oh shocking, poor beggars what they have gone through, terrible.

How much news were you getting in the early days of the war, about what was going on overseas?

You'd hear on the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Commission], I think it was still the 7 o'clock [news], they'd give you a good rundown what was going on. But you wouldn't get the little bits here and there through the day, unless

16:30 something special had happened, and there was the big bombing in England or something like that. You'd hear that, but nothing else. We didn't know much about Darwin at all. I've learnt a lot these latter years, listening in on the TV what went on, we never heard half of that, we were kept in the dark for a lot of things. Well, it was communication, you see.

17:00 I don't suppose they had the men to do it. I never thought about that.

You decided to enlist in the VAD at the end of 1941. Can you talk about what made you decide to join up?

Well I couldn't join up permanently, so I thought, 'well

17:30 why not join', and then one day, oh one night, sitting at he table, we had a huge dining room table; it was alright at the little round table when we were young, we could sit around it, but as we got older we'd sit in the dining room with this huge table that grandfather had built; and we'd sit there discussing and one night my sister said, "Well, why don't you join up the VADs then?" and so that's

18:00 how I came I joined up there. And most, Streets then had open, not long opened up the ice cream factory at Corrimal and oh well, just at the end of Corrimal, it was at a big paddock. And the manager George Street, his wife, she was our president,

18:30 she was a wonderful person.

Did significant events like the Japanese entering the war, escalate your wanting to be involved?

Oh no, I just thought, 'well, I'm doing work for the helping out'. Everybody threw in and did so much, what they could, and there were a lot

19:00 of women who went on the alms, voluntary and helped out there, you know.

Do you remember hearing about the sinking of [HMAS] Sydney off the Western Australian coast?

I remember, but it didn't seem, I just heard and that was all, they didn't go into details at all about it. We were just saying, oh, I don't know who it was. We were just saying in the raw, we were left, we didn't get the communication

19:30 like we are getting now about Iran, and all these things are happening. Nothing like that and yet there was dreadful war going on.

What about he Japanese entering the war?

Oh that was horrible, horrible thought.

Did that change again how you felt about the war?

Oh yes, I hated the Japanese and yet my daughter, now, isn't it strange, Leslie used to coach all these Japanese

20:00 executives that come over from Japan and she used to teach them English. And I said, "I don't know

how you can do it Leslie", I said, "I hate those creatures." The look of them even , you know, I know wars have gone by now, but just what they did to our fellows, it was terrible, it was terrible.

Did you have any sense of the Japanese people prior to their entering the war?

20:30 Well we didn't know much about the Japanese in those days. We did, when we were younger my sister was always organising concerts through the church and they have a group on the stage and you'd be Japan or you'd be China, or you'd be Russia or something like that. And we, you dressed-up and you

21:00 acted in the item that you had to present, but no, never knew much about Japan at all.

So when you heard about Pearl Harbour, did you have a sense that you were directly under threat?

Oh yeah, we knew then in a bad way, things were going to get worse, and when the bombing of Darwin [February 1942], that was terrible. That was very sad because my elder sister, she was,

21:30 they only gave you three weeks after you were posted missing and then they would never look anymore, it was so bad, you couldn't see a foot in front of you, where he had come down. And she was up visiting another family and this family she said, "Oh should I complain? There's a mother who's lost two sons in the same attack as Frank went down",

22:00 it was very sad. And when they came back to be recuperated, our friends from over in New Guinea, oh they were in a terrible way, they were just, you weren't allowed to see them until they had put on a certain amount of weight and things like that. Oh it was terrible, it was cruel they were really vile, horrible creatures.

22:30 And yet Leslie, she adores them, see, different generations, isn't it. Here she is, been teaching them, went over there on her own and stayed with a very wealthy Japanese family who owned a toy business and she went around all on her own, she just thinks they are wonderful. And I still don't have a love for the Japanese

23:00 After you know, after the different ones we knew that have come back and been injured, and some poor beggars never came back.

Is it your feeling that people can't change in a generation? Do you think the Japanese people haven't changed?

Well I look at, it this way, I think that people are under a different rule, and I think

23:30 it's the government, I think, that tells them, but some are brutal, they're just ordinary living people, but they are doing what they are told to do, that's all. A horrible way they had, they all say the same thing, it was shocking.

So you don't think with a different government that they have changed?

Well, I think they've seen what they've done

24:00 to good living Australians, how they brutally knocked them about, and killed them and what they did to them, oh there was no need for that, no. No not at all, but just that we heard from our friends and how they were treated and some of the young boys, they would never talk about it,

24:30 they would never discuss it. Was so bad, no wonder a lot of the young fellows went off, you know mentally unbalanced, coming back from there.

Were you hearing many stories during the war about the atrocities? Or were they in the years following?

It was in the years after that I've heard, I never heard, you never heard, we never had the

25:00 communication, Simon, we never knew what was going on. I've learnt more by listening to the radio talk-back and on television, than when we did when the war was going on down in our little place. I don't think Sydney did either. See they didn't keep us up with the news.

25:30 **You mentioned the midget submarine coming through Sydney harbour on May 14 1942?**

Yes I think it was, yes '42, '43.

Do you recall a heightened urgency in which you blacked out the town and prepared for an emergency?

Well everybody was frightened, they were frightened, they didn't know what was going to happen after that,

26:00 they were desperate.

Were extra measures taken?

Well they, lights had to be out at a certain time and then they got that way that they, the wardens then

would start patrolling regularly. And any little flicker showed straight way, you know. Knock on your door and tell you it had to be out.

26:30 Oh it was horrible.

Were there plans for evacuation? Or other planes in the event of bombings?

Well people were talking about that, they got to the stage, well, what would you do, and that's how some said, "Well why don't you build an underground, dig an underground", my mother said, well I don't know, those days she was home, in the home, ands she said, "I'm here all on my own,

27:00 my family's away, no I'd just stay where I am". And yes, there was a lot of talk about that, I think some did. Some did dig out a plot in their yard and they concreted it out. They didn't go to a lot of, you know, but they went ahead and did a certain amount. And then it all fell through.

Your parents decided not to?

No they didn't worry about it, they said, "If it happens

27:30 it happens that's all there is to it". Oh it was, well I didn't see much. We didn't have anything here compared to what they had overseas. And as I said, it's cruel, it's a cruel thing.

28:00 **Your enlistment in the VAD, what did that involve?**

Oh it just gave me that, helped me satisfy that I was doing something for my country. Trying to help you know as much as I could.

What was the procedure to become a part of the VAD?

Oh you only had to do

28:30 first aid, have a certificate on first aid, which they were carrying on, doing that all through from when war started. They used to have groups at the school and different churches and they'd have first aid, and then home nursing and they put you through a course of that and then you'd sit for a little exam afterwards. And if you passed those, and that was all you were qualified for. And then you could join up, and then once you joined the group,

29:00 well then you had to go then to the hospital and do so many hours. And you had to do those hours straight out. But they only gave you, you were only a nurse's aid, that's all you were, and when they could see that you could do things and you were interested, they'd give you more jobs to do. Washing the patients and things, you know, before you'd be just bringing them meals and bedpans

29:30 and things like that. After that you went up a step and you did a little bit more. That's how it was.

Did you need to go up to Sydney to sign up?

No, it was all done down where we held our meetings, at the School of Arts, out at Corrimal. That's where we used to meet every week, and that's where it was all done, through that.

30:00 **Did you have a minimum commitment you had to make to them, a certain amount of time?**

Oh yes, I've got a certificate out here that I have done all my hours, you know, before I joined into the VADs and then, if you like you could go to any hospital or you could volunteer. But after I did all that and then going up to Kira every so often, well I'd had enough, I couldn't do any more.

30:30 By the time I had a business to run too, you can't do everything.

So you didn't have a certain term that you were committed for, like army service?

Oh no, voluntary is different to permanent. You could withdraw once you joined up, if you wanted to withdraw you could, at any time,

31:00 in a voluntary business like that. But our group, we all joined up and we all seemed to stay together. But I never saw anyone after the war, isn't that terrible. We all just seemed to vanish into different directions.

Can you tell me about those women? What sort of background?

Well a lot of them were married, Simon. I didn't marry until I was 30, I had plenty of boyfriends, but I didn't marry until I was 30,

31:30 and one in particular, who went away, I suppose if war hadn't broken out I might have married him. I don't know, just 'how the cards fell', you know. And no, they were married and they had families. And they couldn't do much work like the single

32:00 women and there was only, was a doctor Foy's [?] daughter was there, oh I suppose there would be about six of us who weren't married.

What sort of support would you provide for each other? Was it a supportive group?

Oh yes, we were all friendly with one another and helped one another out as much as we could, you know. We had

32:30 our little functions too. We had a day out every now and again, it was very nice meeting up with the women.

Do you recall any women having husbands overseas?

Yes there were quite a few of them had their husbands away. That's why I think they joined mainly. And then they had heir families to attend to.

33:00 **It must have been pleasant, amongst the concerns of the day, to have a group of women like that to share your concerns?**

Oh yes, well it didn't worry me so much, because I had my own family, you know. And we'd be always, we were very close with all us, you know oh we used to get up to 'hijinks' [trouble] and everything.

So you 'let your hair down' as well?

33:30 Yes, like my elder sister would meet someone and then she'd decide she wasn't going out with him that night, so she pulled me into it. Oh I used to 'hit the roof' [get angry]. "It doesn't matter Olwyn", I said, "No way", "Yes you'll go because the ticket's bought and I can't stand it any longer so you'll take my place."

34:00 Oh they were devils, you know, good fun, it was good fun what they had, it was just growing up, you know.

This is your older sister setting you up on dates?

Yes.

With men that she didn't want?

Even my younger sister said to her, "Oh no, the group's all ready" and she'd married this lovely fellow, God he's a nice chap. But no, we did things just

34:30 filling in and having fun, that was it.

A little less serious than it is these days?

Oh yes, well some people they meet, they meet up with them, their first girlfriend, and I think that's wrong, I think you should have a variety before you settle down. That's my idea in life. I think that's the whole trouble with the place today. Be friendly, that's all, you don't want to be serious

35:00 **Was there one lady or a committee that oversaw the VAD?**

Well, we had a president, a secretary and I suppose there was a treasurer, because we had to pay every time we went there. And I think, and then a publisher, I suppose that, what it was…

Who was the president?

I can't, I know it was Street, I can't think of her first name, she was a lovely person.

35:30 **And she was good leader?**

Oh she was a wonderful leader, she was wonderful. It was George [Edwin] Street's wife, he was the manager for Streets ice cream factory as I said, started outside of Corrimal

Did they provide the opportunity for leaders to rise to the surface, even in the local community?

36:00 Well there was so much going on after the war, different ones coming back, I didn't get in touch with anyone because my father was selling the top business and we were trying to sell the top business, and I was to go down, and my second eldest sister was

36:30 being married. And that was a big one, when you are born and brought up in the same little village, it's a big 'do' [event]. And it was a big 'do' too.

So you said Mrs Street was a good leader, do you recall anyone else who was a good leader in the community?

37:00 They came out and spoke up, well and there was different ones that would go to different sessions on first aid and they were very high up in it, and they'd come back and they would show us how to shave anyone with a cut-throat shaver, oh God, that was awful.

37:30 And show you how to do things like, oh we always had little different things that were going on, you know.

In the broader community, what were the important positions? The mayor or who were significant figures that spoke up and rallied people during wartime?

Well I think the main, the members of the RSL [Returned and Services League],

38:00 that was the main ones, and oh there was always meetings, that they wanted recruiting, oh that was going on all the time. They wanted more young fellows, more people to enlist all the time. But I think it all came from the RSL and then you'd hear the Prime Minister speak out. Well I don't think he spoke out a great deal.

38:30 But no one in the little townships, you know they'd, oh I suppose some councillors would come and addressed our little meeting, different times and give us talks about what was happening, yeah. That would go on, yes.

You mentioned the intensity of the recruitment drive. Were the young men who weren't signing up, were they

39:00 **looked own upon?**

Oh yes, they used to, well see Simon, you can understand if you've only got one son and he goes away and they are very doted on, their only child, they think everybody else should be doing the same thing. What's good for one is good for everyone, isn't it? And

39:30 that was, I know I had an aunt and my cousin, he was the eldest, there was only three children and he was a Pitman and he was the eldest and he had two sisters. And when he enlisted, well she had her 'nose down', she thought everybody else should be there, his age, they should all be in the army. Oh yes,

40:00 there was some bitter things said about one another. And I never saw it, but I think they sent white feathers or something like that, in the post. I used to read about that, but I never came into contact with anyone that did those things, or had received anything, only heard in a matter of conversation, through conversation, that's what I heard about it all. And that was going on

40:30 all throughout.

Tape 5

00:53 **Your sister married a man named Frank.**

01:00 **Can you tell us how they met and what happened in subsequent years?**

Well they went to high school, they had to travel by train. He travelled from Thirroul, caught the train, and Ray boarded it at Woonona station, they went to Wollongong High School. And they knew one another there, and then they met up, more of less it was the second sister,

01:30 that Frank and Thelma became very friendly and were going out and then they switched over. I tell you it's a terrible family isn't it, then they switched over to Ray and Frank. And they played a lot of golf and I think it was down at (UNCLEAR) at Bulli that more or less the friendship started. And they

02:00 were a well known family down in Thirroul.

So your sister Ray met Frank at school, what happened then?

Well no, actually they knew one another by going onto the train but their relationship came I think when they started playing golf and they met up like that and

02:30 going out to different evenings and then they became very friendly. And then of course, he enlisted in the air force and was going away and they decided they'd be married one Wednesday night. 'Cause it threw everybody into a frenzy. No, no, no you can't do that, you know, things that happened during the war, that were unheard of you know,

03:00 but anyway it happened, it rolled along. And I think he was coming back to celebrate their first anniversary, I think that was it, when he was posted missing.

So coming back to the wedding, your parents were opposed to the wedding?

Well she was over 21 then, I think she was about 25, she knew what she was doing , she wasn't a young kid, you know, so they all agreed, yes. And he

03:30 came from a good, his parents were wonderful parents and that was that.

So where was she married and what was your involvement?

She was married in the Baptist church in Woonona. Yeah.

Did you do any preparation?

No, Thelma was a bridesmaid, and I think Frank's brother was best man. He was also in the air force and he was

04:00 one of the observers in one of the big planes. Frank wanted to be in Spitfires.

And he managed to get to the Spitfires?

Did he? Oh yes he went through, he was a very smart fellow, he went through with 'flying colours'. And then came out, his friend, I don't think came out, Peter Hutton, they had the butchers shop down there, and he was

04:30 brought down, I think in one of the raids over England or something like that. He didn't return. But then Frank came back and it was the, at the Australian Spitfires, he was in the English, and he switched over to Australian and they sent him over here and it was the last raid on Darwin when he was brought down.

05:00 **So Frank served in England first?**

Oh, in Canada, he had to go to Canada and then switch over back to England. Yes, they had to do so much training in Canada and then in England. I don't know, I think he got his 'Wings' in Canada, I think that's where he got his 'Wings' and then went back to England. Oh that's it, he was in the Royal Australian Air Force and then the RAF [Royal Air Force] when he came back over here.

05:30 **Given that Frank was away so long, what did your sister do?**

Oh she kept working at RL Davis the wholesale people in Wollongong, they had a big business there and she just kept working. And she was in the, the same as Thelma, they were doing the ambulance work, SES [State Emergency Service] I think it was, or something like that. SES I think it was, but they only

06:00 used to meet every Saturday afternoon, something like that it was.

Did Ray stay at home or did she live somewhere else?

No she stayed with us while he was away and we went up. He was posted back to Australian, then to

06:30 Camden and he had leave for a couple of weekends, and they were only there for a short time before they were posted up to Darwin.

Did Frank write much to Ray?

Oh yes, yeah, he was well educated and could speak very nicely.

What sort of things would he share?

Golfing and

07:00 swimming, oh mad for cars, big fellow, but he had these tiny little sports cars. How he got into them I'll never know, but he wound himself around and got in. Very likeable fellow.

So he was posted to Darwin, what happened then?

Well he was only there for a few weeks I think it was, when the last raid came. And he was brought down, oh he'd been out, he was a great entertainer, playing cards and drinking

07:30 and then of course, the whistle blew, and he was, had to go up, it was is duty, he had to go and of course, he never returned, into the air.

How did your sister receive the news?

Oh, very upset, very upset, of course, there were different times when

08:00 she was alive would she give us a story and she, no she didn't want to be a part of that. You know she finished up, her second marriage, she married his youngest brother. Amazing, isn't it?

Is this the brother that was in the bomber command?

No, there were three boys and one girl. And Hazel was drowned at Thirroul and the three boys

08:30 enlisted and it was John Hamilton that she married, 7 years younger than her.

How did they meet up?

Well, I suppose she met him going out to see the mother. The mother was a lovely woman. And two sisters married two brothers, that's what Frank's parents were. I think they originally came from New Zealand, I'm not certain of that

09:00 one. And they were a really lovely family. However, she had a sad life. That's how it goes, doesn't it?

It wasn't until many years later that she saw Frank on television?

That's right 50 years. They were celebrating the

09:30 50 years after war, when John Fitzpatrick, Leslie's husband, they rang Ray and John and they immediately clicked on and there he was stepping out of the plane. On video, you know, the TV and they were showing it and then a couple of years later, that's when they found that they were investigating and there was a lot of people who are very interested in different types of the

10:00 machinery, aren't they, like planes and different types of planes, and there is a group up there in Brisbane who are very keen on the Spitfires. Well they went out into the, oh it was very densely covered, and they found this, the plane and the body and everything. After all those years, it's amazing.

10:30 **How did she receive the news?**

Well she just accepted it Michael, I suppose, after all those years, you, she just said, "Well I knew he'd gone", and after three weeks when they tried searching, that was there main thing, known in the air force, they searched for three weeks and then after three weeks they gave it up after that. And she said then, "I assumed then, when they couldn't find the body then, that

11:00 he'd gone." But isn't it amazing, after all these years they come across his plane and his body and everything in it.

When he was initially reported missing, how was Ray?

Oh very, very upset.

How was she notified?

By a telegram, came through the post.

11:30 The telegrams were used a lot those days and being opposite, it came to Woonona Post and the man who was in charge, the post-master then, came over to Dad and told him the news. And then he rang through to his daughter and told her. And that's how it came through.

So it was your Dad that notified Ray?

12:00 Yes, Dad was notified first and then Dad relayed to Ray. We knew it was a very bad raid, we knew that anything could happen, take place, you know. Well that's what you do isn't it, you go up and you never know whether you are going to return or not. Sad.

12:30 I don't know any of the Spitfire fighters, the pilots returned after that raid. I think a lot of them come down.

Did that change the family much?

No, no we just kept like we always are, together, you know. And then the second sister, Thelma, he was a local, he was as a matter of fact, Thelma went to school,

13:00 knew him from going to school, John Henry. And she eventually married him, and they were customers of Dad's. Lovely family, but he was a trainer down at Point Cook and he wasn't allowed to go overseas. And that's where he did all his training down at Point Cook down I think it's Melbourne or Victoria, somewhere down there.

13:30 **So there were Ray, Thelma, yourself, what where the names of the others?**

Roma and Jude.

And then your young brother?

Noel.

Did either of the younger ones serve?

No, they didn't, but they started to do courses. I think they were, you know, first aid, a course, but they weren't involved in anything, no they were too young.

14:00 **You did a first aid course, what did you learn?**

Well going back to it, it was how to bandage anyone collapsed, how to turn their head on one side. And

14:30 don't move them, just leave them there, and if they had a broken limb, make them as comfortable as you possibly could and call a doctor or an ambulance. Well I don't think ambulancemen were very on the scene. You had to go through your doctor in those days I think. Its different today, if anyone is very ill, you call your ambulance straight away. Entirely different.

15:00 **So did they teach you CPR [Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation]?**

Yeah.

That was around at the time?

Yes, and snake bites. And you know diarrhoea and vomiting and children, you know, falling over and bruises, what to do with them. And broken limbs, you know, how to support the limb until you got medical attention.

15:30 And give them little sips of water. I don't know anymore Michael, I think there is a lot in that book I have forgotten.

How long was the course?

Oh only a few weeks, they put them through very quickly because they wanted to get you into a group and get active, you see. But you couldn't go until you were past these, the first aid and the home nursing. And I think there was some other one there too, but I only did

16:00 the home nursing and the first aid. And it was only a couple of nights a week I think, for about it might be a month or six weeks.

Initially when you joined the VAD, what was the training involved?

Well there was nothing, you'd go there, you did all your work in the hospital. You'd meet there and then it was up to you yourself then to get yourself into a hospital and if

16:30 you wanted to, work extra hours and keep on doing that you could. Or if you only wanted, well I only could do the certain number of hours because I had a business to go to. But I don't know how the married women did, some of them I think went through the day or afternoon or something like that, I could

17:00 only do Saturday afternoon. I had to have a break being at the business all day.

So you worked for five and a half days?

Yes, five and a half days in the business.

And then half day Saturday?

At the hospital and every now and again I'd go and do a full day up at Mount Kira.

So before Mount Kira you were at which hospital?

17:30 Bulli Hospital, Bulli District Hospital.

Can you tell me about Bulli Hospital?

Well it was a good hospital it was only, if I remember, there was only Bulli Hospital and Coledale Hospital and Wollongong, there was only about three hospitals on the coast then. There might have been a couple of private ones.

18:00 And the very seriously ill people would be transferred up to Prince of Wales [Hospital], you know, the big hospitals up in Sydney. But they did big operations down there, it was a good hospital.

Was there a shortage of doctors?

Not to my knowledge. No they Doctor Palmer, he worked long hours. Well the majority of GPs [General Practitioner] in those days

18:30 they did, didn't they? They worked long hours. And the nursing staff, they were fully equipped, no they didn't have a shortage there. And of course, in those days they had to stay in the nurses quarters, they weren't allowed to go home. And they wore those, you know, well I think it was a blue, long gown and a white pinafore

19:00 and they had the little caps or if they were sisters they had the big veils. And they were starched, every bit of it. It was like a hospital, not like it is now.

What was your uniform?

My uniform was a blue coat style buttoned with a sports neck, like I've got on now. Buttoned all the way through,

19:30 with lapels from the neck to the shoulder where you pinned on your badges. Grey cotton stockings, black shoes and a little white veil with a red cross on the front.

What sort of badges could you earn?

Well you didn't earn any badges, well in our group, you didn't go up, you just stayed, you just joined in and you

20:00 didn't have to keep on going. Not like in the permanent ones, where if you started off as a VAD, well I think on the ground you gradually came up, in a few years time more or less second in charge and

things like that.

So the badges weren't like Scouts badges of merit?

No, no. I think I'm right, mind you my memory is getting bad.

20:30 **Was there a ranking system?**

No, no. There wasn't anything like that, we were all treated as the same in the voluntary aid group.

What kind of patients were at Bulli Hospital?

Oh with appendix, broken legs,

21:00 I suppose there was a maternity wing and oh, kidney trouble, people with kidney complaints, oh lots of things they took on at, but the infectious diseases, as soon as they could find out what

21:30 it was they transferred them out to, can't think of the hospital. Out near Botany Bay, I think it was.

So Bulli was a civilian hospital?

Yes, it was a cottage hospital, well Coledale was the cottage hospital and Bulli started off as a small one, but it finished up quite a large hospital.

22:00 **How many patients would be admitted?**

They'd have a men's separate ward, a ladies' separate ward, and a children's separate ward. And I don't know, there'd be quite a few there, might be a couple of hundred, or a hundred, something like that. Two big operating theatres, and they did big operations there too

22:30 **Were you given any inoculations?**

No, nothing. I wouldn't know, if I went in there, no I had nothing like that, I was lucky, wasn't I? I never picked up any diseases.

23:00 And you didn't, well you went there and I left with no showering or anything like that before I came on duty. Only thing is you had to keep washing your hands very well, but I had a shower before I went, and then I came home because I smelt of anaesthetic, you know, the hospital smell, when I arrived home I would have to get out of my clothes straight away.

So you would shower each day?

Oh yes, but when I was going up there of a Saturday afternoon I'd fly home

23:30 have a quick shower and hop into my uniform and away I would go. Then as soon as I'd come back again I'd have another shower to get rid of the smell. The disinfectant and what you are in amongst.

So tell me about some of the patients you remember?

Well some of them were elderly,

24:00 some were, you know, well they couldn't look after themselves, there was no convalescent homes those days, so they all had to go into hospitals and there was a lot on the verandas where they had to makeshift for them. Some days you would go up there and there would be hardly anyone there. Another Saturday you'd go up and the place would be really overcrowded. Like all illness, you know,

24:30 you never knew when what is going to hit. But I never picked up any viruses or any thing like that all the time I was working there. Don't know what it was, I don't know.

Do you remember any patients?

I just have faint, vivid, memories, I had to do so many weeks in the women's so many weeks in the men's

25:00 and then so many weeks in the children's. That's what I had to do and it brought up so many hours. No I only remember what used to hurt me was the little kids that were in the hospital, I felt sorry for them. It was nice for them, nice people, nice patients. But they couldn't do much, they were in bed, they couldn't get out so you just had to take what was coming.

25:30 **You don't remember any people, there weren't any friends there when you were working there?**

I had, there were acquaintances, but I hadn't sort of, in the shop or they'd just come up in the street, I'd see them, and just come up

26:00 to them.

What about chaplains that worked in the hospital?

I think they used to come, but they never seemed to come on a Saturday afternoon. Unless they were dying and they thought that they wouldn't make the night, occasionally I think I've seen a couple of them come in there, very bad cases.

26:30 **Can you tell me about your typical shift?**

Well I'd arrive and I'd go and tie on my veil, if it was winter time I'd take off my coat and put on my little cape. And then I'd report to the sister in charge. And then she'd have a list for me to do.

27:00 Like taking, I'd get there at like, 1 o'clock. Some would have had their meal or they might be in the middle of the meal. I'd have to help feed some of the disabled people. And then after that they'd have a wash, after that it was tidy up their bed.

27:30 And I think bedpans were brought out then, which I had to help with that. And help arrange the flowers if there were flowers brought in during the visiting hours. Then help the sister in charge to administer the medication that they had to have. And she'd

28:00 take me along with her, sometime I'd give it to them and sometimes she's do it, but she'd be there with me and telling me, a diabetic, in those days, they were on certain foods, and what they had to have. And how to arrange a meal, which I knew how to do. And things like that. And then it gradually, then teatime would come, well you'd have to go and, I'd be there

28:30 for tea and then there would be, have to help them, a lot of patients couldn't feed themselves, I'd have to help feed them. Bring down the bed, (UNCLEAR) sit them up with cushions behind them, and make them comfortable, and after that, another wash and clean their teeth, and so forth and they'd be ready for the night. Sometimes there'd be visiting

29:00 I just don't know whether, oh yes, there was a Saturday afternoon visiting. And I don't think it was Saturday night, it was Saturday afternoon visiting and I think it was all day Sunday, or a certain time Sunday. But I was never there on a Sunday, I was always there on a Saturday afternoon.

Were there any 'perks' in doing this service?

What do you mean?

Any awards? Obviously you weren't getting paid?

29:30 No, I wasn't getting paid.

What was in it for you that you felt rewarded?

Oh well they'd asked me, some gentlemen would ask me, would I post a letter for them or buy them some stamps, they'd give me money to put on the letters, which I would do for them. Other ladies had asked me if I would get them some talcum powder or something like that. And I would always have those ready for when

30:00 I'd come back on the following. They'd have enough to carry through for the next Saturday. No I wasn't rewarded, I just thought I was doing a good job that's all. And it helped the nurses because they weren't 'running off their feet' those days. And they were long hours because they, they weren't like they are today, they had extremely long hours when I was working there

30:30 and then if some nurse was ill, well the woman who was on before her would have to carry on. So it made it a long day for them.

In respect to your job as a VAD, how many other girls were on a shift with you?

I only came from Woonona and all the other women who were doing hospital training

31:00 were going into Wollongong. And Wollongong was too far for me to travel, it was better for me to go, Bulli is just the next little town, so that's how I come to be at Bulli. But I was asked to go into Wollongong, but I said, "No I'd rather go to Bulli." I had to ring the matron up first, you know, ask for her consent and would I be able to do it, and then I received a letter

31:30 saying yes, they'd be quite happy to have me.

After the war is over, did you ever say you wanted to go into nursing?

No, I'd, I just though well, I wanted to do that before the war broke out. And I would have loved to have done that, but no, I got over that part

32:00 and I didn't want to go back to nursing.

Why was that?

Well I'd been going for so long, afternoons, and then up to Kira, oh no, I wanted a jolly good break. I didn't have the feeling in me to go back into nursing, no it changed.

Did you feel you were almost a qualified nurse?

32:30 No, no I did go into the operating theatre a couple of times, but I just stood back and just watched, I had the masks on and everything, but I just watched. No I wouldn't have, I didn't sit for a nurses' exam and had to attend lectures, I didn't do that. I was only there helping out in the ward.

33:00 **Mount Kira was a different hospital?**

That was different all together.

How was that different?

Well I got the shock of my life when I got there, well you can just imagine, all men, seeing two women arrive. Dear, oh dear, two young girls. Oh what an embarrassing time, the first day I will never forget it. I don't know how I reacted, I was glad when the night came and I went home.

33:30 That's how I felt I was so nervous.

First day you'll never forget, why?

Well you're in amongst all men, and they call them 'corporals', I think they did, those days. And they talked to you, but it was the same as like a fractured arm or they were ill or they had dysentery or something like that but you had to, I only had another partner with me and the rest

34:00 of them were men, big men too. And they were rearing to have some joke with you or something like that, but it upset us completely, but it was only in fun when you come to look back. Because they had to make a life for themselves up there.

What sort of jokes?

Oh,

34:30 some silly little things, oh I won't go into that Michael. No it was in the end when I got used to them, yes, I enjoyed going up there.

It's important of the archive to know the character of returned servicemen. So if you could share some of those it would be helpful?

Well, one chappie there

35:00 had a liking for me, I though he was a 'simple Joe'. Poor fellow, I think he was suffering from shock, I really do. And of course, the chappie in charge, they would ring up and at times speak in my voice to him, saying, "Yes I'd like to see you" and everything. And of course it went on that way, I didn't know all this was going on you see, I'd go one Saturday and it might be

35:30 a month or, yes it might be a month before I go again, Of course I didn't know he was there for a long time, he was in a bad way. I think his name was Keith, and I used to get these letters off him, oh my God. And in the end it went a little bit too far and the chappie who was in charge of it all, he could see it was going to, how it was going to finish up; I was going to have a visitor visit me

36:00 at home, and I thought, 'my God, that's the last straw'. So he had to cancel it all out, but he just, but look, they used to do that and the poor fellow was so shocked he didn't know what he was doing. And if you were kind to them, I think he felt more, that I liked him, but it wasn't that at all. I was just looking after him and helping him.

Was he?

He was a returned man from overseas. He was a young man, he wasn't a married man. Oh I think there were married men up there too, carrying on, but I wasn't

36:30 involved in that. Oh a lot of things went on Michael, a lot of things went on.

Such as?

Well I think, those days, the married men would be taking the young ones out and going on, see, I was brought up strictly, that was terrible, but today its entirely different.

37:00 **So can you tell us some stories?**

No I didn't get involved in that, I just kept right away when they started to talk about things like that, I just kept out of it.

What about the other girls?

Well they, there were only a few of us that went up there. The married women I think only a couple of them went up, it was more the single girls that went up and had it. I don't know their opinion, to tell you the truth. Well

37:30 probably, Michael they have told me, but over the years I've forgotten all about it, its just gone. I can only remember, Dad didn't have the phone on and I can remember being in the shop and Mrs Pallier behind me had the phone on and was called to the phone, and here was this chap calling, and "Oh my

god, this is the last straw." I had to close the doors and race into the kitchen, take the message and I said,

38:00 "No that's the end." But that was all that happened, it was just some silly thing, he just had a liking, oh you can just imagine, all young men up there and when a couple of young women come in, well I suppose I did look a lot better than what I do today, without my wrinkles. Well they'd be having a look at you and eyeing you

38:30 up and down and everything, and asking where you came from and, oh that went on all the time, that's living, I suppose with the men, caged in with men all day long.

So the doctors and the nurse were also men?

Yes, they were all men up there and we were the only women that came up at weekends, on a Sunday. And came up to help them out.

39:00 **Was your role the same there as...**

Oh no, it changed all the time, sometimes I'd be in the kitchen, and I was never a cook. We'd go in the kitchen and help cook up some nice meal for them that they never had. And everything was huge with me, a lot it was big men are as chefs, it was terrible handling some of the big pots and things. But

39:30 we did it, we got through it well. Then we'd help, another time we'd just be in the ward alone, going from helping them shower and helping them dress and things like that.

Tape 6

00:41 **So the men at Mount Kira, what ailments did they have?**

A lot had malaria, some had limbs off. Some were shell shocked, oh dear,

01:00 I think that's, not badly disfigured, they weren't badly disfigured, I think they kept those more up in Sydney. They sent down to Kira the ones that were on the way, you know, but they weren't really bad, some would come in, they'd lost a lot of weight

01:30 and they were just skeletons, we didn't get any of those.

Can you talk me through each of those problems, how the medical team approached them? What about shell shock?

Well I think they just gave them medication

02:00 and tried to talk you know, back into the normal days, see there was no psych, what do you call it, doctors there to treat them mentally and it was the corporals who were in charge. They had to do all that. And they weren't; in real bad cases, they weren't really bad. If they had

02:30 an arm off or fingers taken off or they had a shell in the leg and had been removed, well that was all bandaged up and things like that, more or less to be recuperating, that's what it was. When they brought them back off the ship I think they used to take them to Lady Davidson's home and I think it was to North Ryde

03:00 I think it was, the real bad cases. And from there sometimes they would move them then down to Kira into a just convalescing. They used to do operations down there, like removing tumours or had a cyst or had an abscess, they'd open that up and, well just very light,

03:30 it wasn't fully an operation. It was just a small one.

So in respect to healing these men, you were taking care of general duties?

General duties, that's it. And help, take them out and sit outside with them and discuss the events

04:00 of the day. Get away from the war. That's what we'd do, and I don't think they had visitors, that was another thing, too. They only went down there for a certain time, then they'd be transferred back again. And then another lot that were on the healing list, they'd come down, there was always new people coming to the, it was only very small, very small little place

04:30 **So your role was important in easing these men back into society?**

That's right, to cheer them up, bring them back into society, away from the war and the bombs and everything. Actually trying to live again, a new life.

What do you think were some of the key things required in working with these men?

Well always to be bright, I think. And never go back on the

05:00 fighting, forget all about that and if they could talk to you about in their younger days, before they joined up. That's what I used to try and discuss with them. Try and get it out of their heads, you know. But it wasn't a lot, and then more or less, to sit outside and read through the papers with them, some of them couldn't read.

05:30 And then it's amazing how quickly they seemed to learn, you know, when you are with them all the time. Oh they had been through a terrible time.

So how many men were at Mount Kira?

Oh there might have been only about 12, around about 12 men there.

06:00 About 12, and I don't know how they, they didn't call them doctors, I can't think of the name they gave them, those days, in the army. But no it was only small.

You were administering medicine, did you do that at Mount Kira/

The same thing,

06:30 giving them malaria tablets and things like that. Helping the corporal, you know, they'd say, "Issue number so and so", and you'd have to go and give them that every so often. And put cold or hot packs on their head when they went into these malaria, had these stages. They'd go, more like a convulsion it was.

07:00 Only for a short time and then they'd come out of it.

Do you know what sort of tablets you were giving the malaria patients?

I think it was quinine. I'm not certain, I think that's what it was, I think that that's all they had those days, didn't they. I think it was quinine, but then they were like they are today.

07:30 **Did these men share what they had been through?**

Hmm some would and some wouldn't, and you'd try and switch the conversation straight away. Well if they wanted to talk you'd listen to them. But it would be best to try and switch the conversation, don't discuss about it.

Was that policy of the hospital?

I think that was to try and get their memories away from the war. Well it

08:00 kept on coming back, that is they kept on preceding with it all the time you'd have to, they'd be getting themselves into such a state.

What sort of things did they share with you?

Sport talk, about sport or football or swimming or dancing, you know, going out.

08:30 Were they married, had a family, had a girlfriend. Oh I think I wrote a letter for one chappie, I can't remember his name, don't ask me. I think he was unable to write, so I wrote the letter for him, only a page.

Do you remember what you wrote?

No I can't remember, I remember posting it. If you had come and asked me this thirty years ago I would have told you.

09:00 As I say, as soon as it was over everything went, you know, it was a different life, it was terrible. And it didn't seem to get back, you grew up in the small town where you knew one another from school days, and you know ,you didn't seem to break away. But the war came and of course, everything was changed and it never got back to the same. Never does,

09:30 always a turning point.

I imagine the men who lost limbs would be going through a fair amount of grief?

Yeah, they would.

What was your role with those men?

Well you couldn't do much about it, all you could do was sympathise with them and

10:00 well they just had to make the best of their life, that was it, it was gone, and we put an artificial back in there and helped them like that. Definitely wouldn't be the same, but they'd just have to learn they had to live with it, which is very hard. Very hard.

10:30 **These men seem quite distant to you? Or did they get close?**

Oh no, if I was going up there every week, you'd get to know them more, but when you only went up

once a month or might be once a, might take someone might not be able to go, it might be once a fortnight, once a fortnight, and then there'd be a break for about three weeks and I might be called up again and asked would I go. And then there

might be a lull, might be another six weeks before I go up, that's how it would operate. I couldn't go every Sunday, no there was too much for me.

Too much emotionally?

Well carrying on my ordinary work and then having to do that, no I couldn't do it. 'Cause you are on your feet the whole time, no I couldn't do that. Its too much, I wanted a little bit of a break.

The men who had dysentery, what does that do to you?

Well get them to the toilet or get them a pan and then have to sterilise everything afterwards. And have plenty of disinfectant around you and wore gloves.

So what is dysentery?

Well it's the loosening of the bowels have no control, it just comes away.

And it's just running out of them all the time. Well you are running around just mopping up after them. Some poor beggars can't make it, so you've just got to mop up and clean up as fast as you can go. There wasn't a lot of that, just a little bit. But we weren't; asked to do it, they were very nice to us, "If you would like to help in you just say, you don't want to we won't push you."

They were very nice to us like that.

So the hospital recognised you were volunteers?

Volunteers, they knew we were volunteers, yes. And we asked, I think our president rang up and asked would it be alright if our group could come up and give some assistance, to help out with the men.

And they said, "Yes, they'd love it." So we were women coming into the wards, you know that made another difference, although we wore the most dreadful uniforms.

You were from a musical background, did you sing with the men?

Oh I didn't no, not up there they didn't have, well we didn't have time, by the time we arrived there

and started with getting them ready for morning teas and then after that there was lunch time, and if you were called into the kitchen and you had to help out serving meals and doing things like that, no I had no time for that.

You started at Bulli Hospital in 1941?

That's right.

And you did that for a couple of years?

No, I did that till I reached 113 hours I think it was. And then, when I did the hours they wanted me, I did over, but when we did, we had to do a certain number of hours in the hospital before we could be fully, VAD, we had to have, and our first aid certificates, and our home nursing. And once we had that, well then

we were admitted into the group. And I didn't go then, I only went occasionally up to see them, then if they were short staffed, they'd ring and I would go up and give them a hand, but it was only on a Saturday afternoon. I couldn't go, see I was working all the week and I only had Saturday afternoon and Sunday.

Bulli was your initial training? Then you went to Mount Kira?

And that was only off and on you know.

For a couple of years?

Oh it might have been for that, yes. But it wasn't regularly, it was just every now and again. And sometimes it would be more than I expect because someone couldn't fulfil their job and they would ask me would I fill in, and that's how we went.

You mentioned earlier that your Dad applied for hospital tenders for supplies?

He always, those days, I think they get their supplies now from the main depot, don't they, hospital and all that. Well it was, what do you call it? Bulli Hospital, the town's hospital, and so we had to put in tenders and after a while,

when I came and took over, then they said they were going to get their provisions from head office and that would all be distributed. It grew then, you see and everything was starting to grow and that was cancelled out, that we had to supply them. But every, I think it was every 12 months there'd have to be a

tender put in. Like

16:30 you are building a home or you are building a hall and they ask for tenders, well that was what we'd have to do. How much would be a dozen tins of peaches, and how much would be, charge for a dozen, and then if they'd want 12 dozen well you'd still, you had to keep that list, you know, alongside you all the time when you were doing the accounts.

So what percentage mark up would you have from cost to retail?

Oh,

17:00 Dad used to work that out and just give it to me, I don't know, Michael, he'd cut on things that he could get much cheaper. And he'd give it to them, next to nothing, you know.

Do you know where he was getting his supplies from?

Oh yes, Dad was getting them from Davis, the wholesale merchant, and then from

17:30 different places in Sydney, the travellers would come down, IXL and Rosella, and those, and Fountain. And we'd, Dad would buy directly from them, and then RL Davis set up this big wholesale merchant, and then he used to buy from him, from Wollongong.

He would get all his stock from RL Davis?

18:00 No not all, no it all depends how much the prices were, where there was a different percentage in, you know. And what was the cheapest, well he would go for it, if it was a good brand, sometimes he would go and get the dearer brand, but he'd always get something and a good brand that would sell well.

What about fruit and 'veg'?

Well that came at the latter end, he'd put in 'veg',

18:30 but he never had those right from, the only reason why he put the fruit in and he only kept oranges I think, and apples, might have been mandarins, was when people came and placed their orders and they wanted so many oranges and so many apples, well Dad said, "I may as well put them in here and I can get rid of them like that, save me running, save the lass that was making up the order hopping into

19:00 next door, into the greengrocer and buying the apples from there."

So given your background running your own grocery store, plus the hospital, was there any time when you actually provided food for them?

No we never provided food, the government did all that. No we never had to take food there whatsoever.

19:30 And they provided us with our meals, if we worked there that's what they'd give us, they'd give us afternoon tea, I never had lunch because I just had a snack at home, afternoon tea, if I wanted to stay for tea, sometimes I could have it, but I never, very seldom did that.

What sort of food were they providing?

Oh like all hospitals,

20:00 mash sometimes you know, it all depended what kind of cook they had. Sometimes you'd get a good meal and sometimes you wouldn't. And oh, you got the basic in hospital, today its entirely different, today they have special chefs cooking, doing all that, but years ago they, well whoever they could get they'd put in the kitchen. Sometimes you'd get a good sometimes you wouldn't.

20:30 It's all entirely different when we were young. That's all I can think about, the food, but it was good wholesome food, you know, I think sometimes it was the way it was prepared, served up, the way they served it.

21:00 You often, you might have heard your grandma speak about hospital food, "Oh hospital food is terrible" and it was in those days, it wasn't good. If you had a patient in the hospital a lot of the people I know would bring their food, you know cook them at home and bring it up to the hospital for them, a lot would do. But it was always good, nourishing, they weren't

21:30 starved, but it wasn't A-one.

Were you making good friends through the VAD or the hospital ?

Oh acquaintances I met up with, because

22:00 I had my own personal friends. I didn't have a lot, but I just had a few that I could, and the family were all very close with one another.

So what were your good friends doing, were they doing something as a service for the war?

Well some were married, quite a, those days they were married very young,

22:30 others were working, some a few had joined up in the services and gone away. But we remained in Woonona helping Dad.

If you had a choice would you have left and joined the services?

23:00 I might have, but I knew that Dad wanted help and I couldn't leave him. And there was, he was a man that you didn't want for anything and I though, "Well, what is the use of going somewhere else?" And we were working, and sometimes I used to think, "Oh my God, I wouldn't be working as hard as I'm working with him",

23:30 but you put that in the back of your mind. And when you are with the family, well you stay with them.

So regrets?

No, no. I suppose when I was younger and I was working there I had been approached for a couple, asked would I like to work up in Mark Foys or different places, but no,

24:00 it was leaving home and having to travel and I thought, "No." See today it's different altogether, the young ones they want to get away they leave home straight away, don't they, get out in a flat of their own. That was unheard of when I was young.

Did your mum and Dad and yourself feel like you were contributing to the war effort?

I think so, we were helping

24:30 people and we were doing our bit, they had a big family and they were trying to, they raised all of us and gave us everything they felt was right, you know, as much as they possibly could. And then they were helping other unfortunate people who didn't have the money to go on, do things. And some were very bad, well they had illnesses and one

25:00 thing and another like that. No I think I've though often that I should have gone on and done more in schooling, but when I had my family well I thought they came along and thought if I had the brains, the ability to go ahead and do higher education, good. So that's what we put our money into. Big thing

25:30 when you have two of them going through, law school, both at university at the same time. And then renting a flat down in Sydney for them, paying their rent. And keep9ing them, but I've got no regrets, it was wonderful.

After Japan joined the war, a submarine came to Sydney and Newcastle, how did that change the community in Wollongong?

26:00 Well I think they were getting a little bit desperate, it was getting closer. And everyone was saying, "Well what's going to happen next, I wonder if we are going to get them coming down on us." That's what everyone was thinking, fortunately it didn't happen.

Was your father ready to take up arms at that point?

No

26:30 you've just got to carry on, oh Dad was too old then, you know, and he said, "Well what ever happens will happen. Just hope to the good lord that it doesn't happen." Gee it was close when it came to Newcastle. But then again, they didn't give us all the information. See we didn't learn all about it, at the time we knew it had happened, we didn't know all the details,

27:00 we weren't told anything about it, got the shock of our lives. The same as the submarine in Sydney harbour, see we only had the wireless, and they weren't giving us the news like they are today, nothing like they do today. And all they'd say, if anything happened, "Well a submarine has come into Sydney harbour", and you wouldn't know any more about it. And for a couple of weeks it would gradually sieve out a little,

27:30 but nothing like they do today, nothing. It was very bad. But I suppose in one way it's good because they don't get the community all stirred up, it's best to keep to keep them quite and go about their way. 'Cause you can't do anything can you?

28:00 **I've heard stories that ministers weren't thought too kindly off, because they were bearers of bad news, was that the case in Wollongong?**

Yes I've heard that too, I've never, there was no minister came to Dad, there was only one loss we had,

28:30 with Frank, and I think it was through the telegram as I told you, Dad knew the post-master very well. And when it came through, he came over to Dad. And he said, "What do you think I should do?" And Dad said, "Well what do you want me to do?" And he said, "Well, no, if you like I'll phone her." And I don't know how his mother, how she was approached, I think she was approached the same way.

29:00 I don't know whether the minister came to her or not. But I suppose Michael, if Dad hadn't been in

business, I suppose the minister would have come to our place, that's what would have happened I suppose, but knowing the post-master, see and telegrams that was the only way of getting to know, they were coming through

29:30 well, that was the quickest he thought. It was a very, I can't think, always could remember the day, but that's gone now. When it came through. Oh a lot of the young ones had lost their, just been married, and their husbands had gone, boyfriends had been killed and so forth, very sad.

30:00 But it's all over as my sister said, when she lost her husband, "It's all over, we can't do anything about it."

Do you think your sister should have waited until after the war until she got married?

Oh she didn't marry straight away, it was a while after, when she married the second time, oh yes the war was over when she married.

But when she married Frank?

30:30 No, she married Frank during the war, no her second marriage was when the war was all over.

Do you think that she should have waited?

Oh no, if you love someone dearly and they are going away, well get married, if you want to be married, get married. And you know that they might come back and they might not come back, well you've got to accept that. I'm a queer person like that

31:00 Michael, I think if things are going to happen, they'll happen and you can't stop them, and you've just got to learn to accept it. I've learnt this with my husband. And that's and even before then I thought well, "It's there and no one can stop it."

31:30 **How do you mean you have learnt that with your husband?**

Oh well, when Ron was diagnosed with vascular dementia I lived with it for a while and then one day I just through to myself well, I was told by the specialist it was gradually going to deteriorate and things were going to get

32:00 worse and worse, and it did too. And then I thought one day, "This is it", I sat down and cried for a couple of days and I thought, "I'm not looking after Ron, I'm just looking after someone in his own body", and I've accepted that and that is how I have come along in life. You might think I'm a bit queer. But that's my way of summing things up.

32:30 I know it will never, and of course he'll be 90 in July, doesn't look it, he looks about the youngest out there. And very, still oh, he is tottering now in speech, but no, I woke up to that last, oh 2002, and I thought, "Well that's all I can do." This is life,

33:00 isn't it? You never know what is around the corner, came as a blow to me I'll tell you, but when it's diagnosed, you've just got to be strong enough to take it. No good going under because no one will help, you've just got to help yourself, that's all you got to do. Thank God I've got two kids, that's the main thing.

33:30 But there are worse things, and at least I have got a good roof over my head, haven't I? So what else can I ask for, and I am gradually getting to the tottery old age, so well just got to bring them (UNCLEAR).

34:00 Life is a funny thing, isn't it, when you sum it all up? And I look at poor old Ron, he was a very, very smart man, always striving to do better, get better, and I look at this poor old soul now and I think, "Dear God, look where you are now", wouldn't take a holiday. No wouldn't take

34:30 a holiday, always, I was the spendthrift, I was the one that spent all his money. But poor old soul, they come out, go out to see him some days and he has plenty of clothes, but the is always in somebody else's clothes, but they are clean, thank God for that, they are clean, he looks nice and clean. But there you are, so I say, enjoy yourself while you are young, Michael,

35:00 that's my outlook. You do as much as you possibly can, don't wait until you get to a certain age because it's all gone. So there we are.

Coming back to the store, tell me about the Arnott's chairs?

35:30 Well when Arnott's were owned by the Arnott's family, they were beautiful biscuits and they were there for many, many years and they would send you down so many chairs, well if you, if you were a customer there, which Dad was, a good customer, we'd get a couple of chairs with a parrot on it, the Arnott's 'cocky' [cockatoo], yeah.

36:00 And they are lovely brightly coloured chairs too, they were good in the store.

So did you get any other sort of 'freebies' from distributors?

Oh yes, you'd get different placards to advertise their things and they were beautifully done. Different to what they are today, and you could put them on display and

36:30 they'd send you samples of little things, you know, the new items, if they had some new things out, well you'd, when the traveller would come around he'd give you the little box to sample it out to each customer. And they were good things too. Yes, oh Dad was there for a long, long time, it wasn't just in and out, they were there for ages.

37:00 **So Arnott's biscuits, were they packaged?**

Well they came in tins, and see you'd get a large tin of 'nice' or a large tin of 'iced vovos' or 'monte carlos', 'scotch fingers', well then you'd have to open up the tins and have to weigh

37:30 it out like half a pound or a pound and give those to your, but oh was it wonderful when they put them in packets, different altogether. You could just order, you know, so many packages, so many dozen of 'monte carlos', and they were all in their lovely pack, still done up, but in cardboard boxes, Whereas when the loose biscuits came they were in tins.

38:00 Good sturdy tins they were too, you had to have a special knife to go around the edges and take off all the paper before you opened it up, and they kept lovely and fresh.

From your point of view packaging made life?

Oh much quicker, much quicker, when you are serving a customer, much quicker. Well you know yourself, you go into a place and they have to

38:30 weight up something, well they can just put their hand on the shelf and give you a package, and you give the money, it's different to have to open up the tin and get a bag. Entirely different.

Could you imagine that you are inside the store now, what can you smell?

Oh it was always a mixture of everything

39:00 really, we had ventilators and had fans going. Some days more so, if humidity was bad, sugary smell I think it was something like that, but there was no produce in the, in the store itself, it was in another building alongside the

39:30 shop at the back it was, and not connected to the building at all, it was separate, on its own. And that had a different smell altogether, you can just imagine smelling bran and corn and barley, all that. They were done up in big bags, big hessian bags stored up in platforms.

Did you sell alcohol as well?

No, no, never had any of that. It was just more or less groceries and

40:00 I think he dabbled a little bit, in a little bit of jewellery, but not much, china that was, china, dabbled a little bit in chinaware. They had some very nice china, made in Japan and it was, beautiful those days, very, very fine when it came over. And oh, he used to sell some tennis rackets and balls,

40:30 oh we had a little bit of everything.

So what was the strangest order?

I don't know, Michael, there was always some queer things going on, I can tell you that now. And if we didn't have that, we'd go and buy it in for them,

41:00 oh there was many a customer who couldn't get up to Sydney or into Wollongong, they'd asked Dad if he could buy a bedroom suite for them, and things like that. Or a mattress and he'd willingly do it for them, and he'd have connections and have it delivered free to their place.

Tape 7

00:42 **Can you tell us about your trip to the opening of Ryde hospital?**

I can't tell you much about it at all.

01:00 I had notes on all that and I burnt everything. Sorry Simon, I threw it, its just like I said to Leslie, I don't know, when I joined up and by luck I had the card that I used to take with me up to Bulli Hospital. I just pitched everything out, I'd had enough, isn't that awful.

01:30 So I can't help you there. That's why it takes so long I suppose

What about Lady Davidson's?

No I can't Simon, I know we were there and I can't tell you to this day who opened it. I didn't go to,

02:00 no I went to those two, I can't remember, can't tell you anything about that, it's awful. Had I kept my notes, I always had a little book and write them down, but they all went out.

You mentioned you attended a few marches as a VAD?

Well they had, used to have, big ones in Sydney and we'd come up for Anzac day,

02:30 celebrating Anzac day and we'd take part in that. And then they'd ask for voluntary times, I didn't attend a lot of those, only attended a few, and then we'd go into Wollongong, they'd have a big march down, it was closer for us and we used to go there.

03:00 **Was there a strong sense of pride associated with the march?**

Oh yes, they'd have the returned men and all voluntary people. All the voluntary groups would combine, march down Crown Street. And they'd have a ceremony down at the centre, then they'd all just march and go home. Sometimes we'd go to a hall and they would have a service. Other times it would

03:30 just be the march and home we'd come again, just in respect for the fallen. The ones who didn't come back

Were these marches during or after the war?

They were during the war. And they still, they weren't a great deal of people there, they were more the men in the First World War. Some of them, I know Ron's uncle went in the First World War

04:00 and he went in the Second World War and they were a few marches. There were a few there, not a lot. But I didn't, we used to go up to Sydney for those. And then the VAD community, they'd call if they possibly could, from Bathurst and all around the place and we'd all congregate in Sydney and have a

04:30 big meeting. And as for the head of the VADs, those days I can't even remember the, see it's all written down and I've forgotten everything about them. Isn't it awful.

This Anzac marches take on an increased importance during those war years?

Yes, it was very sad

05:00 and we thought we were doing the right thing for them, asking if we'd march in it. Yeah sometimes there would be a march and we would go to a service and other times there would be just a march and we would embark and we'd go home again.

Were there any political concerns, from the RSL, about volunteers and women marching?

05:30 No, they were delighted to see that we were doing good work, I think they were very proud of us. That we were doing the work, a lot of people, more people should be involved in. But I think there were a lot of people, I came only from a small township Woonona and Corrimal, Wollongong was growing bigger then

06:00 and it was expanding, but our little group, there wasn't as many as Wollongong. But I don't think there were a lot of volunteers, I think there was more permanent people you know, that joined the services and went away, of course ours was just only weekend service.

06:30 That's all I can remember, it's awful, I forgot all about Frank until Leslie was speaking to David and some matter and he said, "Has Mum told them", I said, "No I have forgotten that." They've got to remind me of a lot of things now.

The marches during the war would have involved American serviceman?

07:00 No, not so many. After, this is the Second World War and there wasn't a great deal of marching then. But after the Second World War was finished there was more then, taking place, the American soldiers. I think too another thing, if there was a ship in berth at Sydney Harbour and they came ashore, I think they would march, they would be

07:30 involved in the marches.

Did you notice significant changes to Sydney during that period?

Oh yes, yes, you couldn't walk anywhere, there was always service people on leave or just going, and groups of people farewelling their loved ones, you know, before they went. Oh it was a busy place.

08:00 We went up there a lot, but each time I went, oh just towards the end, that's right, I met my cousin and I wasn't in uniform, I went up to meet her and the Yanks [Americans] had hit Sydney, you couldn't get moving anywhere. Every restaurant and she had, she came down from Newcastle and we met at Circular Quay, I think it was.

08:30 We had lunch and you couldn't get a place to get a 'bite', it was just packed with Americans, everywhere

you went.

What was your attitude to them?

Oh well I suppose there were, I just accepted it, that they were here in Australia and then they were only here for a short while and then they boarded the boat, some were having a break before they went back on duty again, going back overseas.

09:00 Some were going home for good, and they were having a few weeks in paradise, well Australia was paradise those days, compared to what was going on overseas. Yes, it was a big difference.

A lot of the Aussie blokes didn't like the Yanks much?

No, they hated them, they hated them, they had too much to say. As soon as they opened there mouth they didn't stop, did they?

09:30 **And their wallets, from all accounts?**

Yes, I didn't have much to do with the Yanks, but a lot of the people in Sydney, there weren't a great deal of Yanks down the coast, down our way, they were more scattered around Sydney, I think they had come in for a rest or just a, some would be going home and they'd give them a few days in Sydney

10:00 before they transported them back to America. Others would be ready to go back into the firing line again.

A lot of the blokes say they were here stealing all our women?

That's right.

Did you know any girls?

No I didn't know, yes I've heard of them. My husband's brother, he married, he lost his wife. No she was an Australian, Jean was, and she married a Yank and

10:30 oh he, of course their uniforms were beautiful, and you could look a scraggy old fellow and when they put their uniforms on, dear you shone out. I must admit their uniforms were entirely different to the Australians', they were beautiful, even privates, and the material too. And Jean married a Yank and then they divorced and then she married Ken.

11:00 He, Ron's brother, my husband's brother he was about five years younger than Ron and he did so many years over in New Guinea, he came back, he wasn't the same though, it affected him. And she (UNCLEAR) and she married Ken and they went to live over in Hawaii.

11:30 Lovely spot isn't it?

Did you ever attend any dances with the Americans?

We only went to one, I mentioned they had a big 'to do' in Sydney and it was held at Grace Bros and they asked if we would, all groups, could we possibly come up. There was a ship in and I don't know, some were Americans, some were English, I think we had two Poms [English] and, look I can't remember their names, but each

12:00 VAD that came they were given a partner and you had a set table to attend to. They were very nice fellows, and we spent the night one Saturday night at Grace Bros auditorium. That gave them a break they thought it was lovely to do that, but that was the first and last I saw of that. Then we slept at

12:30 the Country Women's Association, I think. Then we came home the next day. Of course you'd have to go by train and it would take you about two hours from catching a train from Woonona Station up to Sydney. And that's how we, that was another weekend. That was only once I went to one of those turn outs, but it was very nice. Well organised.

13:00 **And you were of course, well used to being set up with gentlemen you didn't know?**

Yes, with my sisters, I never used to worry after that, with my sisters, that was the last straw.

It must have been an interesting thing to do to meet these servicemen?

Yes, they spoke about, Eileen was the only one that I was very friendly with, and strange to say I was married and then I lost track of her because my husband

13:30 was only, we'd remain in one place for so long, after he retired from his tiling business and we were moving for something even went into a pub at Leichhardt of all places. That was an experience. And I never got back to my old friends from the VADs. That was what I was just saying to Leslie, if only I could talk to those, some of those women they could help me out, you know, they might

14:00 remember, some of them might be dead, I don't know I haven't been in touch with them, haven't heard from them in years. Amazing isn't it?

I've read the Americans brought a lot of cultural change with them?

Well Simon, I never had anything to do with Americans, there is a lot

14:30 of people they did, I heard about that too, but not personally, didn't affect me at all.

What about Australia culture, values and entertainments and fashions?

Oh they tried to, but I don't think Australians took much notice of them.

15:00 Some did and some didn't, I wouldn't anyway, I wouldn't, I'm not over keen on their fashions.

Except the uniforms?

Oh dear, they were beautiful, they put a lot of money, even the old privates, you'd swear he was a 'million dollar buddy' coming down the road. And some did look really well in their

15:30 uniforms. Well it either makes or breaks you doesn't it?

The train to Sydney, can you describe Central Station in those days?

It was very busy, it was very small

16:00 and you could walk around, oh no, it's nothing like it is today. Today, well I haven't been there, oh it's a long time now since I have been at Central Station and you had the country trains leaving one portion and then you had the coastal trains leaving another part of the place, and then you had the northern

16:30 and then out west. There weren't a lot of trains those days, but they ran on time and they got the people around, yeah. And they were slow because they were steam. Some were fast, they'd put on a couple of fast trains now and again, as I said previously, there was a very fast train early in the morning. A lot of people

17:00 travelled from Woonona, or Bulli up to Sydney and back again, and they'd finish there work, I think it was the quarter past five and they'd be back home again about seven. That wasn't a bad train. Those two trains were good, but in the mean time they were very slow, if you didn't catch those they were very slow trains. Stopping at all stations.

17:30 **During the war there was a great deal of technology improvements, can you remember anything coming out of that time?**

Well, look at the television. After the war the television came, what a difference that made. Gee, you would have though there were on, so many things happened since my day, not so much it will be in yours, but there's been a tremendous amount of improvements

18:00 Look the dollar, the change system, from the cents to the dollar, always change. That was another thing to work out. As you say, television, that was the biggest thrill I think of everybody, once television came on.

Tell me about your first experience of television?

Well my Dad was about the second person to have it in Woonona. Yes,

18:30 we went out to a friend's place, a builder who had put it in, and Dad was taken up with it very much. And he wanted that television, so it wasn't long after that he installed it. We had left home, we were practically all married then, only Noel and we came out, we couldn't afford it straight away, but it wasn't long before we put one on. And then

19:00 the beauty of all when it became coloured. We had the black and white and then it became coloured, that was a big thrill of everybody's. Did a lot of damage to the theatres and then gradually, it all came back again, they got the people coming back to see the movies. But when it first came out oh no, one would go

19:30 from day and night to watch their television.

Was it a social experience at that time? Would you sit down as a group?

You'd sit down as a group, you'd invite people who didn't have any, that's how we started off we had friends, my husband's friend who is not long passed away. He was one of the first ones in Wollongong to put one in and he said, "Come on up Ron and have a

20:00 look at it" and we'd go up to his place on different nights and see different shows. And you'd bring different ones that didn't have it, and then when we put it in we'd invite ones that hadn't. And eventually they all got television. It all came around. It was very exciting, it was wonderful, great company, television.

What about other technological developments,

20:30 **you mentioned the change to metric?**

The metric [system] came. Oh dear.

That would have been interesting for you in the store?

Oh well I wasn't there then, I was married, I was married in 1950 and I think the metric and the dollar changed, I don't know when that

21:00 came in, that came in 1950-something, I know, I'd have to ask Leslie, I think she would have an idea of that, when it changed, it took some getting used to that.

Did the way the store operate in terms of suppliers and packaging change after the war?

21:30 Well to start off with you had cash registers that you could just put your finger on and tally it up and give you the right money. Well see, we had to do all that ourselves. That was another big, a big thing in business, that you could just go to the cash register and just

22:00 dot, dot, dot, and you got your amount and how much to give back, that was wonderful. I never operated one of those, but by 'golly', when I saw it, what a way of doing business there. That all changed quickly.

Before World War II, business would produce goods to meet demand, but after World War II,

22:30 **when the levels of production were so high, they would create products and then create demand, so there were much stronger brand names and marketing. Was that something that you noticed through your business?**

No well see, I had left then, I was away from it. And I noticed when I was buying, just

23:00 for the family I noticed a big difference in that, I had left the business then. Oh there's been big changes Simon, very much. And we were a real 'country', you know, 'family grocer', that's what Dad was and everything was done just 'family like'. But I know my

23:30 brother took over after Dad passed away and he installed quite a few things and made things much, even when the sultanas and all the dried fruits came in packets, and the biscuits they all came in packets and that made a wonderful difference. Yes, we did it the hard way.

24:00 **Definitely a lost experience isn't it?**

Yes, you had to have everything done for quickness, and, like you opened your doors and it might be very slack, and before you know where you are, well, you are run off your feet. And if you haven't got things weighed up and things like that, my gosh, people

24:30 won't stand waiting for that, no, not today. Oh it's a much quicker way, what they are doing now. Even when they touch the cash register there, the amount, how much you are buying, how much you are spending, oh gosh no working out at all is there? Its absolutely heaven, they shouldn't grumble today.

25:00 **Did you have a sense, in 1945 that the war was nearing an end?**

Yes it was coming through that they were trying to make an end, toward Armistice Day was coming and things were going to come to a close. We didn't have it, but we read in the papers the way they were writing that things were going to come to a ceasefire.

25:30 **Did you have complete faith in the reporting and what the media told you?**

Well like everything I do, I read the paper and then I sum it up for myself. I think it out for myself, what is going to happen, whether I am right or wrong, still have my way.

Was there a definite lifting in the publics mood as 1945 wore on?

Oh yes,

26:00 everything seemed to, I know, then see, but everything changed, there was a lull for a little while. Then when the returned men started to settle back into their, some, back into their old position, some trying to do a new job or try some new way of doing things, it took a little while,

26:30 but after I married Ron, the south coast was only small, oh it just went like mushrooms, everything was shooting up everywhere. And his business, oh well they had a very good business down there because they were doing their steelworks down there, their work and everything down there and well, people wanted blocks of land

27:00 and they wanted to build and they wanted homes. And of course, the servicemen were getting so much to build their homes, well it 'going like mad' his business, oh it snowballed, I never saw my husband, they were even working on Sundays to try and get work through.

Could you talk me through the final day of the war?

27:30 Well I was still in the top shop. And the people who we rented it from, they came racing into me, because their son had been in New Guinea and they called out, "It's finished Olwyn, it's finished!" And

everyone went crazy, I believe, in Crown Street. Traffic stopped and they were out with flags and they were dancing

28:00 in the streets and calling out. Down in Woonona they went crazy too, but it was a wonderful lift for a lot of people that had, not so much as the ones that didn't have any family connected. They went (UNCLEAR), but the ones that had family overseas, oh they just went really 'off their heads', they were so excited. Oh they celebrated right into the early hours of the morning.

28:30 I think it was declared about 11 in the morning, 11 or 12, I've just forgotten, Simon. I remember, I was on my own in the top shop and I had a couple of customers in I was serving, when Mrs Palliers came racing in and screamed out to me, "It's over, it's over!" It was a wonderful thing.

Had there been any point during the war that you though you might not hear that?

29:00 Well when we heard about the bombing of Newcastle, we though, "Oh my God, what's going to happen", even when they started at Darwin, "Gee it's coming through Darwin." But then Sydney Harbour and then Newcastle, we thought, "Dear, oh dear it will be Port Kembla next."

29:30 And that's what we all lived in fear of, you know, that that was going to happen. But thank the good lord it didn't happen.

So how did you celebrate?

Oh I had to work the rest of the day, then we went home and we had a bit of a celebration at home. I don't know whether the girls went out, or just exactly what took place, but I know we had a celebration at home

30:00 over it, we were all so thrilled that everything had. But then it all ceases, but the men don't return for a while because they've got to go through all the whole 'rigmarole', go through the doctors and get them, leave, finish their training and it takes a while.

30:30 And the poor beggars that were in New Guinea, well they weren't released straight away, they kept them up there for a while, and then when they were able to travel, then they brought them down, as I was telling you I think, to Lady Davidson's or North Ryde, back to those convalescence places. Then they'd transferred out to the smaller places. I think there was a few like Mount Kira around, and they'd go down there

31:00 for a few weeks until they were strong enough to go home from there.

How long did you keep up with your VAD duties?

Oh well I went to the meetings, we continued the meetings, and when it was finished we had a big farewell meeting and that was it. And then we just closed down and that was the end. Everything was thrown out.

31:30 **Do you recall that final meeting?**

Oh some were broken hearted, some very sad we were parting, we'd said we'd keep in touch, but I don't know, we just drifted on and I didn't keep in touch with a lot of them. I did with one of my closest friends and we drifted away and I haven't seen any of them since.

32:00 That's my husband's fault I'd say, moving on from one place to another. We lived in Wollongong for a while and then he wanted to come back up onto the Georges River, so we lived in Wollongong, in our first home, then we moved, he built this big block of flats and we were on a big penthouse on the top. And we sold

32:30 that and came and lived on the Georges River at Kangaroo Point, it was beautiful there, really lovely.

You mentioned the mixed emotions at the end of the war? Did you have a sense that you didn't know how you should feel?

I did, I felt it was heaven to have everything finished and everything stopped. Very sad for the people, for the families that their loved ones didn't return, very sad for them. But it was a relief, it just seemed as if you

33:00 were on thin air, everything was over, had to be in darkness, lights out at a certain time, darkness all the time, and no more coupons and things like that, oh it was wonderful. It was lovely.

How long did it take before a sens of normality returned for you?

Well Thelma was going to be married

33:30 and so we were all thrilled about that, and we were waiting for John to be discharged so he could come back to a little township. And we were all keyed up about that. Oh it didn't take us long because we fitted into other things. The biggest thing, it was over, and it was out of our hair, and we had

34:00 none of this, had to be careful of this, had to careful of something else. That's all gone and we've got

another free life, that's what it was.

Was there a sense of people making most of new opportunities?

They had new opportunity and they were ready to start a new life. A lot of people were like that. Rebuild their lives again.

So those following years must have been quite exciting? Full of hope?

34:30 It was, everybody rearing to get up. And where people were doing, they didn't go back, a lot of people, the men, didn't go back to their old positions, they went out and tried to get into new positions and try to do different things altogether. And some were successful and others weren't, some went by the wayside, as you know, a lot of people cannot work on their own,

35:00 they have got to work, unfortunately, with someone over them, and you've got to have the willpower to do things. And that was sad, you heard a lot of sad cases like that, there was a lot of broken marriages, terrible lot of broken marriages. But that's how it was.

Were they major changes that never were the same again?

Well,

35:30 you were younger when the war broke out. And you were going off to your socials and your dances and your balls and things like that. We used to love dancing, and you seemed to get into a different bracket, and you didn't want to do those things,

36:00 you wanted to change into something else, they had all gone. Some were just starting to enjoy their young lives when it was broken off through the war. They had lost their partners, they had lost their boyfriends, and they were just left stranded, they didn't want to mix, and some turned over a different, I think it all depends on yourself, if you had the willpower to

36:30 strike out and do something different, you had to be strong though, to do it.

Was life more serious after the war?

It wasn't as 'free living', after the war, you tried to get back to your old ways, but everything had changed with the migrants coming back into the country. You just had to watch your step, what you

37:00 were doing. It wasn't, and of course naturally they wanted to build Australia up, what are we now, thirty million, aren't we? Twenty million, they wanted to bring it up, well they brought all these migrants in and it changed a lot. They brought, I don't know what happened, but to me there was a lot of, there is good and bad in everybody, in all types of

37:30 Australians, Japanese there is good and bad, and they are trying to mix them all in together, and it doesn't work. Some it does, some doesn't and that's where all the trouble started, I think. I might be wrong, that was my outlook in life.

Which trouble?

Oh well,

38:00 when we were young, you could walk to a theatre on your own or with a couple of girls, you could leave home and walk half a mile and wouldn't think anything of it. But you couldn't do that after the war, you'd be bashed up or God knows what they would do to you. It was terrible and of course now, look at it now, it's getting worse, isn't it?

Was there a sense that it was the migrant influence that was causing this?

38:30 Well that was what we all though it was. It was a different way of life, these people came to live in Australia, they thought they were still living in their own land and they weren't living in Australia, that was my outlook, I don't know whether I am right or wrong. But everybody is different. But life

39:00 was much freer and much easier before the Second World War, after the Second World War you just had to be very careful. You could leave doors open and you know, your windows open and everything, and as the years went on you had to watch what you were doing. It was different altogether I think we were a younger country. I suppose I should put it down to, we were a young country and

39:30 there weren't as many people living in the place. I suppose that was what it was. And everyone trusted one another.

There was an innocence about the place?

I think so. I think that's what, when it's all summed up, that's what it was. And the more population you get, well you've got to watch what you get, but it

40:00 was much freer and much easier living before the Second World War. And I imagine that now things have got worse and worse, and different areas. I don't know, these gangs I don't know where they came

from, God only knows.

Do you think the fact that Australia was directly threatened contributed to that loss of innocence?

40:30 Could be, Simon, I don't know, it changed our lives altogether. And I have noticed when my family has been, my two have been growing up, how different their lives, we were lucky we could take them away, we had weekenders and we could pack up and go away for so many weeks at a time and take them into the bush,

41:00 whereas the poor kids today when they go away they've got to go into units and entirely different, isn't it?

Tape 8

00:41 **We have just been discussing the changes following the war,**

01:00 **there were a lot of changes with the roles and contributions of women, did you notice a lot of changes?**

Oh yeah, I think it's wonderful

01:30 the way the women are playing a wonderful part in society today, I think its marvellous and I wish I had gone through and had something I could, that's why I always said to my family, "Strive to do, if you are going to be a teacher, go right through and get your credentials behind you and know what you are doing",

02:00 whereas we were brought up that there was never anything like that. And I always say if anything should break down in the marriage well, they've always got something behind them that they can go and do. Whereas I never, we never had that. And I think that's wonderful, and I think, now it's wonderful that they both are working,

02:30 and the man can help in the home as much as the woman. When I married my husband it was all the woman, the woman had to do everything, he went to work and that was it. And I had to have the house going and control the house and the children and he didn't do anything like that. He was a wonderful man, he provided me with lovely

03:00 homes and everything like that and I wasn't short of money or anything like that, but I think it, every person must have something behind them and if they do marry, they can always go out if they want to and secure a job. And that's something they've got behind them, I don't know whether I am right or wrong, but I do think they are doing a wonderful job.

03:30 **Did you have a sense of injustice at the time, that you would have liked to have been doing more with yourself and your talents?**

Yes, I would always liked to have gone out and done, been independent, that's what I'd like to do. You see now, why I realise this now, Simon, I've had a husband who's done everything for me, being in the building trade, a screw came loose he would fix if up. If the [light] globes

04:00 needed redoing, he'd do those. If the latch fell off the gate, he'd be out and fix that up. Anything, little things like that, and as for investing and all that, he did everything. What happens, it's all fallen on my shoulders now, and it's been a hell of a job, I tell you. I've had to take over and I wasn't trained for anything like that.

04:30 Only with my Dad and my way of doing things and, my goodness it's become very hard. He was a very demanding man and I let him go because whatever made, he made a success in life. And I thought here we are, we are right, and what's happened now? I've got to take over everything, fortunately I've got a good lad that, he says, "Mum do it, and I'll check you over", but

05:00 my God it was hard on me at this age ,it's different if it happens, if you are in your 60s or 70s, but at my age 84, its very hard.

Thank goodness you gave those kids such a good education?

That's what I say to everyone, try, if your kids can't, if they are not academically minded, well put them to a good trade, but put them into something, and even a girl,

05:30 well put her into hairdressing , dressmaking, do something that she can make a living out of for later on, to come. And give her a good eye of the world. I certainly had my training with my Dad, but nothing for years, for 53 years my husband's just done everything, investing, everything, and then all at once it's all fallen on my shoulders.

06:00 Overnight, it's the saying, last year was the hardest year, I've pulled through.

Can you compare some of the lessons in the last year, in the lessons learned during the experience of war?

06:30 I suppose you do achieve some things, but I don't think you achieve a lot. You're mixing and moving around. When I was young, well you kept in your small town. But after the war, well you moved on and it was up and you go

07:00 and try new places to live and go into work. But when I was young it wasn't so, you tried to remain in the same place. Yes, yes and no I'd say to that.

What were the main things you took from the experience of the war? What did you learn about life through that period?

07:30 I don't know, I've learnt you had to, we've been very independent and I'll battle it on my own til the very last you know, and my husband was the same. Well I suppose I grew into his ways more or less. And

08:00 I don't know how to answer that, Simon.

You were very strong in your own right, you were managing your own store, you didn't rush out and get married?

No I had I few friends, yeah, I had a few friends.

Why did you wait?

Oh I wasn't interested

08:30 in them, to be married to be tied down, no.

So you were, in your own way, a socially liberated woman?

I should have had more education and I suppose I would have gone further afield, if I had more education. But I had no one to push me, and I thought more of my people and I thought, no, it would be better to stay with them.

09:00 But I say to every young person, if they possibly can, get as much education as you possibly can. And never be too, never be frightened, always try something new, in your ability, to what you can do. And that's all I can say there. Now I had the experience, yes I did and I

09:30 have had a lot of experience since I've been married with Ron, because we've been into, first of all we've been into the business, then from the business we went into permanent units, which we let, and I handled a lot of that, the renting and things like that. And then we moved up to the Georges River and Ron then started, in a different way, by building

10:00 factories and leasing factories to the pen people from American like that, they'd come over and they'd want a factory and they'd lease it. I can't think of the name of the pens, I had it for years. And then he got tired of that and he went into a pub. The only reason why he went into a pub was because his grandmother owned the Windsor Hotel at Windsor and he

10:30 wanted to just try it out. We were only in there five minutes and he soon got sick of that. We didn't lose any money, we came out of that. And we went back into holiday units at Forster. And we made our money I suppose, in rental. That's been the big thing with us, rental and investment.

11:00 But otherwise, Simon, I would have liked to, and now I am left on my own, and well there we are, at 84 what do you do.

Once the war was finished you discarded...

I was finished I was finished with it all, I'd had enough of going and hearing,

11:30 seeing people ill and limbs off, and how they are mentally unbalanced and all that, oh it was no good. I was glad to see the end of it.

Do you think that was the attitude of most of the community?

I think a lot of people were like that. I was only in voluntary aid, but I threw, my sister Thelma, they threw all their uniforms out too, the same as I did, note paper and everything.

12:00 That's it, it's finished, it's gone, we'll start a new life now.

Did you share your experiences with Ron?

No he was always busy, he was always busy thinking of the next thing, the next project he was going to do, and he didn't go into small projects, the mighty big projects

12:30 building holiday units and then building the big factories and leasing them out, things like that.

What about sharing with your children? Was that important?

Yes, I've spoken to them, and we often, I've often talked to Leslie about different things that have happened. But my life has been very busy, because I've been moving on,

13:00 moving on and preparing to go to something else. And now I've had to take over from my husband and it's not been easy. But yes, we've talked a lot about it with David and Leslie.

What were the best of times, during the war?

13:30 Well we, I met very interesting people at the hospital and up at the military hospital, oh there were some very interesting men. I don't know, Simon.

What were the worst of times?

Having to don that 'ruddy' uniform, grey stockings and the black shoes. I liked the work, but I hated

14:00 the uniform. They've made a much more modern, I think, you know as time went on, they modernised it a little. But still that was those days. No I think we were very, very happy when it was all over and we seemed to be back, but things never got the same. But as we were getting older

14:30 and Thelma was being married and then Roma, Roma the sister after me had met an Englishman and he came from, he was in the Royal Fleet Air Arm and he came over here and of course, he was a 'beggar' Derek, he'd been out on a night out and the next

15:00 morning he'd been demobbed [demobilised] from flying and he had to go into ground staff, and that's how he came out here. Oh just being young I suppose, and being with the boys you know, first time out, being an only child. And he didn't ever want to go back to England again. Oh what an upsetting time that was, he was an only child. He went to Cambridge and the mother and father were in a terrible way. However

15:30 stayed with the big family, the Pitman family, another to add to my mother's crew and she eventually married him. And he wouldn't go back, he wanted to do med [medicine] and my father said, "No, you haven't got the money", so he became a teacher and from then, an inspector of schools. He's done very well Derek, now he's retired up at Mullumbimby and never

16:00 wanted to go back to England again. That was meeting on the beach at North Wollongong, that was another thing. She met him on the beach at North Wollongong, that was the sister next to me. Yes there were some good things, we had some fun in life. I suppose if I think deeply enough I could come back, but at the present time

16:30 you know, things have happened.

So when did you Dad buy the newsagency?

Oh dear, I think that was after the First World War.

17:00 I think it was after the First World War.

He already had a grocery store?

No, yes, wait a minute, he started as a young man, working with a cooperative store down in Woonona and he worked in the grocery department there. And then he was getting tired of that

17:30 and grandfather built this shop and he said, "Right we'll make it into a newsagency." Now Ray would be only, oh she was only a baby. I don't know, I'm not so 'goo', I've got to get a pen and pencil to work things out. And she was four years older than me, and she's been, 1914 to 1918,

18:00 the First World War, may have been 1919, 1920, but that's how. It might be in the book out there.

How did you Dad and mum meet?

My mother came in from a little town called Minmi outside of Newcastle and John Brown owned the

18:30 mine up there. And I think grandfather Williams, her father, worked for him as a train driver. And she had a relative staying down in Woonona and she came down on a holiday and that's how they met.

And they were married soon after that?

Yes, it wasn't long after that their romance

19:00 developed and they decided to get married. I think Mum was about 22 and Dad was five years older than her so it makes him 27. He'd been about 27 or 28 when they were married.

Did they ever share any memories about their meeting and courting?

Oh they used to, no they just used to tell us about their life together in the newsagency. And then they spent so many years there and

19:30 they sold out and Dad wanted a break, so he had a friend who had an apple orchard at Tallimba. And those days, it must have been, yes, because the pneumonic flu was starting to rage, spread around in Australia and I remember

20:00 her saying they went up to Tallimba and they didn't have anything, there were lots and lots of young people dying with it. And I think being out in the open, and on the land, why they went, he wanted a break, but he had no idea of farming, he was 'gentlemen Jim', he didn't know the first thing about farming. But he thoroughly enjoyed it, the best part of all, he used to go into Brisbane and referee the soccer games.

20:30 They'd ask him to do that. And he only spent a few years up there. When he came back then down to, back after the break, came back to Woonona and I think he was working with one of his brothers, then I think he decided to open up a grocery business.

So that's when he was really quite successful with the groceries.

Yes, he had that for a long while. Oh without his family, he made a success when the girls left school and worked for him.

21:00 It was going along alright before, but it grew and grew.

You mentioned that your mum did the 'books'?

Yes.

Did she do 'books' for other businesses?

No, no she had to work that out herself. She was a dressmaker and worked on her own and Dad wanted her to do the 'books'. And he said, "No I'm not employing

21:30 anyone, you can do the 'books'" and she did them. All the way through we were all going to school and then, when Thelma, Dad took ill, I think he had a bleeding ulcer and he was put into Bulli Hospital for about a couple of weeks, well Thelma had to leave school and come home and help Dad with the shop and with all us kids at home. We were

22:00 starting to get you know 14, 15 or 16 growing up and Thelma helped out then, she still did it, but Thelma actually took over and she did them.

What school did you go to?

I was at Woonona Public School.

What are your memories of Woonona?

Big classes, and

22:30 no air-conditioning and they said it was good, school days, but you were all herded in together those days, there was 50 odd in a class. That's a lot of kids. Oh it was a good school there was a lot of students from there went on to do well in life.

23:00 So I didn't blame the school, there were good teachers, it was a good school. A good infants' school down the bottom and then this big building up the top which they had girls separate and boys separate.

Class sizes were 50, was that all one year?

All one year.

So Woonona was densely populated with young families?

23:30 Oh yes, yes. A lot of miners there. Majority was miners, there was brick layers and people in business and things like that, but more miners.

You mentioned earlier your father didn't encourage mixing because you had such a large family.

24:00 **What sort of friendships were formed at school?**

Oh we gradually became, when we were old enough he used to say, "Oh there was enough of you at home, you don't want any more." But by the time then we went to secondary schools and the trade school, we were able then to make up our minds, about 13 or 14, I think. We broke out you know, they'd allow us to have our cousins in, but that was all, but we managed to get our friends in. And then

24:30 we were joining up different tennis clubs and swimming clubs. Going swimming and different clubs and through the church, it made a difference.

So what sort of things were you learning in your early part of schooling?

Well your basic, it was reading, writing, and arithmetic in those days. No art, that came in if you, if you weren't taught, if you didn't have a flair for it, well you could fall by the wayside you know. Different

altogether to what it is today.

In what way?

Well you have smaller classes Michael, and if children are not able to, they will put you into smaller classes, and they will help the backward ones more so than the brighter ones,

and they put the brighter ones into top classes and keep the back ones into another section. So Leslie tells me. I wouldn't know myself, that's what I hear, you know. I knew, when I sent my two to school, I sent mine to public schools, David finished up at Ford Street High, but

I always say 'if your kids can keep in the top classes at school well you leave them were they are'. But if they can't and you want to further on I think its time then to put them into a private school. Give them more tuition.

What sort of mischief did you and your fellow schoolmates get up to?

Oh I can remember when we

were kids, next to my father's shop Mr Edward owned this big fruit stall shop. He had ice cream and sweets and fruit and vegetables. And then he had another little part where he used to lease off to an Italian, he was a hairdresser, George Cruise. I remember I was very friendly with his daughter and we'd get up on, they had, it was a big

weatherboard place, two storey, and we'd get up and they'd open, like a 'bed and breakfast', and they'd have a big dining room. His wife took over the back, she was a cateress and she'd do all the cooking and they'd lease so many rooms

out to borders and Friday night the Salvation Army would play on their, 'cause Friday night was the night you kept your door open, your shop door open until 9 o'clock at night. You'd open at 8 o'clock in the morning and you wouldn't close till after 9. Of course, I was still going to school then, and we climb up there and the 'Salvos' would play and we'd be dropping beads

or whatever we could get, on their heads, as they were playing. To keep us, you do, kids do these things don't they? And they'd look up and you know, then we were caught and did we get 'what out' from our parents. We were never allowed upstairs again.

So what discipline was taken then?

Oh just a good talking to. We never got, oh occasionally my mother would get the 'cat-o-nine-tails' out. It was a

leather strap, say about 12 inches long. Part of it would be very thick and then it would have the tails, the leather cut into tails. We'd get that around our legs if we were naughty. But very seldom.

So a leather strap? Would you get six of the best?

No just get a good hard smack,

she'd just pick it up and give us a 'whack' along the legs or along the bottom. Oh no she wouldn't… some kids would get good beltings and things like that, but we never got that. But it was what they called a 'cat-o-nine-tails' and it was strip of leather, I suppose it would be about 3 inches wide. And half way would be the handle where it had a hole in it

which you'd hang on the hook. And the lower part would cut into strips, it might be four strips of leather. And if you got those around your legs it would hurt. And they call that the 'cat-o-nine-tails'. That used to hang in the kitchen, and if we got up to mischief we'd get that around our legs.

Your father never used it?

No my father never raised a,

I only ever heard him say in all his life, "Damn it", that's all he ever said, my mother used to swear like 'nobody's business'. But she had the whole control, she had to look after the kids and do the sewing for them and everything. Although we had help in the home, she still had 6 kids to look after and see that they were well provided for, you know, but no Dad never raised a hand, always, "Go to your mother, go to your mother."

I'm fascinated that your mum, the disciplinarian and bad language, was that uncommon for women in those days?

Oh she did, well she wouldn't be ridiculous, she might say, "Damn you" or "Bugger you" or something like that, but no

more than that. Might be 'bloody' or something like that, "Bloody little animals" or something like that, you know, she might say that. But she wouldn't know any other words, it would get it off her chest, you can just imagine looking after 6 kids and you've been down doing books all day long and come home and you are left with all this and the housekeeper telling her tales of what you've been up to all day,

what they have been doing,

31:30 well you can just imagine what you would feel like. When you were tired and it was hot. And no air-conditioning in those days, and no big fans in the roof. And oh she was a wonderful woman, she was full of life herself, always urging you to get on and do better things for yourself. But Dad was very 'happy go lucky', never said a word,

32:00 he always used to, if there was any trouble, he say, "They need attending to Harriet" her name was Harriet Muriel Pitman, "Harriet you want to check those kids in you know", "Yes well, I'll do it" and he never, if anything wants nailing up on the walls, he'd hold the ladder while she climbed the ladder and had to put the nails in and paint and do everything,

32:30 he'd sit by, puffing away at his pipe holding on to the ladder. She did everything, wonderful woman.

Did she dominate your father?

No, no, they had a lovely, a good married life, very, they were very happy with one another, though she didn't, well she didn't have time for sport,

33:00 but Dad was wrapped up in sport, anything that was on, tennis match or a soccer match or a league match, he was there to see it you know . He travelled, he'd talk to some of his customers and they were going up and they'd hire a car and all put in and about 6, 5 of them, the old 'Chevs' [Chevrolet] and those old time cars. Up they'd go and see a match up in Sydney, it was no trouble for them.

33:30 He knew Mum was there to look, and he had us to keep an eye on the business and things. He was a lucky man.

Did your mum and Dad argue much?

Oh yes, like ordinary people, married people do they have their ups and downs, don't they? No one's perfect Simon,

34:00 Michael I should say.

Did you go on family holidays?

No, no we didn't go away till he bought a weekender down the coast, but he never took a holiday, he worked through and through and through and then gradually as he got older and the business, we were taking over the business, they'd have a week

34:30 here and a week there. But holidays were the last thing for them, they never worried about holidays.

What about when you were running the second store? Did you take time off?

Oh he always used to say, I'd get a bit cranky and that, "Righto have a day off" and he'd say, "I'll come up and look after the shop and go off to Sydney and have a day,

35:00 you'll come back and feel a lot better", and it was true too, so off you go. I might have a week occasionally, but not regular holidays. I wouldn't have the regular holidays. Every now and again I might go away for a week up to the mountain or somewhere just for a break and come back, but not a permanent, not like they do today.

35:30 **You were paid in wages or vouchers?**

I got 5 shillings a week, until I got 10 shillings a week, that's how much we started off with.

What was the deal there?

Well that was our pocket money and our keep, well that was nothing, but we got 5 shillings for pocket money. I got 5 shillings

36:00 and Thelma got 10 shillings and then it gradually went up every year, we'd get so much. But if we wanted anything special well he'd, Dad would see that we got it. If we wanted a bicycle, which Thelma wanted or she wanted a new racket well he'd always buy it for her. But we never got big wages.

36:30 See, that's working with your family.

There was no sadness that you weren't paid a fair wage?

No we didn't expect it because we had a lovely home, we had everything in the home we wanted and we knew if we wanted anything special well, our parents would get it for us. And of course things were much cheaper in those days, Michael, they were much cheaper,

37:00 clothing and shoes and everything were very cheap. It was different altogether, as I, the years went on, I just don't know how long I was in that shop. And then I came down to the bottom shop, our wages would go up. We started off with that for a few months and then Dad would say, "Righto, we'll give you some more for your pocket money."

37:30 **What was he paying the staff that worked there?**

Oh very little, they weren't just big at all. We used to pay our housekeeper a pound a week in those days. That was good money, in those days, my mother and father, I've just forgotten their wages, I know my cousin who was Dad's nephew he was

38:00 the, he used to collect the orders and deliver them all, Billy, and oh I suppose he'd be getting about 6 or 7 pound a week, its very little compared to what it is today. But that was a good wage. That was a good wage. Then he had a senior man on the order department, and I've just forgotten what he paid

38:30 and then we started to employ more younger people and oh he was very fair, he paid them holiday pay and things like that, but it wasn't big wages, Michael.

Tape 9

00:41 I remember David going to law school he had done his 5 years at uni and he had to finish up another two at the law school and he said, "I think I'll go and get a job before I come up", we were living in

01:00 Forster then. So he applied at a place down at, oh a hotel down at Double Bay and as soon as they saw 'Pickering' they said, "Oh we'll give you the job because we 'know the artist'", you see. David only remained there 3 or 4 days, he said, "No way I'm not made to pick up empty glasses and delivery, no they can have that."

01:30 **Your brother inherited the stores, is that what happened?**

Noel yes, the grocery premises and the business was left to Noel.

Were you disappointed that it wasn't?

No, no we, then it was the rest of the home and contents were all divided up between the 5 girls.

02:00 No that was their idea how to do it and we thought well, Noel is the only son, well he can have it, we were all comfortable. My sisters had married school teachers and solicitors and they were very comfortable and said, "No give it to Noel" he'd got to battle it on, and we were all quite happy about it.

02:30 **How did the war actually change the community of Woonona and Wollongong?**

Well more activity drifting into Wollongong, for entertainment and going to parties and things like that, it all drifted into Wollongong. And whereas Woonona before the war we had

03:00 our own little circle of friends. Well they had all gone, everything had changed and we had to start out again.

Aside from the death and casualties, was war positive for the community of Woonona and Wollongong?

Ah

03:30 I don't know Michael, it made a big change and I suppose Wollongong went ahead whereas Woonona started to drop down. Now I believe to buy a block of land down in Woonona is absolutely unbelievable

04:00 isn't amazing how things go. When my Dad had the business, Wollongong was the little township. And then when Port Kembla started to grow down there with the big works and everything, Wollongong started to build up and then, after the war Woonona just sank down and Woonona was a lovely township. It had two pubs in it and it's

04:30 not the place, well I think so myself, it's not the place, but nothing is the same as we knew it when we were young, it all changes.

After living through World War II from your experience, what would you like to say to future generations about war?

I don't like it for a start. But when it comes, what do you do? If you are able to go I say you must go.

05:00 I think it, in a way, I think it depends on the person themselves. My Dad wasn't, he didn't have anything to do with war. And my husband, and look at my husband's grandfather he was

05:30 a great war man. Isn't it amazing? But I think it's up to the individual themselves. Whatever people think or say about you it's what you feel like doing. Not for other people to remark, saying, "Oh if it's good for one they all must go."

06:00 I don't agree with that. I think I would leave it to the person themselves if they feel that they want to go and fight for Australia all well and good, and if the others don't want to be there, well let them alone. Let them do good work at home, I might be wrong.

Do you have any final comments for future generations?

06:30 I hope there are never any more wars, that's all I'd say, I hope there are never any more wars. And if they want wars, well let the heads of the government get in a paddock and fight it out for themselves. But it is the real nation, it's taken the youth of the country, 'cause once the young fellows go away they come back as old men, they are never the same.

07:00 It's all I can say, I hope to God there's never, I hope nothing ever happens, but they are still fighting over there, overseas. It's terrible. And I hope to goodness I never see another one. You see all the friends you grew up with have to go away, some come back and some don't and they are never the same

07:30 never, they are nervous wrecks. That's all I can say, I hope we never see another war. I think the majority of people think the same, don't they? I hope so anyway.