Australians at War Film Archive

Elsie Solly (Sol) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:31 **So Elsie, you were born in Perth. What can you remember about growing up in Perth?**

What can I remember about growing up in Perth, well we lived... I was an only child to my father and mother, Andy and Winnie Solly. And they were married in 1923, and they bought a block of

01:00 land over the other side of the river and there was development over there. And then we lived in a house down in front of the state sawmills in Beadie Avenue. And we were just a working class suburb. We didn't know too much about anything on the other side of the river, although my father and mother they lived in

01:30 East Perth in Maylands, and all that part of the world. And so my memories of Victoria Park right through my early childhood, my primary school years at East Victoria Park School. And then my mother died in 1938 and my father and I were together

02:00 as a family.

How did the Depression affect you during the 30s?

Well the Depression didn't actually affect me per se because my father had a job. My father worked for Felton, Grimwade and Bickford, which was a large pharmaceutical distribution company, still in existence, the Felton Trust in Melbourne, so we had money. We always had

02:30 a job. And it was only myself. It was a small family unit. So the Depression per se remembering I was about six years when I went to school, but of course the school itself was affected because many kids, you know, didn't have parents who had jobs, and many kids

03:00 those days, of course, phys ed [physical education] or drill it used to be called, every school had to do drill in the early part of the morning and the boys would strip down without their singlets and the girls would be in light clothing. But most of the kids had their pants – and this is a memory – and many of their pants were made out of the old flour bags,

03:30 flour bag, cotton, and they were excellent cotton, those flour bags and sugar bags of those days. And the sign of the Great Southern Flour Mills was an imprint and it was just the way people utilised and made things go round. Everyone, of course, or most people who had a house or land of some sort, grew their own vegetables and had

04:00 trees, fruit trees and had chickens and ducks and all that sort of stuff. But there were people who lived it tough, and in my class there were kids who were struggling. Their families were struggling. Although you must remember we were only between six and 12, those six years up to the war

04:30 and so we... Not Depression...This is what happens in life now. We've got to be very careful what we think we remember and what comes into our memory bank as a result of having read history. You see, it's all very difficult handling this sort of stuff. I try and be objective, as objective as I can, mainly because my life later took me into

05:00 history. So I am well aware of you have got to be careful you don't allow an historical perspective to come into your own thought base, because it's not as accurate as it might well be.

Memories aren't perfect no matter what age you are.

Memories aren't perfect. Memories are moulded out of all sorts of other sources.

Did you have any fruit trees or chickens

05:30 **at your house?**

Oh, yes, good heavens. I am appalled at what I have to pay for lemons! I am appalled! Bloody hell!

You are allowed to say bloody hell!

Oh, sugar. Yes, yes, they were quarter acre blocks, and so yes, we had fruit trees and grape vines.

06:00 I mean, when I see what I pay for grapes now, the grape vines just fell, great trellises everywhere of grape vines. Passionfruit, when I see passion fruit now… My home was just covered with passionfruit vines and, of course, we had WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and so father… And so it was all manured from the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, so yes, yes.

06:30 **Crazy, you can pay 99 cents for one passionfruit these days!**

Absolutely. Tell me where you get it for 99 cents please?

But it's ridiculous 99 cents for one passionfruit. I was told that passionfruit is so expensive because nobody has passionfruit vines anymore.

That could be true. I had a passionfruit vine growing down that fence down there, a Nellie Kelly, and Nellie Kelly's aren't the best to grow because they have got a short life. But I provided my

07:00 own passionfruit. And you know, with my father's upbringing, I have always... Have a look around the garden now. Father's attitude was if you couldn't eat it you didn't grow it. So it was later on when my half brothers and sisters came into the family, we just ate the greatest food out, because father grew everything,

07:30 He was notorious for his peas, I mean the peas just six and seven foot tall. Beans and, you know, carrots. I can't remember parsnips. And all my life, when I went to Canberra, and I had a marvellous vegetable garden in Canberra. I took over a house that Sir Paul Hasluck had lived in and Sir Paul left me the greatest rhubarb patch, and it was

08:00 magnificent. Think of the price of rhubarb now. I would no more buy…

It's ridiculous. So what sort of chores did you have around the house?

Chores, well I was the only child, and, you know, my memories of my mother, she became ill when I was six or seven and she was ill until she passed away

08:30 when I was 13 or whatever I was. But we were just a very close family, the three of us. There were only the three of us and it was just marvellous. So I washed up you know, made my bed, hung up my clothes, you know, that sort of stuff. And, of course, houses were different. The bathroom is an archaic place, with a copper in the corner, so there wasn't this business

09:00 of cleaning baths and tiles. The bath was a cement Oedipus you know, hot water was poured by bucket into the bath, all the chip heaters and bath heaters, they came much later. Like the refrigerator, the refrigerator didn't come until after the war. From memory, you know, it was a Coolgardie safe. I do…

09:30 One thing that was my daily chore, once a week, was to go to the butcher's. When I became older, when I became old enough, to go the butcher's, but the butcher was just around the corner. The butcher was a specialist shop, not a speciality shop, you gotta be careful about language, you know, just the butcher's shop. You went around there daily because there was no refrigeration to keep things, same when you went to the grocer's, everything was bought

10:00 in small. So that was my job when I got old enough to ride a bike and do those things. So, yeah.

Did you play any sport?

Yes, I played tennis. There was a tennis club over the back in the next street, Thornanders, and I played tennis as a kid and I was a pretty good tennis player.

10:30 And, of course, we all played cricket. I have got a photo of a crowd of us that went to school and we all played cricket out on the road. None of this nonsense you have got to go on with today. You would no more let kids put a kerosene tin on that road there and hitting the, you know, it wasn't on. See the traffic flow was different the whole of society, it wasn't… We didn't have bitumen

11:00 on the road outside our... between us and the sawmills, until I don't know, I mean it was just a plank road for many years. And the local families, we played... we all played together and I was the only child of my family, and I was a girl, so I just learned to play cricket. And I went on and I played cricket and

11:30 eventually I captained WA, so you see. So it's all part of the influences of your life. But they are not planned, they just what happens with circumstance. Like all things, everything is governed by absolute chance and circumstance.

Did your family have a car?

We had a motorbike to begin with,

12:00 motorbike and sidecar. And I well remember, you know, riding the motorbike and sidecar. And, of course, we didn't have helmets and seat belts and all this stuff. And yes, we didn't have a motor car. But

Father was a first of all storeman and then later on in my early teens he became a truck driver with Felton,

12:30 Grimwade and Bickford's and had a panel van, sort of panel van. And that's what he did. He delivered, because that's how chemists and everyone got their supplies in those days. Father later then after truck driving, he became a salesman. Went around the chemists' stores getting their orders. And Felton, Grimwade and Bickford's was a big store, warehouse in Murray Street

13:00 right opposite the Wentworth Pub and the Bohemia Pub. I think the Bohemia Pub is still there in Murray Street. I think it is. I haven't been there for... I don't go in that part of town much now. So I have always been associated with transport and in fact after my mother died and I was taken out of school and just Dad and I, I learned to drive

13:30 the Felton, Grimwade and Bickford panel van when I was about 14 and I have had a licence from whatever age I got it, oh 15 or 16 I had a licence... Been able to drive all my life. I have never known what it was to be able to drive. I like to claim I am a very good driver.

You have had plenty of practice. It must

14:00 **have come as a terrible shock to you for your mother to be dying when you were so young?**

Well, people did die young in those days, and yes it was. Yes it was. And, of course, in those days I was born at home and my mother died at home, you know, that was just the way things were.

14:30 You didn't have… The midwives were very important in the maternity side of our life in those days. I certainly don't remember my birth, but I know I was born at home. But I certainly remember my mother's death at home, because my mother was ill at home for a long, long while. And you know

15:00 that was, that was life. That was how it was.

How did her death change your life?

Well, being an only child and being so young and the circumstances, I was taken out of school. I was in the

15:30 first three months at East Perth Girls' School. I had gone to high school, and I had done very well in primary school and I... I can't say that I had any aspirations for a... There was no thought of university. Kids from East Victoria Park didn't go to university. But it was thought that the top boy in my class 6A and

16:00 myself might have won scholarships to modern school – that was the only high school in Perth in those days – but we didn't. We didn't get a scholarship. So Aubrey went of to Perth Boys' [School] and I went to Perth Girls' [School] and then Mum died, so I was taken out of school for the rest of that six months and then when it came time to go back to school,

16:30 of course I didn't want to go back and repeat.. Of course, all the class had gone on. They had been gone into 8th Grade in those days and I would have had to repeat 7th, and so I went to Hartle's Business College, which was up in Hay Street, not far from His Majesty's Theatre, and I learnt shorthand and typing there, and that's where I became a shorthand writer.

Where's the logic

17:00 **in taking you out of school?**

Well it was all tied up with my mother's illness and it was much better for me to be nurtured at that point, too, as it happened.

So did you take over some of the house duties?

No, no not really. My grandmother, my father's mother, moved in with us. She had been a

17:30 widow for many years. And she moved in with us and she was a very, very fine lady, very strong lady, and life went on much the same for me. It became a halcyon period on reflection, because here was I not going to school and out in the truck with Dad all the time, literally, and of course, I can

18:00 say this, I don't... Those days I could snuggle up with my Dad in bed. There was none of this nonsense we are going through now with fathers almost finding it a criminal act to touch your daughter. What a lot of rubbish! We lived a lovely, embracing, comfortable life, you know,

18:30 just did everything together. And Nan, Nanna Solly, and another lady named Nanna Boland, and I have just been up in Kings Park last Sunday, yesterday week, when the Boland's had a great family reunion, not that we are related to them, but Nanna Boland was a second grandmother to me, as well as to my

19:00 half brothers and sisters who came along later. You will hear about that in a minute or two. So yes, it was a lovely, lovely life.

Just with school, what sort of subjects did you actually enjoy?

Subjects, you did readin' writin' and 'rithmetic. You didn't have all this nonsense that goes on now. Little bit of drawing, I hated drawing, I was hopeless. It's

19:30 one of my memories of East Victoria Park was drawing. We didn't call it art. We called it drawing. I just had no and still haven't got any artistic ability, aptitude, myself. And I well remember in my final year at East Vic [Victoria] Park, and one of my classmates, Gloria Hilley, oh she was beautiful

20:00 at art, and here we were grappling, would you believe, Geraldton wax. Have you ever tried as a 12-year-old to try and draw and then paint with Geraldton wax. Well, bloody hell, mine was a shocker and I hated it. But we sang. We had singing,

20:30 choral groups, and they were great.

Did that happen on weekends or was it part of the school?

Oh no, that was all part of the school all part of the school. Weekends were mainly tennis. And Dad played. Dad was a very good sportsman with the Balmoral Cricket Team, and that's how we came to be... And that's one of the reasons we were at the thing last Sunday, the Balmoral Cricket... The Balmoral Hotel, whatever it's called now,

21:00 but it's still up there on Albany Highway. And he was a good footballer. So we were always going to football, and we were always going to, you know, cricket. Friends of Father's and Mother's, the Swazingers, they lived over in East Perth, they were great pianists and we used to have wonderful evenings around the piano, and people would

21:30 come, and I had learned to play a little bit, but I was never very good. But we had lovely old singsong times around the piano. And Father would... And Nanna Boland, this other Nanna, not my... by family association I have spoken about. Father played Bridge in partnership with Tiger Boland, they used to go around houses and have a

22:00 bit they way people go now... or used to play canasta and all that sort of stuff. And I used to always be taken along. And we had a mattress, and the mattress would be put down on the floor, and, "Righto girl, time you went to bed. Time you went to sleep." And that was it. I would just curl up on the mattress and go to sleep and that was it.

Very well organised.

That was it and a very loving,

22:30 caring, warm... yeah. So very happy memories of my childhood to that point.

So what happened when another... did another woman come along?

Yes, yes, you see you have got to be very careful. All of a sudden... Father, and I didn't

23:00 realise it at the time, and you don't realise it when you are only 13 and 14… And it was an entirely different upbringing for girls in particular. There was no sex education, there was none of the normal, what we know now. And I certainly had no normal introduction to the changes that would happen to my body, you know, it was all these

23:30 things that living with my father and my grandmother, it was a different way we were introduced... There was none of the explicit sex you now see on the television or none of the ads. The power of advertising in this field... I look at it sometimes and I think, "Bloody hell!" So all of a sudden... I don't know whether it was all of a sudden, I can't say that, but

24:00 somehow or other, Father had met this lady who was working at the Balmoral Hotel, and then… I am not even certain I was told they were getting married, or would be married. I have no recollection of any of that sort of development and... But what I do know is, all of a sudden there was another woman in the house

24:30 and my marvellous Nanna Solly, she wasn't there and here was a woman.

They had moved out your grandmother?

Yeah, yeah, you know, they were small houses, and here's this other woman in my father's bed. This became… I am not certain how it affected me, frankly. I have got to be careful here. People can go

25:00 romanticising all sorts of things, but I don't. I try and be very realistic about it now.

Sounds like you weren't happy about the change, though?

I don't know. All I know is I spent the weekends with my grandmother, who had become housekeeper/cook at a nursing home over in Rockerby Road, Subiaco, just where the Thomas Street gates into Kings Park are, and in fact that might still be. I don't think it

25:30 exists there as a nursing home. I think part of the building is still there. I would go over there every weekend. I would get on the tram on a Friday afternoon after school, and I would go over there and

spend the weekend with Nanna Solly and come home on Sunday afternoon, Sunday night, you see, and that is a change. And we are now leading up into World War II. We are now coming

26:00 to 1939/40 and there came a point in all of this when I am 17... I had gone to work by the way, I had got a job.

You did mention you went to business school.

Yes. I went to business school and I got a... The first job I got was with a Fred Book who ran an import business. He later went on to head up the East Perth Football Club for many, many years, and

26:30 I think... I am pretty sure he became Mayor of Perth, or certainly a Councillor, played a large part in local government politics for a long, long time. And I climbed up the Wellington building on the corner of Wellington Street and William Street, and there I worked in a Dickensian office. And I mean

27:00 Dickensian, I remember, oh my God.

Please describe it for me?

It was an office like a… Very little light. There are windows, it has been declared heritage now, the Wellington Buildings and I am pretty sure they are being protected in all the railway development that's going on. But it was all dark and dingy, and, you know, just

27:30 old desks and old typewriters. Of course they were new in those days. I can tell you a wonderful history of typewriters, been associated with that all my life. And, you know, a very strict regime. And I can't remember what I got paid, but peanuts, absolute peanuts whatever it was. I can't remember how long I worked there, but I got a job with Cox Brothers

28:00 Australia Limited. They were downstairs in William Street, and that's probably how I got the job. That's the way it was in those days.

Were typewriters actually a new thing in around 1939?

Oh God yes, typewriters had been in existence since 1854.

O.K.

Oh God yes, 1854. I think the first Remington is about 1854.

28:30 And old "Q W E R T Y" keyboard. Women have only used old Q W E R T Y keyboards, men... I have been associated with this all my professional career, and with the advent of men using old Q W E R T Y keyboards you couldn't imagine a man now that couldn't use a Q W E R T Y keyboard.

What's a Q W E R T Y keyboard?

Q W E R T Y, which is the centre

29:00 row of a computer keyboard, any keyboard, say one out there, couple in there. I have got an IBM Selectric typewriter in there. The first electric typewriter.

That would have been a...

That was an advent, the first electric typewriter. I got that when I went to Canberra in 1969. Now that was an electric coup to get a Selectric typewriter. That was politics.

29:30 Anyhow I went to Cox Bros Australia Limited. They were a big retail credit emporium. They sold everything: they sold furniture, they sold clothes, anything you wanted to buy. And, of course, in those days... and, of course, this is now 1939, around about that time, and the Depression, we are just coming...

30:00 Just over. Many, many people out of work. Many, many people without money. So people bought things on credit. And they would pay it off at two [shillings] and six [pence] a week or three and nine a week, you know, one shilling a week. And there were people who were the... What did we call them? What did we call them? People who went from house to house,

30:30 and people had to pay their money, whatever it was they owed weekly. And then I was a sort of clerk, shorthand writer, typist, factotum, in a great big office, very big office, old ledger machines. We pulled handles, put cards in to register the money being recorded. All that sort of office work.

How does that work, a ledger with holes?

31:00 Yes, yes. They were big contraptions, the... Slid a card into a roller and pulled the lever and then the operator… They were good jobs to be a ledger machinist. Ledger machinists were the precursors of the first of the keyboard punchers, people who punched the

31:30 key cards of the first computers when they came into being back in the sort of... When I say came into being, I mean commercially in the mid 1960s and something like that. Verifying, we used to verify everything by key punch machines.

How would you know what holes means what?

Well, it's the same as you have scanners now. How do we know what all those barcodes

32:00 mean? They are codes and so on. And there were codes in that. And every entry was verified by punching the same data and it being superimposed. That would show if there was an error or not an error. Probably a damned sight more accurate you know, but probably a bit more time consuming.

Sounds incredibly time consuming.

But it was all... Everything was, No, no.

32:30 **Anyhow so I was there and they were the years when you turned 21... It wasn't a great joy to have a 21st birthday in many cases. I was still very young, I was still only 16 at this point, but you became aware that people on their 21st birthday, we used to get paid in pounds, shillings and pence**

33:00 **in little envelopes, and people would receive a little note in the week after their 21st birthday, 'Thank you very much for your services. They are no longer required.' You required adult wages you see. Adult wages had to be paid in those days, and so many people, their jobs were just terminated.**

33:30 **Well, of course, this is where the war... the enlistment in the forces takes up a lot of the slack, so that many of the people that joined the forces, particularly in 1939, the 6th Australian Infantry Division. Many of those people were people that were unemployed or were working on what was called sustenance jobs, building**

34:00 **roads and infrastructure works around the state. Living in tents working in very harsh conditions. So, many of those people enlisted. And I recall, when I looked at some of the old photos, of that Cox Bros group in sort of 1940, 1941, many of them became air force, joined the air force. And some of them didn't**

34:30 **return, of course. The air force had a large casualty list, particularly among the air crew in the beginning.**

Just a question about the credit system. If somebody couldn't pay their weekly commitment to the credit...?

If it was something that could be retrieved it would be retrieved, say if it was furniture or something. If it was

35:00 clothes or something like that, the people would be, they would be marked out as not being worthy credit... Worthy for credit consideration. And there were other companies doing this. I am not sure I could name them now. But it was a system and it allowed people to have access.

35:30 And people also were subject to scrutiny as to how much they should go into debt for, and how much they could repay. It was a way of people having access to obtaining necessary goods. You didn't have the wild credit spree like you have now where people can get... I don't know

36:00 how many credit cards people can have, but one can just go in to ongoing debt. And how you get out of it, I don't know. I am glad I don't have to consider such matters.

Exactly. I am just wondering, if you can't pay after a couple of weeks, is it automatic repossession?

Yes, it was, of things that could be repossessed and, you know, maybe resold again.

36:30 Yes, yes. But certainly not clothes or shoes or blankets or, you know, that sort of stuff. But I can't recall, I can't you know, in those days we were at the bottom of the heap, the 15, 16-year-old, you didn't question. You wrote

37:00 letters, I know because I used to type many of the letters. You had to pay up, sort of thing. What happened after that I wouldn't be so bold as to... They certainly weren't thrown into gaol and there weren't any restraining orders... I don't think.

I am just wondering what your average day would be like in this credit business?

Cox Bros Australia Limited. Sorry forgot the name. You would sort of get up,

37:30 and, of course, you didn't get up and go to the... and go and have a shower before you went to work, you only had a bath once a week. You see that's one thing that's so different now. But you went to the bathroom and you washed, you washed your face and hands and body washed. Then you got dressed. We didn't

38:00 have... We had a wardrobe you hung your clothes in. And your bed, and you made your bed and you got your breakfast, and, of course, your breakfast... a fire had to be lit. We got gas at some point in Beadie Avenue, I can't quite remember. It was all wood stoves. The fire had to be lit and Father's toast... We all

had toast made over the coals in the

38:30 stove. The kettle boiled and then you walked to the bus or the tram. And in our case we had the Carlisle Bus Service run by Wrights, that was at the end of Beadie Avenue, or you walked up to Albany Highway, and the No. 9, 10 or 11 tram ran along there and you went into to work on the tram. So you either went to work on the bus

39:00 or you went to the tram. Later on after the war I used to use the train a bit because the Carlisle Railway Station was just walking distance. You did everything by public transport, you see. And once you got into the office, well it was head down and bum up sort of thing. There was always stacks of

39:30 work. And you worked, you didn't get up and roam around, and you didn't stand round and have chats with whoever is at the next desk to you. It was a pretty regimented work place.

What time did you start work?

9 o'clock, yes 9 till 6 and Saturday morning. Yes we worked Saturday morning.

40:00 They were long hours.

What would you do during a lunch break?

I can't recall that we had a lunchroom. We must have had an hour. I really... I know the office boy would come round if you wanted to buy

40:30 your lunch, although you had to be on a pretty good salary to be able to buy your lunch. I think my first salary was about seven and six per week, that's about 75 cents in today's money. I can't really remember about a lunch... I suppose we went

41:00 down and walked around the shops and walked across. There was a Hoyts [theatre]. Oh God, the old memory isn't as good as it used to be.

I think you are doing a marvellous job.

We probably wandered around the stores, you know, Hay Street and Murray Street, Forest Place. They were all so different from what they are now, didn't have all these

41:30 boutique stores. For one thing, I always went off to Albert's Book Store, it was down in Forrest Place. And, you know, as an only child I was always given books for birthday and Christmas presents and so I always had a love and fascination for books.

What sort of duties would you have in an average day?

42:02 **End of tape**

Tape 2

00:32 **Whereabouts did you go to business college?**

Hartle's.

Where is that?

Hartle's Business College was in upstairs in Hay Street West, just up from His Majesty's Theatre. His Majesty's remember, it has been there for that long. 100 years. They are just having their 100 years, upstairs there.

01:00 Underneath there was Metham's Stove Company. And everyone had a Metham's stove. It was great. I learned shorthand and typing there, and old Mr Hartle ran the place with a fist of iron, rod of iron. And Miss Williams, she must have been the senior office assistant, I suppose, looking back now. But very fine.

01:30 I learned typing and shorthand there. In fact I had a telephone call yesterday from an army friend of mine, we went to Hartle's together 60-odd years ago, so that's how long we go back.

How did going to business college compare with going to school?

That was, you know, not as regimented and you only learned shorthand and typewriting and

02:00 bookkeeping. And it was still classes, still desks and people would teach us, but it wasn't the authoritarian atmosphere, although old Mr Hartle demanded excellence as much as possible, or within your ability, excellence as a shorthand writer. And, of course, you know, shorthand has been a very, very much maligned

02:30 area of knowledge. In actual fact you have got to be reasonably smart to be a shorthand writer, and you have got to have an agility of mind and ability to be able to see and hear and formulate words as well as then get it down at these very high speeds, and then, of course, to be able to transcribe it back in a

03:00 format that is presentable and attractive and marketable – it is a much maligned skill, shorthand. And later on in life I had a lot to do with parliamentary reporting, and that's a plateau far beyond anything. But you asked... To come back to your direct question, it

03:30 wasn't authoritarian as a school. But there were still set periods where you went and you did the shorthand and the typewriting, you passed tests, you had to pass the speed rate to go up and I wasn't certainly among their top students, I graduated at 90 wpm [words per minute], I think that's the highest certificate. I think it's still stuck away in a trunk down there.

04:00 But there were people who graduated at 100 and 110, 120. It was a very good speed to graduate from business college with.

I am just wondering how old you were when you were at business college?

Well, I was probably 14 then. 13 or 14. My mother died when I was 13, 1938. I hadn't turned 14 when she died, and I was able to leave

04:30 school at 14 and then I went to Hartle's Business College in the January of 1939. January of 1939.

Why did you decide to go business college as opposed to returning to school?

Well because I had been taken out when my mother died there reasons that had to happen, and I missed

05:00 from July on... I missed all that of schooling, the first year of high school. And in those days you just repeated, you know, there was much different authoritarian attitude. And all my classmates that I had come right through East Vic Park Primary School and then into high school, I wouldn't... It's the usual business, you know, you want to cling to the

05:30 people you know, and the little bit of social stigma of repeating, you know, that was probably a factor, probably. And I had a bachelor uncle, my mother's brother, who said to Father, "Well I would be happy to put her through Hartle's Business College." And I was quite

06:00 happy with that. And it was good.

So your uncle actually financed your study at business college?

Yeah, my uncle financed that, he... Uncle Jack.

That was generous.

Well he was a bachelor and I was his only niece, and again we had a very, very close relationship. You know

06:30 I was just the apple of his eye as it were, and it was nice.

He couldn't have been that well off during that period?

Oh no, he, he had gone to the World War I and had come back and had been gassed and so on, and had been in sustenance work. And sustenance work

07:00 was for people who didn't have jobs and the government had working forces that went out and did the roads, the telegraph lines, the power lines and all that. And these road camps were all around the state, they lived in tents and so on. And so my uncle, there's marvellous stories that can be told about him, because he never had a job until

07:30 World War II broke out when he got a job in the post office, and then he worked in the post office for probably the next 20 years or whatever it was until he died, and had sort of first time, guaranteed employment as it were.

What were some of those stories that you mentioned?

Oh, um, he was a fall guy, for an SP [starting price]

08:00 bookmaker. See there was no TABs [Totalisator Agency Board] or authorised gambling in those days and there were these bookmakers, Nicholls. But Uncle Jack would lay bets, take bets, and you could bet up back lanes and the police would raid them.

08:30 And the bookmakers would have people like Uncle Jack who would be the fall guys who would be picked up by the police and then they would be up in the Magistrates' Court on Monday morning and they'd be fined for illegal bookmaking. It still exists in a different way in our society today. But that's what he did, Uncle Jack did. He earnt some money that way.

What was in it for him?

Money. He got paid by the

09:00 bookmaker so the bookmaker didn't get the penalty, criminal penalty. Uncle Jack did. So he had it as it were a police record for this illegal bookmaking. And he was the most gentle person.

09:30 **You mentioned that you were quite young when you were at business college, I am wondering about the other pupils. What was there average age?**

We were all the same. You see you left school at 14 and that was the statutory leaving age, and many women, many girls – no men – many girls went to business college.

10:00 There were business colleges all around Perth. There was Stott's Business College, there was Williams Business College and Hartle's Business College, there was the Commercial High School. There was East Perth Girls' School up where the Traffic Department is now. Up on the hill over the WACA [Western Australian Cricket Association – Perth Cricket Ground]. But that was where the professional, when I say professional,

10:30 now let me rethink. That's where the if you like, top students went and were possibly going to go on and do their Junior Certificate and then later their Leaving Certificate at Perth Modern School. See, at Perth Modern School you either went there as a scholarship winner after grade six – it was then when we left school – or grade seven

11:00 or when did we change to that. Anyhow, or the others went off to the Commercial High School, where the girls learn commercial work and many of the boy went to tech [technical school] and you see, the crowd that went to university… Not many government school kids went to university, I can tell you that, in those days, unless they had won a scholarship

11:30 to modern school and then went to uni that way after Leaving Certificate. So get back to Hartle's, they were nearly all 14-year-old girls, young women. We were coming up, we were going through puberty and all that at that stage, and so we were the people, when the war broke out, the

12:00 people who sort of joined the army in 1942 at the age of 18.

Just before we get to 1942 and just before I ask the next question, there's a bit of rustling going on there, Elsie, with the bean bag. Can you rest your feet without? Is there something else we can replace that

12:30 **with? So what kinds of relationships did you have with these other young girls as you were going through business college?**

Just as I said, someone I rang up yesterday said she had read in a magazine that I had been in out of hospital a couple of times this year, and she rang up from Mandurah.

13:00 I can't remember the names of too many of the others, quite frankly. The reason Sheila and I were in the army together, so we had that association all our lives. I really can't remember too much about the other girls.

Do you remember if the other girls all had fairly similar family circumstances or financial

13:30 **circumstances?**

By the time we got to Hartle's, people were coming from the other suburbs, you see, and so therefore the western suburbs in this city have always been more affluent than the southern suburbs, although South Perth has become more affluent after the war, Mount Pleasant and that has been built up, and Victoria Park and Belmont and

14:00 Carlisle and all that, those suburbs were always what you would have called lower working class, lower income families by and large.

What was it like associating with the western suburbs girls?

I don't think we even thought of them as western suburbs girls in those days. As I said in the beginning, you have got to be careful. It's easy when you are fired a

14:30 question like that to suddenly belt off into your own reminiscence or…

Well, that's what I would love to hear.

Well I can't, because I can't remember it. I would be telling you an untruth and a mystery. I don't think I…

But you have just mentioned that you were starting to mingle with girls from different backgrounds and I was just wondering if there were any memorable experiences

15:00 **you might have had when you did start to mingle more widely?**

You see you just went to school there and got on the bus and went home. You went home. The weekend

you either went to the pictures with your Vic Park mates. You didn't go belting back into town

15:30 to meet... I didn't anyhow.

Well that was where I was heading actually, with your social...?

It wasn't as mobile. This is what you have got to convey to people. We didn't have the inter-suburban mobility that you have got now in society, and that's why sometimes people, you know, your generation, coming through,

16:00 you have always known suburban mobility, either by motor cars or whatever and so on. A different way sport is played. You just played your sport right in the... where you grew up, you didn't have the WACA and the Eagles [Australian Rules Football Club] sponsoring kids' football teams, you didn't have little league

16:30 kids out on the ovals before the Eagles and the Dockers [Australian Rules Football Club] start their games. There was none of that. I don't ever want to go on record of ever trying to build up a picture of something I don't really remember.

I am just wondering what kind of recreation you did do then?

Well I have explained it earlier. I played tennis as a kid.

17:00 I am talking as a kid.

And does this extend through your business college years?

Oh no. I played tennis, but I played tennis on a Saturday at the courts for those couple of years. And then I described to Denise [interviewer], when my stepmother came and lived in the house with my father – naturally, she had married him – I went

17:30 off and spent my weekends with my grandma out in Subiaco in a nursing home sort of place. You know.

Who did you like muck about with after school, after work in those days?

Muck about? No, no. No.

Would you meet someone on a

18:00 **Saturday or...?**

You mean the kids... There's a marvellous photo there of a group of us that used to go to school: the Colemans, and the Leopolds and the Saxons. And we just sort of played cowboys and Indians, and kicked a football, and cricket on the street, you know. I could kick a football as well as any of the boys because I grew up like that. My father, an

18:30 only child and I was a girl, and this is muckin' about if that's the way you want to put it.

Yeah, well that's great. That's the kind of thing that I would love you to share with us because it has changed a lot.

The clubs didn't have all these junior inter leagues that they have got.

Well things were very limited and money ... Money and transport. Transport

19:00 **was a real inhibiting factor, not many people had cars, and you were restricted to public transport. I look forward to the day when it happens again. Can't afford... This town can't afford to... This state can't afford to do... You don't want to get on to that, I am sure.**

I have often mentioned to veterans during other interviews that it's a shame that we lost the tram system.

19:30 Yes. Absolutely. The trolley bus system. We had wonderful trolley buses that ran all the way around the river. We had trolley buses that ran out to Wembley. Absolutely marvellous, we had a tram system that went down Gilford Road here, trams were fantastic. You go to Melbourne, look at the way Melbourne can shift

20:00 its population from the Melbourne Football Ground [Melbourne Cricket Ground], 100,000 people. You get down here to the WACA, to the trotting and whatnot, and you are in a cul-de-sac. You are down there for three bloody hours. Seriously, it's all nonsense. This state has got $1,500,000 in it and it's one third of the land mass

20:30 of Australia. "I am sorry, we can't have an orthopaedic surgeon in every bush hospital." "You can't have an internet café at every junction along the Gibson track." Let's get real. You don't want to hear this, this is not part of it, is it?

Keep it real.

Well that is real. And until the population of this state...

21:00 Do you realise in this stage we have got 144 shire councils or cities or towns? 144! Two of those have got two – Albany and Narrogin have got a town council and a shire council. Almost CEO [Chief Executive Officer] earns more than the prime minister.

21:30 You blokes have got to change it. I have done my best. Nobody listens to me.

Just getting back to business college, I asked what you do for recreation and you mentioned that you were a young woman and that you were changing, did the kinds of recreation you enjoyed change at that time as well?

Oh no, no, because… See I joined the

22:00 army just after my 17th birthday. So I just kept playing Saturday social tennis. We didn't go off and play in competitions. And I described earlier how I spent a lot of time with my father until my stepmother moved in.

22:30 So my life was pretty ordinary.

Can you just describe then what you would do socially for a tennis match?

Oh, for God's sakes, you played with the boys and the girls and I think we might have played a set or whatever we played. I really

23:00 can't remember.

What about what you would wear, or the sort of refreshments that you would enjoy?

Water, water and cordial, there was no coke or any of that stuff, there was Weaver's lemonade and that was good, but you didn't drink that all the time – you drank water. As far as I can remember.

23:30 We wore white and we had white shorts, I suppose, and a white, we always played in white. And just... Yeah, I enjoyed winning. I don't think we had... It was private, a private little complex of two. I can't even remember how many courts were there.

24:00 I can't even remember. I am sure the Thornanders made their living out of it, but I wouldn't know. they weren't the things you questioned. You know.

I just imagine it would be very different to playing tennis on the weekend today compared to when you did, and I was just wondering what it would have been like to play tennis in those days and what you enjoyed about it?

Well I enjoyed all sport. I have always enjoyed all

24:30 sport. Not so much now. No I don't... I can't even remember. We would have only paid sixpence for the morning. It wouldn't have been a lot of money. I can't remember. I can't remember. I wouldn't want to.

Did your father play tennis?

No, no,

25:00 he played cricket. He had... no he. We did a lot of fishing. My Dad was a great fisherman, and yachting, and he always sailed a yacht. And in fact my mother's illness probably stemmed from us being capsized in the Swan River and hanging on to the yacht

25:30 for some long while until we were picked up, rescued. I can only vaguely remember that. I was only about six or seven when that happened. My father was always a yachtsman, a cricketer and a footballer. Lots of our social gatherings were associated. The firms had… Their companies had their football teams, the cricket teams. And the pubs…

26:00 Balmoral pub was a great social icon in Vic Park and Dad was very much part of that. In fact this reunion we were at last Sunday week, I have just seen some photos of the Balmoral Cricket team which I hadn't seen before with father in it. And so we went and watched cricket. We watched father

26:30 playing cricket, and I suppose kids, what kids… Stood up in Kings Park the other day, they played bocce and they had a baseball bat. I can't even remember a baseball bat when I was a kid. Baseball bats came much later, I think and so on.

I don't suppose you were playing bocce either?

And they certainly weren't playing bocce, I can tell you that. As a matter of fact some of the little kids at this

27:00 reunion, and if they are ever asked these questions when they are 80 I will be interested... I would like to know how many remember that they used that trolley and they were taught how to put the brakes on. You never ever have a ride on anything and you don't put the brakes on and here they were. They were using this trolley and they had to put the brakes on before they were allowed to move away from it. I bet they won't remember it, but who knows, they might

27:30 remember.

So your walking trolley doubled as a bit of a go-kart soapbox?

And I have been a teacher all my life, all my life I have been a teacher. It's important... You can't let kids... Well you were up at Kings Park, it was on a slope, if they had just leave it and it rolls over and hits someone on the head, who knows you might have a David Hookes on your hands before you know where you are. Put the brakes on. Don't leave it

28:00 till you put the brakes on.

That's a reasonable condition. What led you to enlist in the army?

Oh well now you get to... I have described, Father married again, and I have described earlier the wonderful relationship we had where I could snuggle up in bed with him and read a book, we read books.

Did you read aloud to each other?

Oh yeah, yeah. Read aloud, yeah.

28:30 I had all the classics, all the Anne of Green Gables. And I was given books by my bachelor uncle. I have given all my childhood books to my goddaughter. She has got all those now, you know, the classics of Australian literature. And it was just a warm feeling, and then this lady came.

29:00 This lady came, and this was a pretty... This was something I didn't really understand.

Did your father make an attempt to explain the situation?

Well I can't remember. I don't honestly know. I have got no idea how the first... Can't even remember the first night. I don't even know that I had met her before,

29:30 I honestly don't know. But the war had broken out.

Were you following the outbreak of war?

Oh yes, oh yes, because by this time, you know, people... One of my classmates had been killed in Tobruk and people were being affected, people were losing people. Mainly air force in the beginning, and then Greece and Crete and so

30:00 on. And so the women's forces were legislated for and I just said to my father well... I can't even remember saying it, but I must have, I can't remember any actual meeting about it, "I am going to join the army." And that's what I did.

What was his reaction?

Well he must have agreed, because I was

30:30 17, I put my age up. There's a lot of nonsense in folklore that says you had to have your parents' consent. I look at my documents, there's no sign of my father's signature on anything and so I must have put the papers in, sometime, I don't know how long all these things took. I marched into the WACA, the Cricket

31:00 Ground on 15th March 1942. And that was my stepmother's birthday. And the one thing I do remember is, we by this time, had a car. We had an old... Would have been a Ford. We had a Ford, I suppose. I was dropped at the... Well actually, we dropped at Swan Barracks, and then

31:30 we were trucked down to the WACA. And that's where we started our army career on the 15th March... I started my career on 15th March 1942.

Prior to starting your career starting, Elsie, what was the enlisting process?

Again, I have very little, very little, I cannot remember going for an interview, I must have, I really cannot remember actually

32:00 going. I don't know where I got the papers from. I have no idea. I would be telling a lie, I really would.

I believe you, I take your word for it.

You know, other people they've got all sorts of wonderful memories of this that and the other and I think, "God, I was working at Cox Bros Australia Limited," I know that.

Why do you think that

32:30 **has been omitted from your memory?**

I have got no idea.

Okay.

I have got no idea, because the army, you know, that was the beginning of my career. That lady there, you know, she was... I have had mentors all my life, and she was a mentor of mine. And so I found myself in the army at 17, and

33:00 in this group of 35 that went to Northam and we were the first of the Australian Women's Army Service people as an experiment, who were sent in to domicile. We were actually domiciled in the camp. And 60 miles away. It took us four and five hours in the steam train to come home on leave once a month and all this sort of stuff. And that was an experiment to see whether... how women could live

33:30 in a small group of women, could live in a large, large male population of blokes who were going off overseas. And at any time there was between 5 and 8,000 people, men, were in Northam Camp. And so there we were 35 of us, under the command of a sergeant, and then

34:00 one of the people I was in the camp with, from the western suburbs, was a school teacher, who lived in a brick house, you talk about status symbols. Nancy Bolstrop, she lives in Buderim now, and we had a long conversation on the phone on Sunday. These friendships last, you know, they go on forever,

34:30 and rightly so.

Before we explore that time you had at Northam, why had you chosen the army?

I have got no idea why. I don't know why. I have got no idea why I chose the army. I... I honestly have no recollection.

The navy or the air force just didn't appeal?

I don't know, perhaps I didn't know where to

35:00 go, perhaps I... I don't know whether I did go to Swan Barracks. I don't know where I got these papers from. That's just army records.

Do you remember your arrival in Northam?

Oh God, yes.

What happened on your arrival there?

We were put on a train, when we marched out, we had a marching out parade. And we were put on a train and away we went, took hours and hours and hours, in the steam train, up over the

35:30 escarpment up through the tunnel. All these things are all gone. Loaded on to trucks at Northam Railway Station, and drove into this camp and there was a guard hut. There was a light at the guard hut, I can always remember that. And then we just went through this camp and it was night and down into these huts, and we were just off the truck. And we

36:00 found ourselves… I can't even remember if there was barbed wire around it, but there must have been some sort of… But there were floodlights over it, or partly. And we were just put in these huts with stretchers, just, you know, fold away stretchers, and there must have been mattresses on those,

36:30 and a mess hut across the road where the kitchen and all that and the ablution block and there we were.

So you had mattresses as opposed to palliasses?

I think we must have had mattresses, although I find that hard to believe, but I can't remember. I remember filling a palliasse at the WACA. But I really can't remember doing it at Northam.

How were you orientated at the camp?

37:00 Well, you see we were trade grouped. Because I had learned shorthand – I really wanted to be a transport driver – but because I was a shorthand writer, and they were the people they wanted to replace in the orderly rooms, the men, they had many, many men, A class, A medically fit men who were doing a lot of clerical work in all sorts of base camps, and that was the reason for the

37:30 enlistment of the women to replace the men doing those sorts of tasks when you had women who had the training and the skill to do it and were first class typists. That was the main thing, you know, very, very good typists, whereas the men would just hunt and peck. They weren't terribly good typists.

Two finger type. So how were you

38:00 **actually orientated to the camp?**

What do you mean by the word orientate? I am not sure. I am trying to get…?

Well, once you had been shown your barracks and introduced to your role, how were you orientated to the surroundings in the camp?

Oh yeah, right. I was posted to the Army Service Corps. And funnily enough that was also to do with trucks and transport, so I was in my element. And there I met

38:30 another mentor, Royston Arthur Jackson, a great bull of a man. Bull of a man. You have never seen anything like it, a 17-year-old, just turned 17, scared out of my bloody wits of him. Years later, Patsy Adam-Smith writes in some great tome she wrote on the women's services, 'And there was Elsie Solly and she marched in and she looked around and she said, "Well you can get rid of

39:00 three or four of these,"' or whatever her quote words are, "We'll do that job." This 17-year-old, what a lot of rubbish. That's what I mean about colouring history. I had never even been interviewed by Patsy Adam-Smith, and I can tell you there was no way that 17-year-old Elsie Solly said anything like that to Major Royston Arthur Jackson. Rubbish.

What was your role there?

39:30 Well, at every army unit they have got an adjutant, the adjutant is the chief clerk. And George Blackburn was the first adjutant, and they had other clerks and whatnot and we were just shown what we had to do. And mainly what we were doing was sending all the troops overseas. So... Denise was asking about typewriters, now we were typing

40:00 nominal rolls on 16" carriage typewriters, and 16 copies of every enlistment list of all these blokes, and they were going overseas every week, every month. The convoys were just pouring through here. You had the Queen Mary and the Aquitania, and, you know, all these sterling... all these convoys. And that was our job. And we were

40:30 working day and night, preparing all the paperwork, because it was all paper. There were telegraphs and all that, but to get a telegram was, you know, not like MSN [Internet], and all this stuff we play around with today. I don't know much about that, by the way.

What was the paper war? What kind of documents did you have to manage?

Well it was all paper.

41:00 These nominal rolls were enormous sheets of paper. And it was all carbon. None of this, all the paper pre-carbon packed. The way you get it now. The carbon paper came in great containers, you know, packs, and you had to put each sheet in between each sheet of paper, and you do that 15 times, oh now, it was... You know,

41:30 books and leave passes. Issuing leave passes, checking to see if people had come back. Charge sheets – the blokes were always on charges for this that and the other. The office... The orderly room is the office of the battalion, whatever the unit is, the battalion, and so on. And I... Then I was

42:00 promoted. There were four of us. I think there were three or four of us – the Sinclair twins and...

42:30 End of tape

Tape 3

00:31 **I was just going to ask you, Elsie, was this some kind of an experiment to see if women could work in the forces?**

Yes. Absolutely, an experiment. A real social

01:00 experiment. The WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] had already... They were the first women's services and I am not certain just when the navy was actually formed, but the WAAAF was certainly in uniform ahead of us, and certainly the other ranks, the officers had been recruited in 1941. Late 1941

01:30 halfway through 1941, and... But it was a real social experiment. Why it wasn't tried in the east? I have no idea. It's like all things. You think of all sorts of questions you could ask and the people that I could ask now have passed away. And you would

02:00 have to go back into the real records and to see if you could hunt, find it. But I don't know why. We were...

How privileged did you feel at this experiment?

Well, we didn't know. War was on. We didn't know we were the first.

Well you were certainly in the minority. How many of you were there?

35, but we didn't know that, you know. There was

02:30 none of this transparency and accountability that, you know, wants to grip people these days. This is...

Sweetheart, I don't know if we are going to get a photo of you in this. I hope we are. They... You got all this... I am sorry, Jess, you go down the billiard room. Go down to the pool room and get on your chair.

03:00 See you have got to understand this, we had no idea we were unique. We didn't know. We thought it was happening everywhere.

At what point did you realise you were unique?

I don't think we did for years. Don't think it occurred to us.

Now you are at Northam camp, so there is obviously a lot of fellows there, about 5,000, so

03:30 **how do you keep the blokes away from the girls?**

Now, you know, this is interesting. As far as I know, we had all learnt to say no. And it was expected you would say no, you know what I mean? And so we were kept away. Now there is a photo among all that stuff there, of the

04:00 first group of Army Service Corps, of our group, the cooks, and we were taken up to where the unit was sited in Northam camp. Because Northam camp was spread over square miles. You know, there were bloody all sorts of units, artillery and infantry and... We were taken up in a utility

04:30 and when... Morning and night, and lunch, in a utility. The driver was there, whatever his name was, and we moved as a group of women all the time, of course. We worked from 8 till 6 I think it was, and by the time we came down and had mess and you lined up to get your food and all

05:00 that in the beginning. And you only had two uniforms, and uniforms were starched stiff, and, you know, you had to line up to get irons, and you had to line up to the wash houses and the ablution blocks, and it was all pretty crude. It was all deep pit latrines. No sewerage or any of that stuff. And then

05:30 I can't remember when we... We had to... Saturday nights, once we got going, and I don't know how long it took us, but the canteen was open, but we marched everywhere in platoons and groups and platoons of not less than 20, I suppose. And up to the canteen to get our weekly cigarette ration. And you could have a beer, I think you could have a beer.

06:00 We must have been able to have a beer in the canteens. We certainly did later on. To the pictures, go to the pictures, and the church parade. Do you want her [a cat] to go out? Because she... If she's meowing…

06:30 We went everywhere in groups, you see. And Saturday night when we could go into town to the dances, and we could get... We never had leave passes to go into Northam during the week because we were so busy working and so on. But Saturday

07:00 nights we could go into Northam, and there were dances and picture theatres and pubs.

Just before we get into pubs, I can just see a bit of light coming through the green screen. You were going to say, pubs?

Pubs. The

07:30 Shamrock and the Northam, the two major drinking holes.

I think the Shamrock is still there.

Yeah, it is. I have an idea the Northam still is. In fact I saw a photo the other day in the Sunday Times, you know, the Batty Library, and I recognised the pubs that were there then. Of course, the place was alive with troops. It was

08:00 fantastic. We would go to the dances, and of course there were all the civilian women, you know. It wasn't just the 35 servicewomen. We weren't all on leave at one time in Northam. And oh, for me, it was a new world. I had never been associated with fellows, you know, you have heard my... And the one

08:30 fellow I had been associated with – we didn't mention him earlier – the Colemans, the Coleman twins. And Jack joined the navy, and Jack took me to my first dance that my father allowed me to go to, in Government House ballroom, when John Jeram… Anyhow we had these wonderful dances, and Jack Coleman, and we were just great mates.

09:00 I don't think we were... We were 14, you know, growing up. And Jack joined the navy. He didn't come home. So I've never really known whether we would have married, I have got no idea. So, anyhow here I am in Northam in 1942 at the prime old age of 17, and you know, I was promoted to corporal before I was

09:30 18.

How did that happen?

Oh well, because I was pretty good at what I was doing. Well I was a clerk, this trade grouping clerk,

and I was a shorthand-typist… And that's where we stoped. We stopped talking about the four women in the orderly room. And for whatever reason, Major Jackson recommended that I be promoted to corporal and so I was the boss cocky.

10:00 Prime old age of 17, ridiculous when I look back. It played such a enormous part in moulding me as a person because I suppose it gave me a chance at leadership. And that's what happened then for the rest of my life, you know. But I was pretty bloody impossible, first as a corporal

10:30 and then as a sergeant, because I was then promoted to sergeant before I was 18, so you know, you had enormous power.

Was that really unusual?

Yes, sergeant… When I say power, you had power and responsibility, you know, you were responsible for the work floor and deadlines.

11:00 And harmony, reasonable harmony. But that all happened because we were all dedicated. We were all doing the one thing. Well we wanted to hopefully win the war and get the blokes home again.

How did the other women treat you, considering that you were higher up in rank than them?

Well we all ate together, we all slept together, you know.

11:30 There was no… I don't think there was any animosity or bitterness that I can remember or be aware of. You weren't… Later on where there were disciplinary… That original group and the time in Northam, it was all pretty plain sailing

12:00 through there I think. I don't recall any, you know. And I have been associated with all these people over all these years, and we laugh and we joke when we meet up.

What were your uniforms like?

Oh yeah, they were khaki.

12:30 There's… We wore a khaki shirt, khaki tie – this is our dress uniform – and a skirt, two pockets, a band. And the summer uniform was a drab khaki drill. And we went to Northam in March and we did get our uniform pretty quickly, but we only got

13:00 two, I think. Later on we got three. But you know, they had to be starched and ironed, and we didn't have 35 irons, and we didn't have portable irons, and we didn't have electric irons, and all this sort of stuff. And trying to think about the irons you know, I don't know how we managed really. I can tell you

13:30 my collars ¬– and most of us did this when we came to Perth – and we… Somehow or other I got extra collars. I don't know how. Maybe I knew the quartermaster. But the Chinese laundry – they used to have a Chinese laundry over on William Street, just over the horseshoe bridge. And they used to do our collars, because the collars were with studs. See men's collards were all detached. You had

14:00 studs to put your collars on. We were all very proud of our collars and make certain the tie was tied just right, so at… They were very nice, the uniforms. Very nice wool serge, very smart, very smart. I have got photos of our parades – we looked good.

How comfortable were they to wear?

Very comfortable. Very comfortable, and they had the pockets,

14:30 and pockets on the hips here. Oh no, very comfortable. It would be very interesting to know who designed the uniforms actually. They were very good. And hats.

How about footwear?

Brown brogues, brown brogues and stockings with seams, bloody seams, yeah. You forget all this, and the seams had to be straight.

15:00 Going to work we wore socks. We didn't wear… Unless we wanted to, but you didn't want to because stockings were wool and heavy, you know, and of course we wore corsets in those days.

Really?

Oh God, yes. Oh God, yes.

Sounds very uncomfortable to me.

Of course it was. I forget when I shed that, probably after I had a hysterectomy or

15:30 something. But yes you wore corsets and bloody stockings. Singlets – I still wear a singlet to this day. Believe it or not.

How important was fitness?

Oh pretty important. Very important because we used to do a lot of route marching. You had to route march a fair bit. But we didn't do any

16:00 physical jerk sort of stuff.

How long would the route marches be?

Anywhere up to mile two miles around the hills and valleys and so on. Later on in Mt Lawley when I did have the responsibility for a bit of fitness because we were working 24 hour shift work, and we used to do route marches

16:30 around the leafy suburbs around Mt Lawley, round about where the... Still the old homes are there, the home with the tents on it, it's still there. Yeah, fitness – it wasn't the industry that it is now, let's put it like that.

Did you every use any weapons

17:00 **as part of your training?**

Yes, yes, I actually... Not as part... Not required. But because of this Royston Arthur Jackson who... And he knew my interest in trucks and that, and he used to let me go out on the night exercises with the boys. And they would go out right round Sawyers Valley and all that, and around the hills on 2J, map reading. Map reading, so I learned to read a map, and I was unofficially allowed to

17:30 drive the trucks, and the utes, mainly the utes. I was generally in the ute with the sergeant, and by this time I was a sergeant, so I was allowed to you know, unlawful acts, you know, as it all turns out now, but

18:00 you know that was just part of it. So out of it all I learned to slope arms and present arms, but never, but never in the way the girls… There are photos among that stuff there… Friends of mine. And I was on the gun sights, but only in the orderly room, but they had to use rifles. They were actually taught to use rifles. I am unsure whether they actually

18:30 ever fired them per se, but I don't quite know what they were there for, but there's certainly photos among some of the searchlight and gunners with their weapons.

How did some of the men treat you considering the fact that you were female?

In the beginning there was a little bit of resistance from some of the men who, of course, were being pushed to become frontline troops, so it wasn't

19:00 all sweetness and light, although I am not aware of any direct confrontation with any one man. I must say this, but there are people and this... Again this is what you have got to be careful about what you read, and you know, I personally was not in taking over from the orderly room staff that was there. And we worked

19:30 together for two or three weeks I suppose, because we didn't know anything about the army, and we had lectures in the rookies' camp on this that and the other, but it didn't mean much to me.

What sort of lectures would they give you in the rookies' camp?

Oh all sorts of thing on protocol, you had to be able to recognise all the badges, you had to recognise, obviously protocol and discipline,

20:00 army law, parts of army law on, you know, what you can do and what you can't do. Sex lectures.

What did they tell you?

Oh, Jesus, I nearly fell out of my chair. I thought, "Is this me?" The whole business of menstruation and the whole business of sexual contact and VD [venereal disease],

20:30 gonorrhoea in those days, it was, you know…

That must have come as a bit of a rude surprise to you?

Oh absolutely. Absolutely, and I thought, "Gee whiz," you know. Yes I am sure it came as a rude surprise to many people. How many people who would talk about it and admit it, I wouldn't be so sure about, but I wouldn't know. But certainly to me it was, absolutely.

And how would they instruct you

21:00 **on this? Did they just basically tell you to stay away from the men?**

Basically, and showed you charts. I mean the medical profession has always had charts. From memory there was no video, so all that sort of stuff, there might have been lantern... No, I can't even really remember that, but there were certainly charts. I can remember that, and again the whole question

21:30 of relationships was never ever talked about or lectured on. But it was always... It was sort of something we grew up in our age. I mean when we went to the pictures at the Savoy, Jack and I would sit up and in the back and we would have a little kiss. There would be none of the stuff you see now, where... Well I

suppose they are doin' all right.

22:00 You know, this is daylight and, you know, you do see some extraordinary stuff now, and it's no wonder.

Were there any relationships that did develop between some of the girls and the soldiers?

Oh yes, oh yes, I certainly later on had a wonderful relationship and probably would have

22:30 married that bloke, but I was invalided out of the army and so I just decided that in the light of everything I would probably never marry, and I never have for that reason. But we had a wonderful relationship, but we certainly had no sexual intercourse in the course of that relationship, and it was just...

Just wasn't done in those

23:00 **times?**

It just wasn't done. And the same, the same, you would go into town to dances and meet blokes, and you would meet them next week, and then you would go down and get in the shadows and have a kiss and a cuddle, and then you would get on the bus and go back to camp. I am telling you about camp life at this point, you know, it wasn't something that

23:30 happened. As far as I know in Northam, no-one left the barracks at night to meet up with blokes anywhere that I am aware of. Later on, yes, we used to have in Karrakatta... We used to have snap tent roll calls and you would find beds with dummies in them and

24:00 all this. By this time, this is four years into the army life and people are getting pretty sophisticated, you know, things did change. And then, of course, I then worked in leave and transit and discharges and there were people who were discharged for pregnancy and for other reasons and so on. So you can't claim it was a blameless, after all there were bloody

24:30 26,000 of us, and 3,000 of us in WA, so you would be quite foolish to believe that nothing happened.

So when you got to these dances, how did they get you out there? Because you wouldn't have travelled with the troops to the dances?

Oh no, on buses, army buses. The army has always got its buses. And trucks, mainly trucks. And we would be shipped in on the trucks and buses,

25:00 and whoever the sergeant was on duty for the night, there was me, there were a number of us, and whoever the duty sergeant would have the roll of the...the leave pass roll and you would just have to make certain they were all there. And the bus didn't leave... And, of course, they didn't leave, or the truck, they didn't leave until everyone was there, so everyone had a responsibility to your mate to be there because all hell would break

25:30 loose and it never... It just didn't happen. Everyone was there, and we went back to camp and went to bed. Full stop.

What sort of shifts did you have to manage?

For me personally, we worked from 8 to 5.30 or 6, round about that.

26:00 Just a normal office day, as it were. But when the big convoys were in and we were shipping thousands out, we would go back and work at night and we would work through the night if necessary because of the enormous amount of paperwork involved. And we would just work and... But we would always be under surveillance with senior officers around,

26:30 and never ever walked, never walked anywhere at night or anywhere, just taken straight up to the camp where the Army Service Corps was billeted, and where the men's messes and the parade ground and all that, that was all part of this enormous area that was Northam camp. And so we didn't work shift work.

27:00 But there were people who did, because we had switchboard operators, you see, and they were the old plug switchboards. And we had some of the morse code, although we didn't have the morse code at that time because they hadn't been trained at that point. We just had the ordinary plug switchboard, mainly people from PMG [Post Master General's Department] operators, and they had to work. But the girls,

27:30 as far as I remember, they didn't work late shifts. The men worked the late shifts, all night shifts, as far as I remember now. I think our people probably finished duty no later than 9 o'clock if they worked that late. In fact I must ask some of my sig [signals] mates, a friend of mine is on our AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] Committee who was in Northam camp with me, I must ask her about that. I have got the Annual General Meeting on Thursday. I'll ask her.

28:00 **So why were you actually transferred from Northam to Mt Lawley?**

Well I had been there for 18 months, and by 1943 we are not training. We are still training lots of men and still moving people in and out of what was then Western Command, but

28:30 there was a turn down, you know, the Army Service Corps. By this time, you know, the armies are away, they are in the islands, we are starting to hold or own, with the... the Coral Sea Battle, we had won the Battle of the Coral Sea. We were starting to push back. Kokoda was on, we are starting to make an impact in the islands, and bit by bit

29:00 these holding camps for shipping troops overseas were no longer necessary, and so they were starting to wind down. And the Army Service Corps was one of the first. And so I was shipped out down to Mt Lawley – this is the best part of the war for me – the officer and myself as the sergeant. We had a general duties

29:30 person who looked after the officer and myself, and I was later bridesmaid for this person and we are still friends. She lives in Bunbury. She was the general duties person who cooked for us and was literally batman for both of us, you know, looked after our uniforms and just looked after us. And we lived in

30:00 the house. We lived in this bloody great Mount Lawley mansion – it was fantastic. And we had these Sigs from operations research they were called, down in the bowels of the big old home in Mt Lawley, which is part of General Gordon Bennett's 3rd Australian Corps we were by this time. He

30:30 had come out of Singapore and we had all these secret command things and had the Americans flying Catalinas out of whatnot, the Poms down there, the Americans submarine fleets, and it was all controlled from General Bennett's HQ [Headquarters] in Perth Girls' College. Perth Girls' College, that was his H

And we had all

31:00 **these signallers who were working 24 hours a day. Because the women in the Signals Corps had made an enormous impact... They were so good, they so dexterous on the morse code, and very good at decoding. Made an enormous impact. And so we had God knows how many up there – we must have had over 100 there in those tents. They were sleeping**

31:30 **in those tents and working these eight hour shifts. And so they were literally working themselves, because we had nothing to do... We were HQ, rest and command. HQ, just for the maintenance of the troops. The maintenance and sustenance of the troops. It was our job to see the food was there for them. It was our job to see to clothing, footwear, all that.**

32:00 **Leave, their leave was governed by their leave from their...from what they were doing from in their Sigs operations. So Marj and I had nothing to do, nothing. She married a bloke – had married him, actually – and 3rd Field Armoured Regiment were tearing round out of Rockingham firing shells and all this, training,**

32:30 **and she'd say, "Oh God, Sol, I have had enough of this. I'll go down to Rockingham." Because Rockingham pub was... The old Rockingham pub, I think that's gone. Has the old Rockingham pub gone?**

I haven't been to Rockingham for a while.

I think it has. So she'd go down there for three and four nights. And Des was an officer, so he'd come in and that would be that. And I would be left to hold this nominal post up in this house. In summer

33:00 Major Hymas who was our head surang [?]. There'd be a phone call, on, someone, sergeant someone would ring up and say, "Oh, Major Hymas wants to see Lieutenant Dent," and I would say, "Oh, she's just not available just now." Now that was panic stations, because the telephone system wasn't like it is now, none of this you know, completely

33:30 all security, absolute security. So to get bloody Marj Dent back from Rockingham was a nightmare, an absolute nightmare. And this would go on. And that was my biggest task to make certain that Lieutenant Dent would be available to see Major Hymas. And that's how it was. It was fantastic. Well that had to come to an end, too. So I got shipped out to a gun station, I ended up out at Jandakot.

34:00 **Just before you get into that, when you were in the Mt Lawley house, did you manage to have any parties?**

Not there.

I just thought you had such a great house, seems a shame not have a few parties?

You didn't have, no, no, no.

What were the Americans like?

Oh fantastic.

What made them so good?

They had money, whether you liked it or not, they had

34:30 money. And they looked nice; they were very pleasant. Yeah, they were very popular. I like Americans, I always have. Yeah, but it led to... That did cause lots of strife.

What did? What caused strife?

The, the

35:00 the way women...not only service...not so much servicewomen even, but civilian women, you know, because our blokes in their daggy old Australian uniform you know, rough, the private, the non commissioned uniform, the Australian was a pretty... Yeah, rough, that's all you could call it. And the Poms, the Poms didn't

35:30 have, although some of the permanent units were better dressed than ours. And they had… What the hell do they call them, anyhow? The puttees around their ankles and heavy old clobber boots, and nothing like a collar and tie, just a jacket and the slouch hat, and 6 shillings a day, and I can tell you six shillings didn't go far. And here were these Americans

36:00 all looking like 4-star generals, you know, lovely uniforms, most of them nice manners. There was the gulf between the American Negro, etc.

What did you observe about that?

Well, I didn't observe it myself specifically then, but you were aware. You,

36:30 you… I didn't think about it at the time, but I can't ever recall ever seeing a Negro officer, ever. And I don't know that I saw that until I had been going back and forwards to America quite a few times later in life, when I did become associated with the Negro part of the American society.

Did the services mix much, you know, did the army mix with the navy?

37:00 Oh yeah, yeah, yes, oh yes. Well because we, you know, we all had friends who were in the navy, and friends who were in the air force, and the blokes themselves. But it was only while they were home on leave, and that was all so fleeting. It was all so fleeting, it's not like this business now, where

37:30 bloody HMAS [Her Majesty's Australian Ship] Australia is over in the Gulf for three or four months and they come home.

Do you think it has gone a bit soft?

Our blokes went away for three, four and five years. They didn't get leave in the same way. This is why I say sometimes, what in hell are we all on about with these deployments. Even when my brother-in-law went to Vietnam, he was away for 12 months

38:00 and then came home for I forget how long, I think... I don't know. In fact I was in America at the time. But he certainly did come home in the middle of his Vietnam service and then went back and he was a National Serviceman, but it was all so different and so... I wouldn't be aware... There was always fights between the

38:30 Australians and the New Zealanders. Whenever a New Zealand convoy came into town there would be fisticuffs. God knows, you couldn't say it was alcohol fuelled because the pubs shut at six o'clock. There wasn't a lot of liquor around, not like as it is now. But there was always

39:00 competition, let's put it that way, competition between…

So you think it was a bit of friendly competition that would end up in a biffo [fight]?

It certainly ended up in biffo, oh God.

How common was that?

Not all that common because they didn't come through in large convoys. They weren't a large force compared to the Australian numbers either, you know. You have always got to remember,

39:30 try and put it into a historical context with some of these things. But they... The New Zealanders have always had a... There has always been the rivalry between the New Zealanders and Australians. It has always been there.

You mentioned there was a bit of secrecy involved in your work, can you elaborate on that?

Not in the work I was doing, the work that the people that we were

40:00 in charge of in our barracks. And the answer to that is no, because they just didn't talk about it. But they were plotters. You can talk about it in the sense of aftermath, of what, you know, they did. We had all these air spotters, the whole way up the coast, and we would…

40:30 And so these people worked in the plotting rooms were plotting all this information... Whether it was about Japanese submarines – and there were Japanese submarines,

41:00 anyone who thinks there were not are bloody fools. And we certainly had Japanese planes. The other night if you saw it there was the bombing of Broome. That actually happened and that was all done, the

plotting of it was all done by these women in these command rooms associated

41:30 with fortress defence. And you knew what they did but you didn't talk about it. We didn't talk about it because that was their brief. Their brief

41:55 End of tape

Tape 4

00:31 **Can you describe the duties that you had when you were at Karrakatta, Elsie?**

Yes.

Not Karrakatta, Jandakot.

Oh Jandakot. I was only at Jandakot for two weeks. And that was on a gun station and again it was in the orderly room. And again in the orderly room it was very much like what I had been doing in Northam. You see everything was handwritten.

01:00 There's an official, that's a photocopy of my service or whatever, I can't see. Now there's my proceedings for discharge, that was printed. Everything was done by hand. See, I was a clerk. You were always handling paper, masses and masses of paper, and you know, handwriting it.

Where did you

01:30 **stay when you were in Jandakot?**

Oh, Jandakot, we were in tents, out in tents. And that was really rough out there, because one of the most important things I did out there, I had a fair amount of time on my hands really, because they worked shift work on the guns, the actual gunners who were, you know, loading guns and plotting and all this.

02:00 And um, but there would be people off duty and the roads, we had trucks, and the trucks were always getting bogged. And it was sand, Jandakot, you know. Out there by the aerodrome now, we had a whole string of guns, we had countless guns out there as part of the defence of Fremantle and Perth. And so I just said, "Look, this is hopeless." We spent more time digging trucks out of sand

02:30 and we had all this limestone lying around. So I said, "Come on, let's get out and put a sort of a track in." And that's what we did. we built a sort of a road off a fairly well established track into the sand hills where we had these bloody guns and whatnot... But I think we put about three or four in hospital with tummy strains and made a hysterectomies and God knows what in so

03:00 doing, but they were the sort of things we did. We turned our hands to almost anything.

What kind of tools did you pick up to do that?

Mmmm?

What kind of tools did you pick up to do that job?

Hands. Picked them up in hands and you know, limestone was everywhere, and just put it upon the truck and just drove the truck to the next bit and put it down and used the truck backwards and forwards to give it a bit of foundation and so on. We

03:30 you had to do things like that to save yourself in some of these situations. And, of course, there are people…

That's a pretty committed effort.

Mmm?

That's a pretty committed effort.

You were, you were there 24 hours a day forever. You didn't know the war was going to end on the... We didn't know they were going to drop the atom bomb on the 5th and 6th August 1945. We didn't know that.

04:00 We were there for God knows then.

Did you discuss the war?

Only in terms of where friends were and... See, you didn't have the nightly news and you didn't switch from channel to channel to decide which nightly news you would watch. You had a radio, which if you were lucky and you were off duty, you might tune in and get something. And everything was censored.

04:30 And when you went to the pictures on leave, it was the Movietone News, you know. We didn't really know what was happening. As I keep saying, you have got to be really careful in these sorts of things in case you colour what you say because of what you have read after. Now I read all this stuff... I have got a great interest in

05:00 historic things, so I see some of the banner headlines of that day the atom bomb was dropped. But we didn't read it that day, we didn't see a newspaper for God knows when.

How long did you think it would take for the war to complete?

Well we had no idea. All we knew was that tremendous

05:30 effort on the part of the Brits in the Battle of Britain, and there's no question that that was the first strike. And the second one was the Russians turning back the German armies in Moscow and Stalingrad in 1941. They are long before America had come into the war. They were the things that influenced

06:00 our lives. If for whatever reason Hitler didn't decide to invade England, God alone knows why, he was there. He was sitting on the [English] Channel ports. Instead of that he goes hurtling back across the European continent and takes on Russia. And then gets bombed out there in the bloody snow storms –

06:30 a literally incredible decision. But I only know all this 40, 50, 60 years later. We didn't know it at the time. We got odd news bulletins by radio. And you would go to the... When you were on leave... But everything was censored. But no, you didn't have this plethora of news you have now,

07:00 so much so that we don't even take it in. I read two newspapers daily, but half the time I think, I don't think I want to plough through whether Mr Howard knew the bloody kids were thrown overboard off the Tampa and I don't really care whether... I do care, in fact I do care, of the latest one now with the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] and Lord Hutton, and whether we had weapons of mass destruction or whether we

07:30 didn't, or whether we knew or didn't know. We have got such... It consumes us now, news, but it certainly didn't consume us in 1942 until 1945 because we... Obviously, we wanted to win. We didn't want any, you know, but we didn't have any idea really what was going on up in the islands. We had really no idea how

08:00 our POWs [Prisoners of War] were being treated. And we really didn't know, and in fact some of our members of the army sigs [signals], they were in Darwin and got the first of the names as they were picked up, the POWs, and the nurses. It was all quite different.

What did you think the odds were that perhaps the Japanese would

08:30 **bomb Perth and/or Fremantle?**

We thought it was very real, absolutely real. We had air raid things here, I was... We had all these shelters along St George's Terrace, we had slit trenches all round the place. Oh no, no, it was a real possibility, and there was no question there were Japanese submarines

09:00 off the coast. We are still arguing the point about the Sydney. It certainly disappear from sight because they had a mutiny on board the Sydney and blew up the captain. I am damned certain that didn't happen. But something must have happened.

Was there talk of the 5th Columnist action?

Oh yes, you know, we had all sorts of people who were interned. Japanese from Broome, part of the pearling community.

09:30 Certainly lots of Germans and Italians were interned. Now, you know, we weren't... We really weren't as far as I know the concern about terrorism or people acting in 5th Column capacities

10:00 here in Australia, per se.

How were those people interned?

How were they? They were just picked up and taken off down to bush camps. There was one at Dwellingup, there was an internment... And a POW, we had German POWs and in fact at Karrakatta, when I went to Karrakatta, that was about 1944, 1945,

10:30 the German POWs, not German, Italian POWs were used as gardeners and, you know, did all the rough work around the place. As I say, you know, much of it was deep pit latrines, so they cleaned out all the latrines and all that sort of stuff. And one I remember so distinctly,

11:00 the most magnificent tenor voice, and he had come from the Milan Opera Company, and he used to sing as we went round the barracks. And they were all so nice. They wore these pink uniforms, they wore pink suits, shirts and whatnot, so if they went missing they were readily identifiable. But just nice, charming fellows.

11:30 **I believe there were Italian POWs dispersed in the wheat belt as well, working on the farms?**

Oh yeah, worked on farms. Worked on farms. Did all sorts of things. Italians. As far as I know, we didn't do that with the Germans, or the Japanese. And, of course, there was the Cowra outbreak with the Japanese, which led to deaths and so on. Yes, the

12:00 Italians, they had been fighting wars for a long while. People forget that. They had been running around Spain and Africa, you know.

I was just wondering how it affected the community when people were being interned. There was obviously a large Italian and...?

Well I didn't know anyone, so I really can't speak

12:30 from pure knowledge how it would affect people. But last night, I was sitting here out there reading the Order of Australia Magazine and it had a whole lot of information about new inductees into the Order [of Australia], and there's two people in that who are Italians, and very, very fine business people at the beginning of the war, and they were interned. The

13:00 husband was. It's an interesting story of these... It's interesting we bring it up here now. This husband and wife have just been admitted to the Order of Australia for their services to the community at large, including the Italian community, but the fellow was plucked away at the beginning, or at some point in World War II and interned. All this business

13:30 we've got with refugees now, that's been going on forever since we started off in 1788. We had a whole bunch of people…

So you never observed or witnessed any kind of factioning in the community?

No. No I can't honestly say.

Are you aware of it possibly existing or...?

Am I what?

Are you aware it might have existed or division in the community?

There has always been factionalism,

14:00 always. When I first went to London and found my feet and first flew out, all the Australians were in, oh God, you know, Kangaroo Court. Earl's Court... Not Earl's Court, but you know. You have got to be a very strong person not to automatically go and associate with your own

14:30 kith and kin. You have got to be very strong. It's so easy. And this is why the Australians literally... You talk about the English backpackers coming out here. The Australians going to London in the '50s and '60s, I mean they literally kept the... They probably still do keep the hospitality and the pub industry going

15:00 etc., etc. But you'll all be at certain points. As it happened, a friend and myself, we were really not part of that culture at all. We... I joined the Servicewomen's Club in London when I was in and out of London. And that was fantastic, because I met servicewomen from all the British services and

15:30 so on.

If we come back and discuss London in a bit more detail later. How else did you see the community here in Perth change in war time?

How did it change?

Yeah. You mentioned bomb shelters in Hay Street, and...

Well yes, they were all necessary, they were put... Whether they were adequate, thankfully was never proven.

16:00 **How much artillery was positioned around the metropolitan area?**

Not... You weren't aware of guns per se around here, but there were certainly guns all the way around that coastal strip from Two Rocks. If you read your newspapers now, you will see right now that they are opening up a

16:30 development, you know, a new housing estate. And they have been warned – and I can tell people all about this – they were used as firing ranges for all the artillery. I have talked about the artillery out at Rockingham. There are still shells down there. The other day they had to let a bushfire run out of control because of it was too dangerous to put the

17:00 firemen in to put it out because of the possibility of unexploded shells and armaments and so on. The whole place was just heavy artillery and light artillery from sort of...sort of north of Mora [?] that I know of.

I know that Rottnest was heavily fired and that the North and South Molle there was

17:30 **artillery and Buckland Hills. How much artillery did you have at Jandakot?**

There were pits all the way along. It was... We had whole batteries there. We had batteries up on Wireless Hill overlooking Buckland, you know, on the Applecross side. The place was heavily fortified in terms

18:00 of artillery and, of course, we had one particular division, the 3rd Armoured Division, which was all armoured cars. They never went overseas, the poor buggers. They had the most terrible trouble proving their war service in terms of getting disability and all the things the DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] do provide because they were charging around the wheat

18:30 fields out through Darrogan [?] and Mullewa and all that learning how to use armoured cars. We left the desert, we left the desert in Africa in 1942, we are fighting wars up in jungles, well you can't go screaming around jungles too much in armoured cars. These poor cows, they... But they were busy firing live ammunition. The place was a…

19:00 **So who were the gunners attending all the artillery in the metro area?**

Mainly women, mainly women. But mainly officers, there were women officers who were gun plotters and so on. And that's what women did. We took over

19:30 much of the plotting, not so much of the firing and the handling of it the per se because they are pretty heavy some of those shells, but um, it was a joint business, men and women working closely together, particularly on the guns. Probably much more so than we were in Northam as the clerical staff because we were just a small group. But the women were actually

20:00 were there playing a large part in the actual day by day use of the guns.

Can you describe how men and women worked together at Jandakot for instance?

Well, remembering that I was only there two weeks and in the orderly room, but again just, you know, you are a team, you are not, you are on duty.

How many army personnel were on the team at Jandakot?

Oh look I honestly, I

20:30 honestly.

Can you estimate?

No. I wouldn't like to put a figure on it.

What were the numbers of men in comparison to women?

Mmm?

What were the numbers of men in comparison to women?

There would be more, gee whiz I wouldn't like to. Look I wouldn't like to make a snap guess on that. Mark you we messed in separate and lived in separate quarters, and I

21:00 was never on the guns per se, so that's why I am being a little chary about saying anything definitely because I am…

Well, Elsie, can you describe the site and the orderly room and the layout of the…?

Oh yeah, just a long army hut, if you know what an army hut looks like, with prop-up louvre windows, steps that go up into it and get up. And then there would be counters, you know,

21:30 and the staff would be behind the counters. Not the sort of filing cabinets, I can't even think what... We didn't have gunmetal filing cabinets like we have now, most of them were wood. And just benches with typewriters and sort of typists chairs, clerical chairs. But they were all pretty basic, just on a

22:00 pole and that sort of stuff. I don't think we even had pin-up boards, you know…can't even think of a pin-up board per se. And as for drawing pins, I don't know that I can even think about a drawing pin.

What kind of interaction did you have with the other personnel outside of the orderly room?

Well my

22:30 interaction always was from the orderly room of the issuing of leave passes, and then in the mess having meals, and the usual thing we did all the time. Attending to laundry – laundry was always one of the biggest chores of your army career and it still is for anyone from any rank at all, in the army, is their laundry, making certain their uniform is spot on.

23:00 You wouldn't want to have anything go wrong with your uniform if you could avoid it.

After Jandakot you were moved to Karrakatta?

Went to Karrakatta.

What was the purpose of that posting?

The purpose of that posting was to... That was leave in transit and I then became

23:30 the senior sergeant, in that... The senior sergeant under the command of a warrant officer. And the warrant officer and I were very good friends we had come through the ranks, or she was older than I was. And we literally were responsible for the movement of the Australian Women's Army Service people moving in and out of Western Command. Whether it was by troop train or by air or...

24:00 Nobody moved by... Some did move by sea if they were able to get... Going north, some had leave to go north. There were some that had leave to go by sea. But mainly troop trains, let's stick to troop trains, and I was responsible for all the parade ground and the marshalling to get them on to the trains or to be at the trains when they came in from the east on leave and later on

24:30 discharge, to get them from the trains to Karrakatta. So I literally was a sort of parade ground sergeant in this particular post, with a lot of paperwork. It was all again, my life was filled with nominal roles throughout my army career, because it was... You have got to have a list. All it is is a list for a nominal roll. You can't shift one person and you can't shift 100 or 1000

25:00 people without a nominal roll, without documentation and all the associated papers that go with it. So that was my major job at Karrakatta. And the war in Europe ended in May, about 9th May or 8th May or whenever VE [Victory in Europe] Day was. And it was at that time

25:30 the Australian Army decided that we now had to send women to New Guinea. We had to fulfil the same role. We had all these people in HQ spots along New Guinea, and Hollandia, which was in Dutch New Guinea at that point. So the regulations were signed and put through parliament and

26:00 MacArthur in particular wanted to be moving these blokes all the time through the islands. And so I was on the draft of six people, six WA, who were going to Hollandia, which was the capital of Dutch New Guinea at that time. And the rest of the troops, there were a whole bunch that were going to Lae to Thomas

26:30 Blamey's HQ in Lae. And all the blokes then would do what we had done here in Australia. They would be shipped to, you know, further north as we were up chasing the Japanese and forcing them further and further toward the ultimate killing fields of the invasion of Japan. I mean, the invasion of Japan would have cost us God knows how many lives if we would have

27:00 done it. Well, as it happens, Hollandia is just over the border, or it was. It's now west, you know, as you draw the map. That is outside of Australian Mandated Territory. Now Australia had two armies in World War II. It had the Australian Imperial Forces, which could be sent anywhere. They were all

27:30 volunteers, absolute volunteers and they served to serve Australia and its allies anywhere. And they also had the Australian Military Forces, and they were people who toward the end of the war, or one point when we thought we needed more manpower, we did start to conscript people, and so some people were in the Australian Military Forces. But under the Australian Act of Parliament they could only serve

28:00 on Australian Mandated Territory, which included our part of Papua New Guinea, not Dutch New Guinea, because that hadn't been declared independent at that point. So here are the six of us, we are all lined up here in Perth, yellow with Atebrin, and we have got tropical kit, and all of a sudden I am just called in to the CO [Commanding Officer], "Sorry, sorry

28:30 Sol. The draft's cancelled. You are not going." Well I mean, knocked the daylights... Another great friend of mine, she was going as quartermaster, I was going as orderly room sergeant to that, this group. But all the rest of the draft they went about, from memory, two or three weeks later, they all went to Lae. They packed up and went to Lae and

29:00 I... You know... I had been chosen for this other one so I didn't get a berth for Lae draft. And away they went, and I was left here. So as they... As a consolation, and by this time it's pretty obvious we are winning the war in the islands, but with all this terrible thought that you know, the invasion of Japan was not really

29:30 to be contemplated if you could avoid it. So they said, "Well all right, look they are setting up a training program in Melbourne, so go over to Melbourne and you will be heading up the discharge." The discharge, when you know, and we were... Lots of people, POWs were coming back from Germany, you see, all sorts of things, people were getting out of the army.

30:00 So we were moving into a discharge vein long before the war against Japan ended. Long before. So, I get on a plane out here at Pearce on the 5th August 1945, and that scared the daylights out of me. I am the only woman on this plane, a DC-3. Seat belts – there were no seats. You sat on a

30:30 mail bag and you put a seat belt around your waist. And, I had never flown, never been in an aircraft.

And away we trundled down the runway at Pearce. It had poured with rain, we had the great... Swan River, Swan River had broken its banks. It wasn't a canal. It wasn't bloody canal in those days. It was a river. The water... No Riverside Drive.

31:00 So the water just washed right up to Government House. So it was the river. And when we got up and circled up and got off. But before we got to that stage, I am sitting there and watching these lights. You are facing inward because you are strapped to the side of the plane, you are not facing down, it wasn't an aisle per se. So I am watching these lights and I could see the last one coming up and we are still on the

31:30 ground, and I thought, "Oh my God, we are not going to get off the ground. We are not just going to get up." And somehow or other we did. I think I might have even wet my pants. I was so bloody scared. Anyhow away we went and we go over Perth and we could see... So we had to put down at Forrest

32:00 Field, at Forrest, Forrest, out there on the Nullarbor Plain, to refuel, because they didn't have long range tanks. And all this, of course, the plane just stood up on its wings like this, and I thought I was going to fall out. I thought, "Well this is it, we are not going to make it down, having made it up, we are not going to make it down." Anyhow we did.

32:30 DC-3s were something else. I later flew in DC-3s commercially and they are fantastic – they were great old planes. So I get to Adelaide and I don't know where the blokes went, they were all going to various places. I was taken into Adelaide into the YWCA, was a Young Women's Christian Association, had

33:00 hostels everywhere around Australia, and they were leave places for us. And given a palliasse and a bed and just died. I mean it had been a long, long day. We had been going since about 2am from Pearce here, and then over there. It had been a long, long day. And then in the middle of it all, someone burst in, I really can't remember the exact words but this hubbub,

33:30 this bomb had been dropped and there had been a news flash on a radio somewhere. And this was the first we knew of the dropping of the atomic bomb. In August, that was about the 6th or 7th of August. And again it still didn't hit us. We really didn't know what an atomic bomb was, you know. I don't think we heard the word atomic,

34:00 you have got to be so careful. I can't really remember. All I know is the excitement of this news flash had indicated that the Americans had done this wonderful thing. So anyhow, I got to Melbourne and marched into Camp Pell and put in the sergeants' mess and was about to start and do all this course work with this

34:30 demobilisation program, and of course three days later the Americans dropped the bomb on Nagasaki and that really did seem to indicate, you know, in Melbourne, there really was the whole emphasis that the war was over. And sure enough, the Japs capitulated. The surrender was the 15th August. And so here am I in Melbourne, and they said,

35:00 "Well, you better go back to Perth because we are going to start demobilising yesterday." And so I came back home by troop train.

What was that journey like?

Oh fantastic.

How did it compare with the DC-3 ride?

Oh, well a lot longer, because I have spoken about this 3rd Armoured Division that's runnin' around the wheat fields over here, well... That's how quickly they shifted. They got these

35:30 blokes together, a whole division. Now a division is… Oh, what would a division be of those blokes, tanks? Something like 3,000 or more, could have been more. Anyhow this whole troop train, we got offloaded at one of the stations along the line and we were just out on a spur line for three days while all these

36:00 troop trains went through taking the Armoured Division back to the east, and they were nearly all eastern staters anyhow. And we were out there for three days just sitting on hard rations, just bully beef out of cans and hard biscuits and port-a-loos [portable toilets] and many, many Aboriginals. Because the Aboriginal communities, of course, lived off the stations along the Nullarbor

36:30 route and did so until many years later. And the trains became air conditioned and the windows didn't go up. So the trains used to stop at all these stations along the Nullarbor, along the Trans-Continental. And many years later when I was playing cricket, we used to go over and the Aboriginals would be there selling their artefacts and this, that and the other.

37:00 And that was a source of income for them for many years until we put air conditioning in and closed the windows and didn't stop as often as we used to. Amazing how different innovations change cultures and so on.

How long were you at the spur for?

Three days we were out there. Three days. Because the train was stationary. And we were in carriages, there eight to a carriage. And the

37:30 women were in carriages. The blokes always travelled on cattle trucks. They just travelled on the flat. Flat cattle trucks or with the, you know, just what we ship cattle and sheep around in now. They didn't travel in carriages with padded seats, but the women did. But we travelled eight, eight to a carriage and so we had to rotate. And sergeants didn't, sergeants didn't sleep in luggage racks.

38:00 But you had to rotate round, you know, from a corner, to a middle... Or some would sleep on the floor. You know, in shifts because... It was a long time, 72 hours, when you sit round and travelling. That was when we were travelling we all had to... You just ran a shift as to who sat where and so on.

What kind of comforts did you have on the train?

None. None.

38:30 The... You got off for food. The train stopped at sidings for meals, and there was always a meal, like a cafeteria, you know, the same as you go to a dining room when you travel on a train now, when someone is cooking the meals. But there was no comfort. Water was in hessian... Not hessian...

Canvas?

Canvas,

39:00 hanging on the back of the platform. Certainly no water in... No bottled water. You were lucky to have water.

What about water for washing?

There was the usual... At the end of each carriage, there was the usual toilet and just a hand basin.

39:30 But we... There were no first-class carriages, and if there were the officers would be travelling in those. And, you know, you had whatever water was there, and you just slooshed. Certainly didn't have showers or that sort of stuff.

Those three days when you were stopped on the spur must have been an incredibly long time?

Long while. Very difficult, very difficult, you know. You had to...

40:00 In fact I think we played more cricket... I can remember organising cricket... We must have got a ball and something for a bat from somewhere. But no it was a long while, a long while to keep people organised, but you know, we were all pretty self reliant, you learn to cope with yourself, you, yeah.

Did you play cricket against the boys?

Out there?

40:30 I can't remember that we did that. But I am sure we did. I had played cricket with boys all my life so I am sure I would have.

I am just wondering did you mingle with the boys for those three days?

Yes, yes, the...

It must have drawn a bit of attention. They wouldn't have seen many women?

Oh well, I don't know that testosterone played such a big part... It was

41:00 there, but you know it was, that magic word discipline was still pretty powerful. Um, no I can't think that we... The biggest problem was to find shade. That was the biggest problem. Because you don't have a lot of trees out in some of that part of the world. I do remember that the

41:30 spur line we were on sort of led into the settlement, and so there must have been people.

Do you recall the name of that settlement?

No I can't recall the name. I can't recall the name now. I always used to think it was Forrest, but Forrest was where we landed in the aircraft. I think it would have been... There was that many stations out there.

Sure.

42:01 **End of tape**

Tape 5

00:31 This is on the draft to New Guinea. The war was coming, toning down, the need was becoming evident to have the demobilisation process in place and I had been chosen to go to the school, or whatever it was going to be called, in Melbourne. And then the atom bombs were dropped

01:00 and Japan capitulated, and so therefore the hierarchy just said, "Well, look, go back." And you are there, and away we'll go. I wasn't going to Hollandia, all my mates were going to New Guinea and I was back in Karrakatta.

What was it like being back home knowing the war was over?

Now what are we talking about? Back

01:30 to Karrakatta or back home? Because I don't come back home for another two years.

Oh right.

At this point we are just going back to Karrakatta. And you had a demob [demobilisation], you had a number which showed where you were hierarchy, in the list, where you would be discharged. I didn't have a husband,

02:00 I wasn't planning to marry, I wasn't planning to have kids and all that came into it. So my demob number, I don't even know that I know it now, or if I ever got one. But I was just still in the army in 1946. By this time, 1945, the bomb is dropped, and so we start on the demob process. And that was what I was doing, just doing that. And this is when the nurses came back from the POW

02:30 camps in Japan, not in Japan, in the islands and, you know, just the whole demobilisation process was under way of however many troops we had in uniform. Over here, it just meant all this transportation getting them back here and so on.

It's got to be a lot of organisation?

Oh,

03:00 enormous organisation, and the whole business of medical examinations, the whole business of people filling in the documentation for possible repatriation benefits as they were called then. The blokes who had been POWs, the blokes who had been wounded, the issuing of the civilian suits, etc.

They were issuing civilian suits?

Oh yes, every person who came out the army

03:30 pardon me, the men, they all got a suit, pretty ill cut. None of then were too rapt in them, but they were certainly better than the terrible army uniforms they had been wearing, some of them for up to six years. Because we had POWs from Germany coming back, who had been away since late 1939 early 1940. And here we are we are into the

04:00 beginning of 1946 as it were, so enormous amount of organisation, the whole business of getting reconstruction training grants. Most of the people that went into teachers' colleges in those early years were ex servicemen and women who were given the opportunity to retain. And that was one of the great, that was one of the really great wartime pieces of legislation at the end of the war,

04:30 the postwar reconstruction training scheme, which meant that people by education and qualifications and whatever were chosen to go to university or go to teachers' college and so on. Wonderful scheme, absolutely wonderful scheme.

Just going back to the so called demobbing [demobilising] of people, did you have a one on

05:00 **one relationship with people, or was it just more paperwork?**

Oh, no, no, they... It was a great chain of paper. I didn't handle one person from the start of his or her demobilisation, only her… Because I was only connected with the AWAS, because I was on AWAS HQ staff by now at Karrakatta. But people pass through an enormous chain, starting with

05:30 x-rays. Everyone had to have an x-ray to be discharged, starting with medical examination. If people reported any illness or anything they wanted to claim a disability for, and with the men, that was paramount, I mean most of the blokes that had been on active service in, wherever, regrettably far too many didn't put in for a...

06:00 didn't lodge... make certain their medical records were complete with all the things that may or may not have happened to them, so that now there are many of them now still fighting pension claims and they are now in their 80s. For God's sakes. They are still battling. I battle a lot, I do a lot… Not a lot of work, a fair amount of work...

06:30 **So you would go through x-rays and then what?**

Yeah.

And then what would happen after the x-rays?

Well if you were

07:00 claiming for any disability that you thought was war caused you had a medical. Everyone had a medical... and there was handing in, people had to hand in their military gear, or most of it. I didn't get any of mine

07:30 because I was discharged from a hospital bed. But the blokes coming back, they had rifles and bayonets and bandoliers, and all the accoutrements of

08:00 warfare. They all had to be handed in and documented and stored. Enormous, enormous administrative process.

Was it destroyed or was it stored?

I have got no idea what they did with it. I have got no idea.

Were the women easier to deal with than the men?

Oh well I wasn't dealing with the men, so I can't honestly say. There were women... We had this big camp of women, so that the people associated

08:30 with finance in district finance office, they were handling all the pay claims of people, women, were handling men in this long chain, this chain of... It's like flow charts, you've got flow charts to run this bloody Department of Veterans' Affairs and all this stuff is…

Not really, we just arrive on your doorstep.

09:00 Oh yeah, but you know that someone has put it together and you know what's there and you know that you have got to take this back and be accountable for it. Isn't that so?

Yes, absolutely.

Well it's just the same sort of thing.

How long would it take somebody to get through the whole process? Would it take a whole day?

Anything up to two to three days. We didn't have appointments, you know, you didn't have an appointment book or anything like that.

09:30 People were marched in in great squads. A squad was anywhere between 10 and 15 people, and the way they were set. People worked their backsides off in those days to get people through and out into civvie [civilian] street. And then there was the whole business of the men were entitled to go back to their jobs. Those that had come from jobs, they were entitled to have those jobs restored to them. And there were people that either the jobs had

10:00 gone or they didn't want to do that or they were looking for something else. They were tumultuous days then.

What sort of options did a war veteran have as far as benefits?

In jobs or…?

Or say for instance housing?

Housing, that was another thing. The housing scheme wasn't in place immediately, but

10:30 most people got married and went and lived with their in-laws. You could go through the history of members in my association and, my godson, in actual fact he... His mother and father, they lived in a room in a house in West Perth, in Richardson Street, West Perth. And the main thing with Aunty Elsie in those days was to keep Bill quiet, because she couldn't have a screaming baby because

11:00 people lived in lodging houses. These were the old houses with passages down the centre and rooms, and people hired out those rooms and made fortunes, some of those people that owned some of those properties. They put small kerosene stoves in for people to cook on and all this. And that's how these friends of mine and my godson, that's how they

11:30 lived for the better part of two to three years.

Do you think there was a shortage of housing at all?

Of course there was, yes. Housing, there had been… There had been no houses built. Housing just came to a halt. Absolute standstill, there were no houses built. The whole thing went into the war effort. There were no, no developers with

12:00 $50 million and carving up land and selling it outrageous and building outrageous homes that no-one can afford to buy, and never will own most of them, or you know, it... But then people didn't own houses. Lots of people renting. We were like most of the rest of the world, people renting houses, some

12:30 people owned their house. I mean, the family homestead in Vic Park, my Dad paid something like $877, £877. I think it was. I think he paid something like £20 for the block. The title deeds showed that the house itself was, I think, £877 or something or other.

13:00 You just can't get your mind around figures now, you really can't. And you see, the war housing scheme, which gave us loans, gave men, not women, not women – I have never been a member of the RSL [Returned & Services League] over this issue. Which we'll come to in a minute. The... It gave men the opportunity to

13:30 own their own homes, and we had 45 years, 45 years to pay them off.

Which is a long time.

45 years, and I forget what the interest rate was. 2% or something like that. Unbelievable. So that, you know, many of my generation, many people don't thank you if you say this, but many people of my generation now own property and

14:00 have got assets which they got as part of the war housing. Suburbs like Applecross was bush. Mt Pleasant, that was just banksia trees. Just banksia trees. And they got these blocks of land for God knows what, pittance money. But those lovely old homes along the river, most of those are all war

14:30 service, it used to be called the War Service Housing Scheme, and many people became asset rich because they lived in these houses and 45 or over you see.

And you have got a bit of a bee in your bonnet about it wasn't available to women?

No. No.

So can you explain that to me a bit more?

Well nothing was available to women unless you had served overseas. And this, by the way,

15:00 was also true of men. But so few women had served overseas, so it was only the nurses, and there quite a few VADs [Voluntary Aid Detachments] went overseas, because I have to be very careful, because the VADs and the nurses were attached to the Australian hospitals, and I wouldn't know, I have never looked at the regimental list actually as to how many hospitals, but we many, many hospitals, where...

15:30 And they were overseas and so on, and they qualified. But a person like myself who was discharged as totally and permanently incapacitated in 1947 and going home to a family home which by this time had three kids, '42, '44,

16:00 '46, and Judith's '49.

Does that happen quite quickly?

Well this is my second family. We skipped over my stepmother and all that, but the family, my... The siblings, were born in 1942, 1944, 1942 and 1949. By the time I was coming out of hospital in

16:30 1947, middle of 1947, we had three kids at home and we still had this still small weatherboard, iron-roofed house. And by this time we had six people living in this house, where there had been three when I was born. And so on. I, of course, strange, absolutely strange with this woman and three kids and my father and then me, not able to

17:00 work and on a pension. The pensions were good at that point. But all I wanted to do was get a house, get housing. So I applied to the government as it was, and oh no, a woman, a single woman to boot, not even a war widow.

17:30 A single woman wasn't eligible, and the fact of this extreme family situation I found myself in... So I went off to the RSL...

So war widows were getting treated better than people like yourself?

I am not too certain when it all affected, I think war widows were eligible. I am still only 21

18:00 am still only 21, 1923 by this time. I am still just another cog in this whole enormous thingo, I am... But the RSL the same thing, "Oh no, you are not returned." See nobody could join the RSL, but nobody, the women,

18:30 until they invited us to march, I think the first time we were ever invited to march Anzac Day was 1963 and by that time, you know, we were involved in the Vietnam War and nobody wanted to know about war. And a lot of disharmony. And the Second World War blokes were dying off in

19:00 great numbers at that point because they had been badly wounded, and all the effects of the war were catching up on them. So many members of my association have been widows, have been war widows, for 30 and 40 and 50 years, some of them because the blokes died within, you know, 10, 20 years after they came home. So many of them have been war widows for... And brought up kids. And this is

19:30 why I do a bit of and have done... I loved 20 years in Canberra, which upset things in this field a little bit. But anyhow that's beside the point. The RSL rejected me, so I have never marched Anzac Day. I do a lot of work with the RSL, but I have never marched. You didn't want us until you wanted the numbers bolstered. And that's what they did. I think 1963 was the first

20:00 time. I was teaching in the country at that time, so I am not sure about all that.

So you are still obviously still pretty annoyed with the situation with the RSL?

From that point of view. Because people don't know that history of it. This is what I mean. This is why I have said right from the beginning and people I have talked to. You have got to be careful about how you interpret history.

20:30 You know where you get your information from. Many people it has never entered their head that women didn't march in the Anzac Day Parade. Wouldn't ever have entered their heads.

Did you feel that that was a serious problem when you... Well after the situation of women being in the services, do you think that should have been addressed immediately?

Well, something we haven't touched on, women didn't get equal pay.

21:00 You didn't get equal pay with the men and you didn't get equal pay if you were under 18. 21 was an adult wage for the various ranks... We are shilly shallying around a bit, but you are touching on a lot of issues that people are just not aware of. And it is inconceivable that we had to be in the army as 18-year-olds, which was the statutory age to enlist,

21:30 and we got paid three and four a day. What's three and four? Oh God, I can hardly do these sums quickly now, but it's about 30 cents or whatever it is. And we had to be in the army 12 months before we got adult female wage. You know, this is all part of our industrial arbitration history

22:00 which is not commonly known.

Was there...?

The RSL has always been a very, very good organ for servicemen and women now, and women now, but certainly back in those days it was still a legacy of the First World War and men, the dominance of men in society, etc. Men in the work place, you know.

22:30 **Was there a reasonable amount of dissention amongst ranks of women in regards to the way they were treated after they had been in the war and served?**

No, no I don't think so. I think it was left to sort of part militants like myself who for various reasons you know...

How did you get militant?

Well I have always been militant. I have always been part of

23:00 unions, etc. That's not to say I am a raving radical person, but I just believe in... I just believe in fairness and equality. And so when I became a teacher, I was very active in the Teachers' Union because women didn't have equal pay in teaching.

23:30 **What year would that be?**

Oh God.

Is that still the '60s?

I became a teacher in 1956. I became a teacher when circumstances, I thought... I couldn't become a teacher under the Commonwealth Reconstruction Scheme I described to you.

We haven't actually discussed why you were discharged as medically unfit?

24:00 That's right, well we'll come to that now. I have talked about the... I have talked about the system of discharge, so you had to have an x-ray to come out of the army. You had to have one to go in and one to come out. And I had mine to go in, and there was nothing wrong with me. And one day, because I was working in leave and transit, and someone came in and said, "We can go down and have an

24:30 x-ray if we like," and we were nowhere near getting ready for discharge. "We can go down to the medical centre and they'll give us an x-ray if we want it." And every one of us in the group, about four or five of us, and I said, "That's a good idea." So we went down to the bottom of the camp where the place was, and we all had a chest x-ray, and lo and behold within 24 hours

25:00 I was in Hollywood Hospital with TB [tuberculosis]. And within 48 hours I was back in Northam, in a different part of Northam because they turned that into a TB hospital. And so I spent 12 months then in hospital.

What were the symptoms that you had?

I didn't have any. I didn't have any symptoms.

Any idea how you contracted it?

Well I presume because

25:30 my mother had died of TB. But many people… If you have a look, it has just been released on it. TB was the second highest cause of death through the '50s and the '60s in our western, our kinds of societies. Oh yeah. The navy in particular suffered badly,

26:00 particularly the people under the decks, the stokers, the stokers and the engineers and people that lived in the, worked in the engine rooms. And many... There are still a few of them alive, the navy blokes are still with us. But there aren't many of us, so there is only two of us from that original Northam crowd in 1946/47 who are still

26:30 alive. And all the others are dead and most of them have been dead for many, many years.

So the thing is, is it quite contagious, the TB?

It used to be, yes.

I mean I don't know a lot about it because...

Yeah, sure, again it's something people don't know a lot about. But yes, it's contagious. We were isolated, and apart from that it was the most terrible regime of bed rest. Would you believe a person like myself, I am nearly 80

27:00 now, so can you imagine what I was like at 23?

A bit of a dynamo.

Yeah, can you imagine putting me in a bed, and not having a shower for 9 months?

What?

Where's the logic of the non showering?

Rest. All they knew about treating TB was rest. We didn't do a thing for ourselves. We were bed

27:30 bathed for nine months. I... Jane Dowson – it all depends on how you structure things – Jane Dowson would know about all this. All the VADs and the nurses would know about this. Because we were up in... The doctors, even the doctors treating us, two of the doctors ended up with us as patients. It's a

28:00 bacillus which is carried by air. You will find, my dear, this is, you had better turn that thing off. I'll say it, I'll say it, I am not scared. I believe that eventually we will find that cancer is a bacillus, it is carried by air. It's no accident that cancer is rampant in so many families.

28:30 It's no accident that you can look at family histories with women with breast cancer, and I personally believe that we will find it's bacillus carried.

Well, everybody has sort of got a bit of a theory about cancer. But going back to TB, is there any other treatment other than this incredible bed rest?

Oh yeah. Now mine was in the right lung,

29:00 so twice a week we would be put in a wheelchair and wheeled up to the operating theatre. Oh, it wasn't an operating theatre, but it was just a treatment room really. And you would lie on the bed on your side and put your hand up like this, and this would expose your ribs here, and they would use a great needle. Before that you

29:30 had the operation which collapsed the lung.

You had an operation?

Yeah, in the pneumothorax, the pneumothorax took the air out of your lung and depressed the lung. And then to stop the lung from working, which is all part of this rest business, they would pump air in twice a week to keep the pleural cavity and the chest cavity with this air in it to keep the lung depressed. And that happened twice a week.

30:00 And we weren't allowed out of bed except to have our bed made daily and straightened at night. And we would have a bed bath between five and seven, you know, hospital started at five o'clock in the morning in those days because they had all these patients. There were at least 12 women, there is a photo there of wards and that.

30:30 And we had visitors once a week. And for the family to come from Perth to Northam, the road was a goat cart, a goat track. Cars – by this time, you know, there were cars. And petrol had come, because petrol had been rationed, people didn't have petrol, they had been driving around in motor cars, civilians I am talking about. The

31:00 family would come up and visit us. Families, they would be allowed to come and visit us for Sundays. Sunday afternoons, one o'clock till four or whatever it was, and friends. But there were two of our hospital friends, they had such contagious TB

31:30 that they were in separate rooms. I never saw... One of them is still alive. Joan is still alive and still playing golf and she's bloody 80, and she's still hitting a golf ball around. Well I can't even hit a croquet ball around now. So she's one up on me, you know, the contagion is…

Were there different sorts of TB?

Yes, there is miliary TB and whatever

32:00 TB, but miliary TB is very, very pervasive right over the lung. The other TB is just a spot, which is, you know, eating away at the lung. But of course, many died. Many of the boys died in hospital, and you know they came back grievously ill, some of them were just grievously ill.

So how did you pass the time while you were bedridden for 9 months?

32:30 Oh well we played a lot of bridge. Well you couldn't do much. And read. They had occupational therapy, you know, played round making leather goods and all this sort of stuff. Long, tedious time.

Did you make some good friends out of that period?

Ah yes, very good friends, very good friends, regrettably they are all

33:00 dead, except Joan. All dead. Yes. But you don't have too many friends behind you when you get to 80 you know.

So um, how big was this actual, what was it an isolation ward in Northam?

For?

For TB?

33:30 Yeah, four to a little bay, they were.

And what other sorts of facilities did they have at that hospital, or was it just for TB only?

Just TB. It had been an ordinary camp hospital, general hospital you know, that had all sorts of things that happened to men, um, men who were training for war. I mean, they got hurt, they fell off trucks, they got run over by

34:00 trucks, you know, they got hurt. So that hospital had been 118 Australian General Hospital and then it became a camp hospital. Because Hollywood was the big military hospital. When did Hollywood start? About 1942, I suppose.

Were they only men in with you?

Oh no, it was all men. the 12 women we were this

34:30 little pocket in this hospital. We were this little pocket in one of the wards away, and um, we used to see the boys when we would be wheeled up to have our pneumothorax pumped in. No, we became very good friends. We made lots of friends and then when we were shifted, we came back from Northam,

35:00 an ambulance convoy brought us back in November 1946. I went up to... I went to Northam in April 1946 and in November 1946, they brought us all back to Hollywood. They opened up... Do you ever go to Hollywood? Do you do any work down there?

Haven't yet.

No?

35:30 The bottom end, down on the Subiaco end, they were all TB wards, and they... What would they have held? I think there were 32 to a ward, four lots of 8, yeah 32 to a ward. And we were down there, the women, by that time they brought women from Wooroloo, and there had been women

36:00 and there a few civilian women joined us. I can't even think too much about them at this point. And then the boys, we had 13. We have five wards, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18. Maybe we had six wards. 13-18 were TB wards right down the bottom. But by this time we used to be

36:30 wheeled over to the blokes' wards. They would have picture shows and they'd have concert parties would come, great old stage performer, Nell Shortland-Jones, a great singer, and she would come and they'd have concert parties, the same as you have people go round homes now and have these concert parties. And of course we were young, we were all in our 20s and 30s. A few of the blokes had probably got

37:00 into their 40s, you know, officers and all that. But we were a pretty young group.

It must have been absolutely hideous being bedridden for 9 months.

Yes it wasn't the best. I was lucky I got out. But you only got up for an hour a day, and then you had to prove that you could walk and you gradually built up your strength in a

37:30 completely different way. I mean the way we are looked after now is just absolutely unbelievable what they do for us. I don't have any, I don't have any compunction about it, because I have been part of the repat [repatriation] system since 1946, you know, so I know a bit about DVA and repat and legislation and…

Um, so you were discharged

38:00 **because you were medically unfit. How did that news arrive to you?**

By doctors. You had a medical board, same as you go to your doctor now and he tells you got cancer, or he tells you whatever else you might have. The same way. And then you look forward to your discharge. You know you are getting close because you are walking further, and you just know, and the people ahead of you are being discharged, going out ahead of you.

38:30 So you know, you know you are getting there. And all of a sudden, in fact, coming back, I was discharged in bed. We were all discharged, because Hollywood in January 1947 became a private hospital. Just became a general hospital, it had been a military hospital. And we were all...

39:00 We were still under the auspices of the repatriation, or the Department of Veterans' Affairs. They have changed the name that many damned times. But we were discharged from the services in 1947. Very few were left in the women's services until June, 30th June 1947. In fact my

39:30 secretary of the association now is probably the last person who was discharged as a WA enlistment. Discharged in a hospital bed, and didn't go through the whole discharge procedure. What I didn't tell you, in that discharge procedure you were given a book, a little booklet about that thick, and as you went through each stage of the

40:00 discharge they tore out the page, and then when you finally got to the end they took your whole book, discharge book, which proved you had gone through. Now in our case in hospital... I don't know what happened to my uniform. From the 24 hours when I had the x-ray and found myself in Hollywood Hospital, I never ever saw my uniform again. I don't know what happened to it. I have got no part of my army uniform.

40:30 And stupidly enough, stupidly enough, I gave my demob book, which was given to us, handed to us in hospital. And we still had our pay books, and we were paid out in the hospital bed, and I had my pay book. And they are valuable memorabilia. And I would be one of the few people, I would be absolutely sure, that kept her demob book. But I put it into the army museum. But I gave it to the army

41:00 museum when it was round here in Dilhorn House, corner of Bulwa and Lord Streets, that used to be the beginnings of the army museum, long before this Fremantle Barracks came into to it. And anyhow, they used to be on display there, but now it's buried away in some damned shoe box down in the army museum.

41:30 That's another thing we can't afford.

Army Museum?

I better not put too much of that on tape. If people…

That's okay, you are entitled to your opinion. You are a fairly opinionated woman, so you may as well give it a go. So…

Museums take curators. It's a business. You can't run a museum on volunteers. Can't do it.

Well you wouldn't have enough volunteers, probably?

42:02 **So,**

Tape 6

00:32 And this wonderful thing called the Gold Card, which allows all these entitlements to veterans who had got this 100% physical... lack of physical, God I have got stuck with a word now. 100% disability. And that's what TB

01:00 gave us, 100% disability, because we weren't able to work. And it was very difficult to get jobs and it's a whole long story. So TB has remained in the 100% category. Now once you have got this famous Gold Card that then allows to have all sorts of medical treatment and other access to other things. So it's good if you live.

So you have got your Gold Card?

01:30 Oh yes, I have had my Gold Card ever since... It's changed colours over the years, by the way. So I have had that since back in the 1950s. But that allows me to have the most extraordinary operations, and dental treatment and some of the things, my body has been battered around a bit I can assure you. Because the TB later

02:00 on took me to having a... Took me on my left lung. I have had most or one whole lobe of my left lung taken away, and that was removed in what was the beginning of open heart surgery. But back in those days only one in three each week of the then eminent Perth surgeon, who did these operations, only one

02:30 survived in that. And I am one of those survivors. And there aren't too many of those around, I can tell you.

I was about to say you sound like a survivor, Elsie.

Yeah, I am a survivor. I have been surviving all my life.

I think you were about to discuss the Commonwealth Reconstruction Scheme before the...?

I have really discussed that. You know, I wasn't able to become a teacher, that's where we stopped. I dearly wanted to go into teaching, which I wanted to do. That's what I wanted

03:00 to do. I wanted to teach. I wanted to stay in the army, but I couldn't stay in the army because of this TB, I had been kicked out anyhow. And I thought, "Oh well, I will get a reconstruction training." But anyhow the TB, you see, once you have had TB, in those days anyhow, it was just a blight. It was a blight on your career, it was a blight on everything. And so I went back to shorthand

03:30 typing and got a job at the State Sawmills, which then ran all the forests. We sent all the kauri and jarrah overseas to South Africa and they ran the stays in the diamond and gold mining in South Africa, because kauri is such a great straight tree, you know. You don't have to touch a kauri tree for about the first 100 feet. Just

04:00 run it through band mills, band saws. And so I got a job there, I got a job at the State Sawmills, in Murray Street, Perth.

That was the head office, was it?

Yes, that was the head office. I worked with the shipping manager. And, you know, again I was still transport, I have been in transport all my life in some shape or form, interesting. Here we were shipping all this

04:30 stuff, and I was doing all the paper work again. And the, JM Parker was the shipping manager, and every day at five o'clock he would get up and take his coat off where they used to hang coats on the thingo, the hat stand, and say, "God girl, what a day, what a day." And I would go home and I used to think, "Buggered if I know, I have

05:00 done all the work, JMP hasn't done too much. I have done all the work."

Where were you living at that time?

I had gone back home for the first two or three years. But then I moved out.

What was it like returning home?

Well I have described it to Denise. I described it, to go home to a home where you have now got a stepmother and three kids, one born in 1942 and one born in 1944 and the other born in

05:30 1946 and you go home in 1947. I tell you, that was a bit of a culture shock, to put it mildly. Well wouldn't you find that so? You have lived a life that I have lived for four or five years, and faced with this. So anyhow, I was able to with a friend, it all comes back to, you know, you can go on. How anyone will make anything of this interview, I am damned if I know,

06:00 but good luck to them. That's their business.

What sort of statistics do you remember about the WA sawmill at that time, by the numbers of trees being cut down or sawed or...?

Oh God no, no, no, no. We worked in super feet, people would never know about super feet now. You worked them. The length of the timber whatever was ordered by

06:30 the mines. No, I wouldn't have a... There was no environmental movement. Maybe there ought to have been, I am not so sure. The State Sawmills was the biggest of them all, but there were Bunning's, Bunning's, you know, they were sawmillers.

Whitaker's?

Mmm?

Whitaker's?

Whitakers, Bunning's,

07:00 Dean's, and all the towns down the south-west like Deanmill and Manjimup, Pemberton, they were just great milling towns. That's what people did, they were tree fellers. And people got killed when trees fell down on top of them, because they were busy sawing away through these great trees. Long before the days of power saws, they were busy... And in the early days, not in my day, they were hauling out with horses and you know, they were using

07:30 trucks to haul out in our day, but wasn't terribly automated and it was very dangerous work.

Did your clerical work take you out to the forest?

Pardon?

Did your work take you in to the forest?

Oh yes, yes, yes, we used to go out to the forests on our holidays. We were in head office here in Perth. But we'd go down to Pemberton for our holidays and, of course, they were great days, because the mill blokes, lots of young blokes,

08:00 they would take us marronning, they were the days when you could just drop a snare or even drop nets in the creeks and whatnot and you get a feed of marron. And marron is just the shellfish, the shellfish, if you can get marron, beautiful.

So you don't know the statistics of the timber you were

08:30 **exporting?**

No, no, no. Christ, this is 60, 40 years ago! No.

So the company didn't boast any sort of figures?

Mmm?

There was no boasting of figures in the office how many ton or ship loads or...?

No, no, no. You were just there making certain…

Dotting the Is and crossing the Ts?

That's right.

When did you

09:00 **leave the sawmilling industry?**

Well I left the sawmilling industry as a result of playing a game of pontoon. Ever played pontoon?

No.

Blackjack. You have... if you have played blackjack.

Not in many years.

Not in many years. You must have played it. You must have played it at university.

I think I must have played a few games with my grandmother.

I can't you believe don't play…

09:30 By this time I was working at the sawmills. I had taken up sport and I decided the only sport I could play reasonably was cricket, you know. I described how I played cricket all my life as a kid. And so there was a cricket competition, and somehow or other, I can't even remember, and I

10:00 met someone and was invited to go and play cricket. That was good. There was about eight teams. Oh no, there wasn't that many then, three or four teams in the beginning when I joined, Willows and Subiaco, and I formed South Perth, with a whole mob of juniors, and we played on concrete pitches and we had

10:30 the old mats we rolled our down at Wellington Square and down at the Esplanade and out at Subiaco, right opposite where the gates are now. That used to be a lovely little oval was there. They have now turned it into a sort of a walkway and a park. That used to be a little oval.

I remember that.

You remember that? Yeah, yeah. That was a little oval,

11:00 and that was good. So we played our cricket there and we used to go away for holidays and that and by this time I had a motor car. You ask about advantages from the Gold Card, one of the things was we could buy a car without sales tax and so I bought a Hillman Minx, a Hillman Minx motor car. And I was

one of the few people that owned a

11:30 motor car.

That's not a bad perk.

It's still on too. If you are on the extreme disability, you can still buy your motor car through DVA without sales tax.

Maybe we'll have to talk later.

You don't want to be permanently, totally and permanently handicapped. Let me dispel all thoughts of that for your mind. And so we would go to Bunbury.

12:00 And to go to Bunbury, even the Hillman Minx was a pretty smart little car because we always stopped at every pub. See we used to drink in those days.

And Drive.

And drive, oh yeah, we didn't have all this stuff. People were... Cars were different. Not everyone had a car, and it took us about six hours to drive to Bunbury, the road to Bunbury wasn't a bloody great freeway, there was none of this coastal road, the whole thing was just

12:30 a track and the trees were right down to the road, and you would get to the Pinjarra pub and you would stop at all the pubs along the way, you know, you would only have one or two. You wouldn't sit there and drink yourself stupid and go to the next pub and become even more stupid. Wasn't like that. But we would get to Bunbury, and my cousin, we'd take over her house. And she would come to Perth her family. My aunt and

13:00 uncle lived up here. And we are talking about long weekends and that sort of thing now. And so this cricket group, two car loads of us and away we'd go. And at night we'd play pontoon, you know, pontoon, you count to 21, you know, that, you know, enough about the game for that. And I am playing there one night and the banker elatedly shouts, she turns over an

13:30 eight a five and a court card, okay? Now, you know what that adds up to?

A court card can be different.

10, most court cards are 10, and so it was 23, and pontoon is called 21. Is the other name for the game. So this… Most of these people, by the way, are teachers at Perth Modern School. And so here am I

14:00 have left school at the end of primary school. I have only gone to Hartles Business College. I haven't had any mathematical education or you know, pretty limited education. And I look at these three cards and I say, "Lesley, what do they add up to?" and she said, "21. That's what I'll pay. Pontoon." Banker always paid pontoon, and I said, "Jesus, if you can teach at Perth Modern School,

14:30 so can I." So can I. And anyhow that sort of passed, and not long after a person who was in that school playing pontoon, "Are you really serious?" This was in 1953, and this person said, "Are you really serious about becoming a teacher?" and I said, "Oh yes, my word I am," because I am still at the State

15:00 Sawmills, with this bloody fella saying every day, "God, girl what a day." And she said, "This year, 1954, is the last year you can do your Leaving Certificate on English and any other four subjects." After that you had to have one maths, one science, one something else and so on. And I have no mathematical ability at all, it had

15:30 stopped at the end of primary school. I am very good at arithmetic but I had no idea. So she said, "If you want to become a teacher, you'll have to get your Leaving Certificate and then go from there." And, you know, my life turned around. I stopped all the nonsense of... And we used to drink, let's face it we did, it was a great life, great life. I stopped, I went to night school. I was still working at the

16:00 State Sawmills, and the then general manager, a bloke named Fred Gregson, he allowed me to leave the office at four o'clock. No, no wait a minute I am jumping ahead of myself. At that stage I worked till five and then walked down to tech [technical school] in Perth, the Terrace, the old building still there, and I would go to night school five nights a week.

16:30 I did English, geography, physiology and hygiene, history, and economics. And they are the five. I did that at night, and I was still living at home at Beadie Avenue, and this is where my stepmother came into it. I did have a room to myself. All the other kids, by this time we had four, and I had my own room and the sleep-out, so in the old family shack. And

17:00 I would go to Perth Tech until 9 o'clock at night, and I had the car, so I would drive home to Vic Park, and my stepmother, we always had soup, you would always find soup in the Solly homestead. You'll find soup out there in the deep freeze there now. It's something I was brought up on and you have always got a feed if you have got soup. Your own soup. And I would either study from 9.30 until two

17:30 or whatever, or I would go to sleep and then get up and reverse, I would either be studying or sleeping

through half of the night, and that's what I did for that year to pass those five subjects.

Sounds like a busy year.

Very heavy year. And when the results came out I had five distinctions. I mean, it was

18:00 made for me. Othello was the English play. I mean you couldn't get a better play for mature aged person to be doing Leaving Certificate English than Othello, you know. Well English History – that was made for me, geography was made for me, physiology and hygiene was the only one I struggled with and I had someone who coached me in economics and so I got five

18:30 distinctions... But I still couldn't get into teaching, I still couldn't get into teachers' college because of... So I went to university in 1954, 1955 I started my degree at UWA [University of Western Australia], part time, and that's where the then general manager who knew I was doing my Leaving Certificate, he allowed me to leave work about

19:00 4 o'clock so I could drive down to uni so I could go to the 4:15 lecture. And, of course, you could do that in those days. You could park your car, just wandered in, park your car on Whitfield Court just about. And then I started part time uni and did my Arts degree and then I never stopped studying.

What did you major in at uni?

History. History and Geography.

What

19:30 **areas of history?**

I did general history. English History was the first unit, and then I did South-east Asian History, American History and whatever the other one was. It was all over a year, you did a whole continuum, not these little bits and pieces they way they break it up now. And I did

20:00 very well. I got a distinction in History and I got a distinction... and I did a sub major in Geography, so that was it. And I went on and did a reasonably good degree.

How did you support yourself during your degree?

Mmm?

How did you support yourself?

I was working at the State Sawmills and it was a free university. No fees. Remember those days?

What do you think about

20:30 **universities?**

Mm?

What do you think about fees in universities?

You have got to be realistic now, but you can't have gulps, once you have gulps in society that's where your society starts to fragment, and the way we are going now over education, I really don't want to get

21:00 on that on this, you know, we are just heading for mayhem. I did become a teacher as a result of having gone to university. In Perth Tech. They advertised for a shorthand-typing teacher. And I thought, "Gee." In fact I was over playing cricket in the eastern states, and when I came back this friend had kept the advertisement, and said, "Here, look.

21:30 They are looking for shorthand-typing teachers at Perth Tech. Why don't you go and see if you can get yourself a job?" So I fronted up there, and again, lucky, I have been lucky all my life. Finding the right person for the interview. And this bloke... I told him my story, and he said, "Oh yeah," and I didn't have to have a medical exam for that, so nobody asked me about TB, nobody asked me,

22:00 I didn't have to lie, didn't have to do anything. They said, "Right, we'll have you. You can come and teach here." So I became a shorthand-typing teacher in Perth Tech and I never stopped then. I just went from there to there…

You were playing a lot of cricket at this stage?

Yeah, yeah. I captained WA that year I think, one year anyway.

That's a pretty interesting claim.

22:30 Yeah, and then I worked at Perth Tech for um, 1956 to 1962, and I had become a senior lecturer at Leederville Tech in commercial subjects, I had all that. And I had appealed, I appealed against someone who had got a job ahead of me

23:00 on seniority, not on merit, so I think I was the first person, first woman, to ever appeal... Women didn't

appeal, of course. Women didn't get equal pay in those days, let me hasten to add. So I am at Perth Tech…

Where did you live?

Mmm?

Where did you live?

Just around the corner, round here by then, with this friend,

23:30 who said to me, "Look, become a teacher." And so she and I got a living quarters round here in Kirkham Hill Terrace, round there. And she was a teacher at Perth Mod [Perth Modern School], and she had done a BEd [Bachelor of Education] and she has just retired from the University of Toronto, in Canada, and is now living in England. We just had

24:00 all this interesting history and all that. But we were active people. She was a good cricketer… And anyhow 1962, 1961, I had appealed because I wasn't going anywhere. I had come to the end of the line there. And this person

24:30 who had appointed me to Perth Tech, he said to me, he said, "Look, if you want to go any further in teaching, apply to become a Principal Mistress in a high school." Now I had never been to high school, except for these few months when my mother died and I was taken out of Perth Girls', so I didn't even know what happened in high schools. And he said, "Apply to become a Principal Mistress. You will have to go to the country,"

25:00 and I said, "That's all right, I don't mind going to the country." And so I said, "Yeah, all right." So lo and behold I am appointed to Manjimup. I am appointed to Manjimup Senior High School as Principal Mistress. Well I had no idea what a Principal Mistress did, had no idea in the wide, wide world. And I thought, "Well, I have got the job. I had better go out and find out." So I went down a week early.

25:30 And the Principal and the Deputy were there. And he said, "I have never had a Mistress who turned up a week early to find out what you do." He was most impressed. A bloke named Bill Speary. So here we are at Manjimup.

What did he tell you you have to do?

He said, "You're the commercial teacher," and I said, "Yes." He said, "Well right, you'll teach all the commercial subjects, and as

26:00 Principal Mistress you are responsible for the discipline of the girls." And I didn't really know how you did that or what all that meant. But I had been in the army, I mean let's face it, it wasn't as though I was a…

You were groomed for the job.

Yeah. And um, in those days, I then went on… Let's finish with Manjimup first. And that's when this damned kauri tree, this 100 foot kauri tree… I was playing golf. But first, well let's stick with the job.

26:30 Well the first job he gave me, he said, "Look, we have trouble getting the first day under way. All these books they have got to be given to the kids. Can you think of a way so we have it all ready so they get their books?" And I said, "Well I will think of something." Showed me all the exercise books, all the stuff they used to get. I don't know whether they still get it. So I spent the whole of the week from

27:00 Year 1 to Year 5. And came 9 o'clock on the Monday, we started school and we were teaching at 9.30, the staff couldn't get over it, but it was all there. The timetable was done. I didn't have the responsibility for the timetable there, I did later on in Narrogin, but you know, it was there, it happened.

27:30 That's how it ought to be.

What happened with the kauri tree?

I joined the golf club, and great place, great place. And during the week I had been playing a round of golf with the club captain, and on the 12th hole there was a dead kauri tree. Now kauri trees grow up 100 feet before they have their first branch out. You see the one up in Kings Park by the kiosk,

28:00 have a look at the length of that. Well that's the size of the tree that fell down that far from me – whisker. I am putting on the 12th green, they're sand greens. And the lady I am playing yells, "Run Else, run." And you are putting for par in the bloody club championships and here's some woman screaming, "Run." So I jerked

28:30 back, and you know, I am left handed, left handed. And I stepped back and looked up and here's this tree slowly just falling earth bound. And I thought, "Geez." And so if I had've been right handed I would have been anchored in the path of it. She was standing round behind me, and so I just automatically

29:00 swung round, swung toward her voice and took I think three, four, five paces, and this thing just crashed down, they go up 100 feet and there's generally branches, small branches. And I just fell in the V of the… And it just shattered into thousands… It was dead. God

29:30 knows how long it had been. I was in hospital three days from that, just black and blue, they couldn't believe that I... This is why I have got the spinal problems now. The spinal problems now come from the shattering of all that timber debris around me. I was black and blue, I was in hospital for three days. Tried to make up their minds whether I had anything broken. The only

30:00 thing that was broken was that bone there. And I put my hand up and sheltered my head.

You were hit by flying branches?

The whole trunk just disintegrated, you know what rotten wood is like, you know, how rotten wood just falls apart. But they were great bits, great, you know, 100 feet of all this stuff. And the golf ball, the golf ball itself when they finally got the tree lifted up, the golf ball was somewhere down

30:30 somewhere about 8 to 10 inches. Buried into the soil, you know, if it had... People thought... The worst thing, of course, people just abandoned their golf buggies, it looked as though the martians had come and swept everyone away. By the time they got an ambulance to me, and people round me. And people just thought I could've lost my legs, I could have lost anything. My life, my legs. Could have lost anything. And all I did was have that broken

31:00 bone in my finger. But now, all these years later, I am... We didn't realise, the x-ray weren't as good in those days, and all these things are coming to the surface.

Sounds like an incredibly close shave.

Very close. Very close. Too close.

You would have to be unlucky to have a tree fall on you on a golf course.

Yep, that's right. You would have to be unlucky and I am

31:30 lucky, been lucky all my life, Julian [interviewer], lucky all my life. Lucky.

I believe you went to Canberra later?

Yes, yes I went to Canberra. I first of all I went to America. I went to England. I went to England first. 1963 in England, teaching on an exchange program.

32:00 **What kind of an exchange program was it?**

Teacher, teacher exchange program. Teaching commercial subjects in a commercial school, Bedford, London, Bedford, England, Bedfordshire, John Bunyan's home city. And that was great. The year of the Beatles. Year of the Beatles, great year to be in London 1963.

Swinging London?

Mmm?

Swinging London?

Mm?

Swinging London?

Oh

32:30 fantastic. Fantastic, great year to be in London too. Mandy Profumo, and Mandy Rice-Davies, and Christine Keeler. Princess Alexandra got married, and Gaitskell, the Labour

33:00 aspirant for the premiership, prime ministership, he died. And that was the year that was, have you ever heard, did you ever study it in your media programs? That was the year that was TW3, Saturday Night on British TV, you wouldn't miss it. And this friend of mine who talked me into going into teaching, she by this time was teaching in

33:30 England also, so we... I bought a Ford Popular and she had a car, and she was in Kent and I was Bedford in the north, and we used to meet in London every weekend at the Servicewomen's Club. I never ever did get to Earl's Court per se. You know. The Servicewomen's Club was just around the corner from Harrods. And just great.

34:00 And then we travelled every weekend. I went to London, went to England for 52 weekends and for 52 weekends we did something different. Went somewhere different. So that was the week was a satirical television show. Fantastic. And they literally tore down the Profumo government. Talk about the power of television and the power of the

34:30 media politically. And that's where I first started to see the first glimmerings of it. So we used to always book in, always book in at an inn. Lovely old British pubs. Terrible beer at that point. But we always used to drink the cold lager when we could get it.

So you weren't partial to the odd ale?

35:00 Oh, never gave up beer... Always loved my beer. Had no compunction about that. Still do, but don't drink it as much as I used to.

You must have seen the odd cricket match while you were there?

Oh most certainly, I saw everything. I did... We did everything you could possibly do. Yes, I went to the cricket, I went to Lords. I saw the Eaton/Harrow match.

35:30 I went to Lords. I wanted to go especially. I had heard all about this Eaton/Harrow, and you know, and such a privilege to me and I thought, "I better go and have a look at this, and see what these..." You know, it's all part of society. It was fantastic. Yes I went to a test match there. I went to... And later on in England I went to the 1975 World

36:00 Cup Series when Lloyd captained England, and Lillee and Thompson, in a last wicket stand, they lost the bloody ball. We nearly won that game, they lost the ball, and they just kept running up and down the pitch, and somebody had the bloody ball in their pocket. Absolute mayhem. Yeah, Lord's, just great. Yes I have done all that. Went to an England/Scotland soccer match.

36:30 The billboards read 'Scotland invades London' and it was absolutely true. The only other woman there I think was Princess Anne, was the royalty in the Royal Box. England/Scotland, fantastic, all these mad Scotsmen. Give the poor wee bairn a drink, and the drink is whisky,

37:00 whisky bottles. Here they were swigging away at these whisky bottles, these mad Scotsmen. Fantastic, yes, you do, you do all these things. You lose your inhibitions.

What about clubbing?

No, no, no clubs. We didn't club, we pubbed.

Okay. We verified that.

You asked me to get to

37:30 Canberra. Well...

Were there any other particular sights that you visited in England that you would like to mention?

Well in 12 months, we had the most wonderful tour of the continent. The holidays aren't uniform in England, so the institution I was working at I was on holidays for 10 days before Joy, so we... I took by this time, we decided to take, she had a Morris Minor

38:00 and I would take the Morris Minor and go from Newcastle to Bergen in Norway, and spend 10 days in Scandinavia by myself and then come back to Copenhagen and pick her up at Copenhagen railway station. And she would come from London across to Calais and up by train and meet me in the Copenhagen railway station.

38:30 So off I went to bloody Norway and Scandinavia by myself. And that was fantastic because by this time I was about 40, I think I was about 40 at this point. So I stayed in all these youth hostels, they were marvellous. All these bloody young Germans and Spaniards and Portuguese and Swiss and all these nationalities. And most people spoke English so there was no problem.

39:00 And I could drink beer, so I could match any Scandinavian or any German, no worries.

So you must have made a few mates.

Got back to Cop...yes...got back to Copenhagen and Joy gets off the train absolutely shattered because she had trouble, as we do when we go overseas in foreign countries if the announcements aren't reasonably good in English, or they are not in English

39:30 at all. And especially in French, you know what the French are like – they don't want to speak English for God's sakes. And um, she was absolutely shattered, "We are going back to England. We are not going on with this plan." "Bloody hell we are. We are going to Greece. That's what we agreed on and that's what we are doing. We are going to Greece." She said, "How have you managed?" I said, "I have had a fantastic time." Well you didn't use the word fantastic, that wasn't in our vocabulary then. I probably said I have had a bloody good time or something, you

40:00 know. So off we went, in this Morris Minor with the tent on the top and accoutrements, you know, sleeping bags and stretcher and all this, and we stayed in youth hostels or camping areas. Because even by that time, this is 1963, it wasn't safe on the continent then to be parking by the side of the road. We never did.

40:30 We always went in to proper camping areas. And, you know, we had a... you didn't have big Australian flags, but you know, great spot, the way to go. You do that at this age, fantastic. You've got all the.. Of course, the exchange, where in England, the money, God...

So you are a true

41:00 **blue ambassador?**

Oh yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. I did the same in America. America was fantastic because... I am in London when Kennedy dies, you see. Everybody knows where they were when Kennedy dies. We were in the Servicewomen's Club. And we came back and I was appointed to Teachers'

41:30 College and... 1964 I went to Narrogin, I went to Narrogin Senior Agricultural High School.

Bit of a contrast to London?

Yes, yes, it was but it was great and, of course, you know, I was in... and Narrogin was a Senior Academic High School, and the Academic Wing in town was just run down.

42:00 End of tape

Tape 7

00:32 **What did you really enjoy about Narrogin?**

Well at Narrogin I was given virtually, together with the deputy, the principal is out at the Ag [Agricultural] Wing with his 4,000 acres of farmland where they have got a very, very fine agricultural college. But the Ag Wing was just an adjunct, and the

01:00 then Principal, Jim West, all he cared about, well he bred virus-free pigs. All we heard about was the bloody virus-free pigs, and that's all we heard about. And we arrived at... The new Headmaster, a new Deputy and myself, you know, we have a meeting and we got all these results and they weren't all terribly crash hot. And Gordon Appleton was such

01:30 a gentlemanly man and just lovely, and Fred Marsh was a bit like myself, a driving educationist on the make. And so we had the town wing. Gordon left the town wing to Gordon and I, and Fred was one of these blokes who as Deputy and the man... Of course we didn't have equal pay. This is what takes me to Canberra, the fact that I was doing all the bloody work again and didn't have...

02:00 wasn't being paid the same as people like Fred Marsh. And Fred... And if everything went right, Fred would come in and it was always I, I, I, the personal pronoun. But when something went wrong, Fred would come hurtling in to my office and say, "Oh God Else, we forgot," 'We', we didn't do or we didn't... We would go into the plural, and thought, "I can't

02:30 cope with this fellow, I can't cope with this." But anyhow, how do we turn the school around.? I had a house, a big old house in Narrogin, which... First of all I was in the important pub... Important pub? No, that doesn't sound right. Anyhow they put me in the pub and I should have...

Handy.

Yes, it was for a while. It was a terrible pub with the rats running around.

03:00 And again, there was no accommodation for teachers. Accommodation in the country for teachers back in the 1960s was appalling. Absolutely appalling. Anyhow I managed to get this house off Mrs Goater, and we had fantastic parties there. We just had fantastic parties, the staff, a young staff. Country high school staff is always young.

03:30 Anyhow we were sitting around the fire, it was early though, it wasn't fire night around about then. But it was always cold in Narrogin; you could have a fire all the time, even the summer in Narrogin. And I said, "What are we going to do about this school? What are we going to do to drag it up?" And the music teacher, Bev Gleason, said, "Well, you know, there's nothing like a good musical, nothing like a good musical

04:00 to get a school going," and I said, "Oh yes." Then we had a... The language bloke, Garry Gillard, he now teaches at Murdoch. You know, talented... All these people are talented. So I said, "What have you got in mind?" And she said, "Well you never go past Gilbert & Sullivan, and seeing as we have got all those

04:30 fellows out at the Ag Wing, Pirates of Penzance. We'll do Pirates of Penzance." I said, "Well that sounds okay, yeah." So I said, "Well leave it to me and I will talk to Mr Appleton about it." So I go in the next day... Gordon lived out at the farm and came in during the day and this and that. I said, "Mr Appleton, we would like to put on a production,

05:00 Pirates of Penzance." He had beautiful blue eyes and he quizzically looked at me and he said, "Oh Miss Solly, you'll have to cope with Mr Buttrill." Mr Buttrill was the Senior Master out at the Ag Wing. He ran the boys. Anyhow to cut a long story short, we went in to Pirates of Penzance. Well it was fantastic. You won't believe who the...

05:30 You have lived in WA all your life? So you have heard of the name Peter Foss, who was our Attorney-General? He's still in Parliament. Peter Foss married a Narrogin girl called Jonica Curry, and Jonica Curry had the most magnificent soprano voice, and Jonica sang… Oh gee, oh

06:00 come on… What's the… Bloody hell. How could I forget? This is what happens to me now, I just lose names they just slip away.

I am a lot younger than you and it happens to me as well. I don't know that it is necessarily age.

Yeah, sure. Mabel, Mabel, Mabel and Frederick and Gary Gillard, he sang, he was the

06:30 only staff member that we had in the cast, because he had a lovely, just a tenor voice, so he sang Frederick who headed up the pirates. And my job, apart from getting the school part to the practices and organising all that, I coached Peter Ruchter, who was the major general, you know, "I am the model of a very model Major General."

07:00 And so we got all these Ag Wing blokes who would come in on the school bus and we would be down at the town hall and they were great, it was absolutely fantastic. Everyone did something – the manual arts blokes provided the sets, and the home science did the all the costuming

07:30 and all that. And I was teaching a little bit of commercial work, and so with the commercial teachers we did the program. And we all had something to do, the whole school, and absolutely the whole school got into this. And well that production, and I have seen many productions because wherever I see a school is putting on Pirates of Penzance until just a few years back

08:00 I would always go to see, and nobody... I have never seen production, and Jonica Curry, who is now Jonica Foss, she was just magnificent. In fact it's only about four years ago they all turned 50. This Leaving class when they became the Leaving class, they turned 50

08:30 and I was guest of honour, they invited me, they had a party out at Perry Lakes. And they invited me to be the guest of honour.

That was excellent. So how did the Pirates of Penzance production actually turn the school around?

Yes, yes, yes, yes. It knitted the school together. And Monty and I had great fights.

09:00 I would... One night I went in and some fellow turned up and shaking in his boots from the Ag Wing and said, "Miss Solly, Mr Buttfield sends his compliments, but most of the cast won't be here tonight. They have got hockey practice." I said, "Is that so? Thank you very much. Give Mr Buttfield my compliments, and I will be in touch with him." So the next morning I bounce into Gordon Appleton, the Principal, and said, "Mr Appleton,

09:30 you will have to make a decision. You will have to make a decision between Mr Buttfield and myself, so would you please decide which is more important." We were within six weeks of this production going on, and I said, "I just want you to say whether Mr Buttfield's hockey and football practice is more important than the school production, that's all. Just say which one."

10:00 And he looked at me again with these beautiful blue eyes, and he said, "Oh, Miss S," – he called me Miss S – "Oh, Miss S, I think we'll concentrate on the school production for the next couple of weeks." I said, "Oh thank you so much." But to put it in to context, academically, we did that in 1965, 1964, they did... I went to America in

10:30 1967. By the time I went to America in1967 we had a maths teacher named Eric Alcock, and he had a wonderful letter in yesterday's paper – Eric's retired now – about the teaching in schools, particularly mathematics, wonderful mathematics teacher. And because I had control of the girls' maths

11:00 program, no girl dropped mathematics. Once they got to fourth year, once they started mathematics they kept going. And I have always had this belief all my long life in education. There's only two subjects that count, English and mathematics, and I am talking about people with ability, I am not talking about people who might struggle. And, so

11:30 they just... And we took that school and that... 1967, was the year that Narrogin was the top school in the state, and we took it to the top in three years, and it all started with that school production. And it went on, and we had a school production every year. We did the Midsummer Night's Dream the next year, and then we went back to Gilbert & Sullivan and we did…

12:00 Oh no, we had a combination. We had Trial by Jury. Anyhow it was all based upon the combination of sport and drama, drama, dramatics and with the lower, lesser ability kids, and I even went in the 2E classes, and I even learnt to play the recorder, because the music teacher couldn't control

12:30 2E, they were just…

A nightmare.

Nightmare. So I said, "Right, I'll handle this." I said, "Right, I'll come down, and give me a desk and a recorder and I'll learn to play the recorder with the class." And that's what happened. And when Bev had to take 2E so I said, "Right." And I got recorders. But it was a nightmare for her. I said, "Let's teach them how to read

13:00 music," and give them recorders, and so we would be there…

So what made you decide to go to America?

Well I had long service leave by this time. I had been in the [Education] Department quite a while by now. From 1956 to... I had been to England, I had long service leave. And the first of

13:30 the, of the oh, Churchill Fellowships, among the first of the Churchill Fellowships, and I thought, "Well, I might apply for a Churchill Fellowship," because what I had seen in England in commercial and business education, I knew we were miles behind the 8-ball here in what we were doing. And I knew

14:00 what they were doing in America. I knew they were light years ahead of us. So I applied for a Churchill Fellowship to study Business Education, as they called it, in America and... Well the upshot of it was that I didn't get a Churchill Fellowship, but as a result of having to apply to various universities, as part of the application to get a Churchill, I got

14:30 admission for at least four universities, Columbia, Ohio, North Dakota, Wisconsin, etc. And so I thought, "I didn't get the Churchill," so I thought, "Oh well, but I got admission to these universities." And I had a good friend from Perth Tech

15:00 who later headed up a large part of Curtin University. And he was a visiting professor at the University of Wisconsin, and I had got an entry to Wisconsin. So I just wrote to him and said, "I got this," and he said, "Come to Wisconsin. The bloke you would work with is the.." You know the Americans, they have always got their number one teacher, you know.

15:30 He said, "This fellow Hostler has just been named the American Business Education Teacher of the year." And that's how I came to go to Wisconsin and I did my Master's. 12 months and I did a Coursework Masters, including two semester and the summer. And I worked my butt off, I really worked my butt off.

Did you get time to enjoy a bit of America?

Oh most certainly. Most certainly.

16:00 Most certainly, and that's how I... And the other graduate assistant with me was a Negro, Negro woman. And there's an email out there I have to answer within the next... I am waiting for the Super Bowl, I have been waiting, I have had all this Christmas and New Year stuff, and I am waiting for the Super Bowl so I can get on the hurdy gurdy tonight or tomorrow and …

Talk about the Super Bowl. So you also mentioned

16:30 **that Canberra, what's the story behind Canberra?**

Well, I... By this time I had come back here. I was the only person in my field who had a Masters. They had started up the new Secondary Teachers' College and they put Business Education in there, and I was just, well it had my name written on it.

17:00 So I came back from America and didn't go back to Narrogin, I went to Nedlands to head up this department in Business Education training teachers. And I was there for two years or 18 months or whatever it was, it wasn't that long. Because I went to Canberra in 1969, I came to Canberra in 1968, took up the appointment in June-July and

17:30 went to Russia on that trip as an individual, that was another thing.

That would be a fairly unusual thing to do in Cold War times, going to Russia?

Yeah. Well I had a round the world air ticket – that's where I learned a lot of my compassion for people for who their mother tongue is not spoken by anyone else. I found myself on an Aeroflot aeroplane, flying

18:00 from Copenhagen to Moscow, and I was the only foreigner, and it was when I went through that experience of knowing what it is to be the only foreigner you suddenly take notice of what's happening in this country as you go in and out of airports and shipping terminals. And you watch some of our people handle for whom English is

18:30 not their first language.

Can be quite appalling.

You help. You always step forward and you always help those people. So, so there I am back here. And this is the beginning of the binary system in education, when we brought in the CAEs. The Colleges of Advanced Education,

19:00 and they set up the only one that didn't grow out of a teachers' college, was Canberra. And believe it or not, they advertised for someone who could introduce and develop courses in graduate secretarial training. And now remembering that Arts graduates couldn't get a job, university graduates were having a hard

19:30 time getting a job in the late 1960s the early 1970s, particularly Arts graduates.

Why was that a problem in those times?

Well, they weren't good times, economically.

Downturn economically. Because the Vietnam war was on about that time.

Yes. And all that.

Would that have had anything to do with it?

No, not so much, you know. Whitlam comes in 1972.

20:00 It was 23 years of political stagnation, you know, the divine right to rule had swept our political spectrum, you know, the Liberal government had been there for 23 years, we had gone through all sorts of... Anyhow so this job was advertised and a friend of mine sent the advertisement over and said, "This has got your

20:30 name written on it." Now, here am I over here, in teachers' college working with all these people. Women didn't have equal pay. Women didn't have equal status. I couldn't become the Principal of a high school. This Fred Marsh I talk about, he went on to become a principal of a high school. The personal pronoun 'man', not my values.

21:00 And here am I, all I can become is warden of women students at teachers' college. Well I didn't want to be worried about attendance of students at teachers' college. And I didn't want to be worried about tablecloths and the correct table decoration when the director general came to morning tea. I didn't want to be worried about that stuff, and I am not being paid equal pay. So

21:30 here's this job turns up and I think, "Jesus." So I put in an application and they flew me over for an interview, and I was offered the job immediately after the interview. As senior lecturer. I thought, "I am just a common old lecturer at teachers college, and would've become warden of women

22:00 students." So I went to Canberra.

So was there really good pay as far as this job was concerned?

Oh God yes. And I bargained, because the teachers were getting a... Oh no, yes I was appointed on $8,400.

Which I am sure was a great deal of money in those days.

That's right. $8,400.

What do you think you achieved in Canberra?

A lot, I think you could say that.

22:30 I think you could say that. My Order of Australia comes from, well it comes from the whole of my life really.

How is that actually assessed, the Order of Australia?

Well, you know nothing about it. You know nothing about it. The recipient doesn't know until about a month before, when you get a letter from Government House

23:00 saying you had been nominated and, if selected, would you accept the award? That's the first intimation you have that you have been nominated. And I was home here on leave, and then got signed documents and sent them back and said yes. Then you are asked to keep it to yourself. So I couldn't

23:30 even tell the family before I went back from holidays. And, of course, it's announced Australia Day. But you had someone who nominates you. I have done it myself. I have nominated someone who was a VAD as a matter of fact – not Joan Dowson – but has done an enormous amount of work. And that's how it

24:00 happens. And then you get other people, they seek other referees and then it goes to a secretariat in Canberra and they make the selection, and I got my AM [Member in the Order of Australia] in 1983. So.

That must have been a very exciting time for you?

Oh yeah. Mind you I had been there since 1969, and I had fought many political battles. Because

24:30 the development secretaries at the tertiary level was not something easily achieved, I can assure you. I had to... I did it at the interview. I had made it very clear that I wasn't there to produce shorthand-typists. I was there to produce executive women, which I had seen that in America. I wasn't there to

produce shorthand-typists. You can do that in other institutions. That was what they wanted. That was

25:00 their brief that they gave me. So I said, "Right, well I can do that. I can provide the..." I had more difficulty with the staff, with the academic staff, because I just insisted that everyone that was going to become an executive assistant would have to do accounting. Accounting I, not bookkeeping. I insisted they would have to do economics because you couldn't possibly live in the capital city

25:30 and produce people for the highest level of political office and public service office without a background in economics and politics, politics, and English. And so they were the four core subjects. And then I designed all this special business English based around shorthand, but topnotch shorthand – the graduating speed was

26:00 120. But I mean I produced people who, you know, just crackerjack shorthand writers, and they just loved it. And, you know, I just believed in what you need to have to be a good shorthand writer. You have got to have mental agility, it's... People don't understand how difficult it is to write shorthand. Because of the way it is in this country we

26:30 funnelled our so-called lesser ability people into the commercial classes. You know, like many things they did it upside down. But anyhow, they... So my graduates did mathematics, they did Maths I, and economics and accounting and law, a required unit, and then they had an electric strand of their of six

27:00 semester units over the three years, so they could elect to major in… If they wanted to they could go and do media, although we didn't have media in those early days. But it was all a question if you like, putting academic beef into something. And so some of these women, and these women are everywhere now.

27:30 **There's probably one on the phone.**

Could be, could be I have all sorts. So Canberra was a great experience.

And that was directly responsible for your...?

And I retired from there. I retired early. I had a contract until I was 65, but they decided then to

28:00 turn the CAEs into universities and, you know, everyone was going to be called professor this and professor that, and I wasn't a professor – I was just a bloody good teacher. And a very, very good administrator. I wasn't a professor, I wasn't a researcher. You've got to be realistic about it. So I just said... And an

28:30 enormous amount of work had to be done administratively by all the heads of the department to take that institution to a university. The amount of administrative work in it is just…

How much did being in the army and your experiences during the war assist you with...?

Enormously.

How?

Enormously, yes, no question of it. That's where

29:00 the genesis is there, because it gave you command. You did NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer] courses, you were in charge of people, you had to articulate with people above you at the officer level and at all levels, and it was all about systems, all about paperwork systems. I have described the demob booklet; it was all about seeing how you did things by progression, and you did

29:30 it within time frameworks and all this. There's no question. No my whole career was based upon my army career. No question at all.

So where do you think you would have ended up if you hadn't had the army background?

I would have been Fagin's sister. Well, you know, who Fagin was. Fagin ran all the thieves; Fagin had his girlfriends and his

30:00 pickpocket women. I would have been one of those, I have no doubt.

Well you have certainly got a bit of a personality, so you need a bit of a personality to be a ...?

Oh yes, personality has always got a lot do with it... I have always used this expression, "If you can walk with kings nor lose the common touch." That's what it's all about, it doesn't matter

30:30 who you are, you have no power or say over where you are born or where you are conceived. Got nothing to do with you the individual. I have got no way that I influenced my father and mother conceiving me any more than Saddam… What's his name?

31:00 Hussein. He's what he is because of who conceived him. I watched an SBS [Special Broadcasting Service] program last night of two million people at the Haj in Mecca. Today I pick up the paper, 242 or something had been killed in a people stampede.

One of the greatest religious festivals of its kind.

That's right they had no

31:30 power and no selection. Our religion the colour of our skin, everything is determined for us by whomsoever conceives us. What isn't determined for us is how we formulate our morality and our integrity. And they are the thing... People help you I am sure, and I like to think that

32:00 I have helped many, many people just become whatever.

Well I certainly think you have helped a lot of people. Just getting back to the Anzac Day we were touching on before, how it has changed over the years, so how have you seen it change over the years?

Oh well there is a fervour for Anzac Day now that certainly, you know, I didn't want to know too much about the army and the

32:30 glorification. There was no glorification in it. I sometimes wonder how much is being bolstered by people who have become historians and made big fat myths and so on. There is no glorification about war.

How do you think the turnout to Anzac Day has

33:00 **actually changed over the years? Is it becoming more and more popular?**

Oh, it's obviously becoming more and more popular. You couldn't deny that. And we've had sufficient wars to keep on keeping the ranks being swelling, whether it's Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War,

33:30 peacekeeping. We've got peacekeepers everywhere, and there are police in the peacekeepers and all this, you know, but we are always going to be involved in this, unfortunately. My viewpoint is that we are suffering now, we, I mean, western civilisation, Judeo-Christian civilisations of

34:00 300 years of Western European colonialism. Western European colonialism has led us to where we are now. And Africa, across Asia, and the Middle East, and that includes Spanish, the Portuguese, the French, the Brits of course.

There has always been colonialism and there's always been takeovers.

Colonialism and of

34:30 course colonialism is swinging the other way now, and we will be the oppressed the way we are going. And after all, the American casualty list is getting to be almost as large as though that were engaged in the so-called Gulf War.

Sure. You mentioned that you had some issues about the RSL and the fact that, you know, that women are almost second-class

35:00 **citizens, has that opinion changed over the years?**

Oh yes, it's changed, because I have described how it's changed. They have invited us to march, we can actually become members of the RSL and many of my colleagues are members of the RSL, but I am not a member of the RSL.

So you have still got a bee in your bonnet about the original attitudes about the original attitudes of the RSL?

No I have got a long memory,

35:30 I have not got a bee in my bonnet. It's about a difficult time in my life and there were many women were in that difficult period. If it hadn't been for organisations, organisations… Like Legacy, has been a wonderful organisation for widows and children of

36:00 war casualties and so on. Legacy has probably done far more at the grassroots level of actual helping people. The RSL has provided the political link into government and there was a time when the repatriation portfolio, the Minister for Repatriation or Veterans' Affairs was always a top cabinet minister,

36:30 but not now. I mean Vet Affairs, and under this government, under this crowd, it will become less and less – they are just whittling away. God help the people in the permanent defence forces now as they come up to battle for their entitlements.

So you think there has been a complete and total emasculation?

37:00 It's been from the political side, and I don't think the RSL, you know, have got the political clout to, you know, to hold the bulwarks as it were, just from what I have seen. I appeared at the Clark Committee when they were here; I appeared at that. I mean sat down and spoke for three minutes or whatever,

37:30 and blokes came up to me after that and they shook my hands, and said, "We had no idea you women

did all that during the war," you know. I spoke about the classifications and I talked about that those of us here in Western Command were under far greater possible attack than our girls that went to Lae New Guinea in 1945. The Japs had disappeared from the face of New Guinea at that point, but when we were here in

38:00 1942, out on bloody guns and crossing over to Rottnest, you know, we had women over there on guns, and doing all sorts of things. There was far more danger from crossing the 12 miles from Rottnest Island to Fremantle. And I say to people... And they think of Rottnest as a tourist resort. Rottnest in the war was a bloody terrible place. Absolutely

38:30 terrible, you know. But people think of Rottnest they think of it as a playground and Thompson's Bay and schoolie [Year 12 school leavers'] holidays, and oh, you know.

Just um, we are coming towards the end of tape and I just wanted to find out if you have any words of wisdom for future generations about some of your experiences you had in the war?

Avoid it if you can. But if you

39:00 have to, you must defend your own, but it's much better if you can be friends with everyone. It's much better if you can find a way through negotiation and so on, but the numbers are all too big now. There's no way Australia, 20 million people, living on the outer rim of the largest Muslim state,

39:30 But they are not all…You see, Muslims are like Christians. There's God knows how many branches of Christianity and there are warring branches of Christianity among us. And you can take the Irish, you see. But we automatically think they are Muslims and they have got to be fundamentalists. Well they are not. There are many, many absolutely wonderful

40:00 scholars and wonderful families. Not all Germans, not all Russians, you know, not all Australians are lily-white loving good fellows.

There's always some sort of a radical faction no matter where you look, really.

Sure. And even in your own organisations there are people you mightn't see eye to eye with on issues or whatever.

40:30 So it's very difficult. You don't want to... I... Marcel Marceau said he wished the world was on this tiny planet Earth, or words to that effect, that's what he meant – I have just paraphrased that.

41:00 The planet Earth was the whole world instead of this crazy, crazy, crazy. I don't know. There must be better ways, the whole adversarial role of our parliament appalls me. There was always adversity, and I had a lot to do with parliament over there. But there... And I used to go to question time.

41:30 But there was always a lot of good humour. Even Gough [Whitlam], you know, the three years of Gough and Fred Daly and Jim Killen, and I mean to see Killen and Fred Daly and Gough, and you know, there was a gentlemanly, not this bitter rank order. Do you ever watch question time now?

I must say that I don't.

It's a shocker to watch it.

42:00 You know, the vitriol. And we shouldn't have room for vitriol…

You certainly sound like...

42:07 **INTERVIEW ENDS**