Australians at War Film Archive

Rhoda Johnson - Transcript of interview

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http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1752

Tape 1

00:34 **Your born name?**

Oh, it was Rhoda Kitchener and I was born in 1924 in Brisbane and my earliest memories, although not a real pleasant memory was at about two and a half when I fell through some French doors on a verandah and saw my grandmother lying in bed who'd had her teeth extracted that morning.

01:00 I thought she had a lizard coming out of her mouth but it was blood that was coming down. That would be the earliest memory and we had shops at Paddington. My father had three stores there, a grocery shop, a printing shop and a stall in a Paddington theatre.

What do you remember about those shops?

01:30 That I had to practice every day in front of people. Before I'd go to bed at night, there'd be an hour's practice. At the time I was learning tap dancing and of course I was on my toes at three so that was before we went into the shop. I'd have to do mainly my tap dancing in there and the crowds would come outside the shop which was most embarrassing for me.

02:00 In those days parents smacked their children very much if they didn't do the right thing so I was afraid of being smacked so I just went ahead and did it, as much as I was embarrassed. After that he lost all his shops during the Depression mainly because he loaned money out to lots of people

02:30 and they didn't have any money to pay him back, so we lost everything. Before that I was taught tap dancing, Russian dancing, toe dancing, acrobatics, even trapeze work and broke my jaw on a trapeze because I fell. My father did a lot of work for different charities and I can recall being woken up at nine o'clock at night because they were short a dancer or an act somewhere and they'd ring him up.

03:00 He did a lot of work with the limbless soldiers therefore I was dancing raising money for them and also for earphones for the general hospital where they had the first lot earphones put on. I remember having a letter from them when I had to go into hospital myself to say, "To think that you put the earphones on here and now you're in hospital." Then after that, as I said, the Depression came so we lost everything and my lessons stopped then but I had to still practice every day.

03:30 That was about the age of eleven, twelve maybe thirteen and went to school until scholarship which was about grade seven or eight in those days. Then, what happened after that. We lost the shops and we went into a rented house for a short while at South Brisbane.

04:00 In the mean time, you couldn't get work, so he got thirteen [shillings] and six [pence] a week in groceries and would work one or two days a week on the roads. So my mother went to work. She went to work at the Bellevue Hotel which has been demolished now. She worked as a salad maker, or server. We still had the car, we still happened to hang on to the car which was brand new when he bought it and we'd go and pick her up at night time.

04:30 Actually, we saw Mary Maguire. She was an actress, an Australian screen star and we met her one night there. In the mean time you weren't allowed to work and collect the relief money. Mainly it would be vegetables you'd get plus the thirteen and sixpence.

05:00 Somebody reported them for her working because she'd be getting more money if she was working so they put him in jail. He got a sentence. When they went to court he thought, "No, I won't go to jail." They gave him a seven day sentence as an example to people that didn't obey the law. He was devastated but he said to somebody when he got there, "I won't be here long." He said, "That's what they all say."

05:30 I can remember my Dad telling me this. He was very, very friendly, his best friend was the Premier of Queensland, Mr Hanlon. That's who we used to do a lot of charity work with, Mr Hanlon. Hanlon was on holidays at the time and as soon as he came back, he heard, my mother rang and told him, he was out. So he only spent one night in jail. But it was enough to really shock him.

06:00 Then he came and the years are going on. I'm at school, leave school, still dancing, every day, still practicing everything, still doing the trapeze work. Then I'd left school.

Actually it'd be good Rhoda to talk about your school life. What do you remember of primary school?

Primary school, I can remember coming top of the class in grade three and probably middle of the class in grade five.

06:30 So it was diminishing as I went along. I can remember going into Hanlons. Hanlons had relatives in Paddington, that's how we so very close and he became Premier. They used to sell broken biscuits. On the way to school we would buy pennyworth of broken biscuits and you would get a bag that big of broken biscuits. The other thing I remember about school is that I used to have a lot of animals at different times.

07:00 My father found a porcupine and I said I wanted to take it to school for what they call today 'show and tell'.

What was it called then?

It was just a nature study. So you bought along for nature study. I dragged this thing, because nobody drove to school in those days, we all walked. We lived at Paddington and this was up to the Sacred Heart Convent at Roselea. So I walked from where the Paddington theatre was more or less, we lived nearby there.

07:30 I dragged this thing in a sugar bag to school. I remember that very clearly. That's about the only thing I remember about school. Just having friends and so on.

What were the teachers like there?

My grade three teacher I remember greatly because she was the one that was my mentor, I suppose. When I went to hospital with my knee,

08:00 I had had a fall doing what they call chest rolls where you stand up and you fall on your knees first, then your chest, you bring your legs over and you stand up. I used to do three or four of these chest rolls, as they called them, and I'd hit my knee every time and that led to a cartilage problem. I was in hospital with the cartilage and my grade three teacher came to see me and brought me a little tiny sewing machine. I remember that clearly. Miss Gregory was her name.

08:30 Then I had a Mr Byers in grade five and they're about the only teachers that I remember because they impressed me so much. When I left school I applied for a position in a globe furnishing company at Woolangabba and got the job and worked there as a shop assistant for about six months or so and then I got a position at the Theatre Royal as a dancer.

09:00 So I went there and started my dancing, mainly in the ballet but on odd occasions I would do a solo. Then Cremorne was opening and they were looking for what they call the Glorified Ten, good title isn't it? They were canvassing all around so naturally two or three girls from the Theatre Royal went over and auditioned.

09:30 We auditioned for acrobats, tap, toe, Russian and I was lucky to get a position in the Glorified Ten. They could only get eight from Brisbane so the other two came from the Tivoli in Sydney. We opened there with Will Mahoney and Evie Hayes. She was on TV for a long while after that, wasn't she, on the Johnny Young. She used to adjudicate there.

10:00 I was there for about three or four years and of course the war had started by this stage. One time there I can recall. We never had holidays at all and we worked six days a week with a Saturday matinee and a Saturday night show. We rehearsed every second week,

10:30 from about ten in the morning until about four in the afternoon, come home and then go back for the night show. Then the following week we'd have all days off and only do the night show. By this stage the war had come and we were very much aware of the Japanese. We'd hear the air raid siren go at different times, mainly I think as an exercise more than anything else, but it was scary for us. We had an air raid shelter right outside the theatre.

11:00 We had a ballet mistress that wouldn't let you down for a minute, you had to keep going. When the air raid siren would go she'd say, "All right girls, out." Naturally, we all had to go out but she wouldn't let us rest from rehearsing. So she would start rehearsing us in the air raid shelter and we weren't the only ones there, there were lots of other people there too so you felt very much on show and embarrassed and we didn't like that at all.

11:30 Anyway, we had to do it. Then one week something went on that we weren't paid. I don't know who it was absconded with all the takings for the week so nobody was paid. I think some of the bigger artists were probably paid but we weren't. Anyway, we objected and we talked to Garretty, who was the manager, about it. I was the spokeswoman at the time.

12:00 He said, "Rhoda's the bush lawyer here." Five of us decided to walk out. We thought if five walk out

they'll do something about it, but they didn't, they got the other five up from Tivoli. So, we were out then. At that time the Americans had arrived here in Brisbane by this stage because Pearl Harbour had happened and there were a lot of troops on the way somewhere in the Pacific.

12:30 They decided to bring them to Brisbane.

Can you remember, Rhoda, hearing about Pearl Harbour?

Oh yes, definitely.

How did you hear about that?

Probably the radio in those days. That's when I started to become scared. I was still at the Cremorne then and I had to go home at night, a tram at south Brisbane and I lived at east Brisbane at the time. I was always scared that if the Japanese came,

13:00 because you would hear stories that they would rape the girls and all this sort of thing, Cremorne theatre was situated near Fish Lane as they called it, so there was a lane and I was always very frightened of coming up there because I thought the Japanese might be there. At that time my Dad had bought a small fruit shop in Adelaide Street.

13:30 It wasn't actually a shop, it was just a hallway and you'd go to the markets, buy your fruit, bring it there and sell it, which he was doing and many's the time during my week off from rehearsal I'd pop into town and I'd see him. He had some soldiers that used to visit him regularly to buy fruit from him and they were Negro soldiers in the American army.

14:00 He'd introduce me to them and I got to know them quite well from when I'd pop in and seem him. One night after the theatre I was waiting for my tram at South Brisbane. South Brisbane was kept for the Negroes, they weren't allowed on the north side. This night I was waiting for my tram and a big truckload of American soldiers passed.

14:30 They were all Negro soldiers. They sang out to me because there were two of them who knew me so they sang out, "Hello Rhoda," and I helloed back. There were some white American soldiers standing nearby waiting for a tram and I got quite a dressing down for talking to the Negro soldiers because we didn't feel anything different towards them but obviously they did at that time. There was quite a lot of that going on between the northerners and the southerners still. I think they were still carrying that civil war with them.

15:00 **That segregation where the American Negroes had to remain on the south side, was that only at night time?**

Well, possibly it was only at night time. I think mainly they were there because they'd be over on the other side during the day but I think mainly it was at night time, that was a thing I'd never thought about before. I'm getting ahead of myself … at the theatre, I left there.

15:30 Then I had a very good friend who was a pianist by the name of George Creatham. He changed his name to George Lawrence. I think he thought he was another Ziegfeld because at that time the Great Ziegfeld shows were out and he wanted to make costumes, he wanted to produce, he wanted to play, he was a great musician I must say. Unbeknownst to me he was gay and in those days you'd never come across any, nothing was out in the open.

16:00 He was my first boyfriend, I thought he was my boyfriend but he wasn't. His aunts used to ask me, "Did George kiss you goodnight?" and I'd say, "No, no." George and I had a great rapport together. How it happened I don't know but he and the Americans decided to put on a show for the United States Services to be put on at the Theatre Royal. The Theatre Royal had closed down to the public.

16:30 So, they thought they'd put on this show with a combination of Australian girls and American servicemen so he approached me and asked me would I do the dances, or choreography as you call it today. I said yes and also there was, to make it even, an American soldier who was also a dancer, Michael Skratorial. He had just appeared in Springtime in the Rockies with Betty Grable, I think it was, as a dancer in the show.

17:00 So between us we put the dances on for that particular show. He did the music, Australian, and there was a lot of the humour and a lot of other things were done by the American servicemen and we got the ballet together of Australian girls for them. So we did that show which was called 'Khaki and Lace' and that was so successful. I can't remember how long it ran for.

17:30 They thought 'Let's do another one.' I can recall during rehearsal being on the side, in the wings with Michael and we were just getting ready to go out to do a double and I said, "Here we go again," and he said, "We'll call it that, we'll call it 'Here We Go Again'." So, that's what we called the second show.

What was Michael's job in the services?

I don't know, I never knew that. But, unbeknownst to me, later on,

18:00 I realised that Michael and George were a twosome. That happened later but I lost track of George after that because I think the war ended not long after that, oh no, when the two shows finished I decided I

wanted to do something a bit more important for the war. I didn't want the Land Army, a lot of the girls had gone into the Land Army.

18:30 That's when I went to find out about mending the aeroplanes out at Archerfield.

Was it Archerfield or Amberley?

No, I said Amberley when I was speaking to the lady and I realised I'd made a mistake, Archerfield. It was daylight saving in those days and we had to be out there by six. It's quite a distance from the city so we were up at four to be able to be out there, in the middle of winter. I can recall that, there'd be frost on the ground out there.

19:00 As I said, we went to school for about three months to learn to read these micrometers because it was all decimals and things.

Can you explain to people who don't know what a micrometer is?

Well, I think it's something, as I recall, going back sixty years ago, it's hard to remember that, it reads the tiniest microbe you can imagine, therefore you'd have to learn the decimals to get right down to that.

19:30 If you look it in the dictionary I think it will explain that, it's a measuring microbe, if that sounds right or not. So anyway, we had to learn to read that and then once we had learnt to read that we went out there. You went out in overalls, you always worked in overalls with that and then you cut the metal. I don't know if we cut the metal, we must have because we had to measure it and then you'd rivet it onto where the bullet holes were.

20:00 **So in what way did you use the micrometer?**

To measure, you'd measure the metal possibly, when you were cutting the metal out, and the hole too. It's like patching anything I suppose, the hole would be there but you'd have to have a big piece around it and then rivet it in. Then after that I went to work for, the war was over by this stage.

20:30 I had been engaged twice during that time, both to Americans. Well, I wasn't engaged to the first one, it was the second one I was engaged to. He was a submarine person.

This is the second one?

The second one, we got engaged the night before he left and I never heard again, ever. The first one that I'd met while I was at the theatre, at the Cremorne.

21:00 He was an American serviceman and he went AWOL [AWL – Absent Without Leave] so that he would stay in Brisbane, near me. He was caught and he was put in a, I don't know what you would call it but they had some sort of, they weren't jails.

Like a work gang or something like that?

Yeah, something like that. It was behind, what's that girls school at South Brisbane, that's still there?

Somerville House?

21:30 Yes, it was at Somerville House. He had to do duties there of taking garbage out at night or something and on the way from rehearsals of an afternoon I'd go home on the tram and then coming back I'd see him, wave. That's right, he used to agree to take the garbage out because then I'd get a certain tram on the way back to the theatre and here he'd be and another wave. One night I came out of the theatre and there's a captain or somebody waiting there for me.

22:00 He asked me my name and I told him and he said, "I've got bad news," that he had been on a work team down at the wharves, apparently they used to do that when they were put in there, they were unloading a ship or doing something down there. It was a hot day and he and this other chap had gone for a swim. The other chap jumped in first and then he dived in after him and hit him on his shoulder and broke his neck.

22:30 They were very good, the American army, they took me to the funeral and they were very, very considerate. There's lots of other things that keep coming in between that that I'm trying to think of.

That's all right, if we can go back and try to fill in a lot of the details. Can you remember the first house that you lived in?

Yes, the first house. I remember the first house.

23:00 I was about two and a half and I remember running away from home with a little suitcase to neighbours about four doors down because I'd been roused on for something so I just packed the thing up and went down there. They had three daughters and one son and they were all grown up so they fussed about me, I remember that. Another time I remember going down to that family, and they were having a game, the girls and the boy. I thought the boy was being to rough on the girl.

23:30 I was only little and I threw a stone at him and he had to get three stitches in the back of his head, I

remember that. I remember the shop. One thing I forgot to tell you, very, very important too. Probably very illegal in those days, well it was, now the government do it so it's all right, was when things were getting bad in the shop and money was getting very, very scarce. Because everyone ticked up, as they called it, they'd say, "I'll pay you on pay day."

24:00 So you used to call it 'on tick' then they'd come and pay after a week or a fortnight. A lot of people weren't paying at all and things were getting down so my Dad went into SP [starting price] book making. That was the thing, I don't like races and yet I have a daughter now whose husband is the chairman of the Gold Coast Racing Committee and we go down there and I can sit and have a little bet. She's mad on horses, everybody is around the place but I'm not.

24:30 What'd happen, every Saturday afternoon there'd be races. With those races you weren't allowed to bet outside of the racecourse. They called it SP booking. Starting Price, is that correct? You'd know more about it than I would, I'd think. Anyway, he used to have, in the shop, an attic. Not an attic.

25:00 You know where the manhole is and you'd go up into the roof, not really an attic. He'd have someone sitting up there, with a candle and he'd have a tube running down from there and talk into it and he would give the bets. "Two and six for N&N on such-and-such." N&N was the nicknames, and they'd have different names for different people. I remember N&N as clearly as anything. I always heard N&N, she must have bet quite a lot of horses.

25:30 If the police came they'd sing out, "Police," and they'd burn, with the candle upstairs, all the evidence. Well now today, the government do that, they have the starting price bookmaking. I remember that. That was to make money.

Can you remember your dad ever getting in trouble with the police with that?

No, no. Because the police used to come in there, that was the funny part about it.

26:00 Many the time he'd save the police that might have had a few drinks outside and he'd pull them in the shop to sober them up. It was that sort of era I think. Because Paddington at that time, before I was born, was a sort of a gangland. They had a razor gang there. I can recall my Dad talking about that. I was never allowed out of the shop after about seven o'clock at night, never allowed to go out onto the footpath or anything. There was a hotel across the street from there.

26:30 There was never anything like that when I was growing up but apparently before I was born there had been a few. There were the O'Goosgills I can remember, a bunch of Irish migrants that were out and they were all, well you'd call them gangsters today. They would use the cut-throat razor a lot in those times. I can recall my Dad, he was always on the police's side that way.

Sounds pretty nasty.

27:00 **What else can you tell us about your dad?**

My Dad would always make a living. Many years before that, the way he made his money to be able to buy these three shops was before the radio, before everybody had a radio. He would ride a pushbike. He was always in with horses, with bookmakers. I don't really know a lot about bookmaking.

27:30 I can recall him saying that they'd get the information then he'd get on his bike and run to another bookmaker and give him the information and he would get so much an afternoon. He made so much money he was able to start buying these shops. The other thing I did forget to tell you, Saturday afternoons I didn't like. We'd be out the back. I had a sister, she was about two years younger than I was.

28:00 We'd either be at our grandmother's house or we'd be at the back of the shop and they used to have a girl that looked after us. She would be taking care of us for the day. This day there was a raid I can remember, the police had come. They came to the shop but apparently everybody that was in the shop came out the back way where we were. All of a sudden I saw people coming out, jumping out of windows and everything. So I used to hate Saturday afternoons.

28:30 **Was that the mixed business shop that your dad had?**

That was the mixed business one. He used to make ice blocks. They had the best ice blocks in Paddington. They used to sit up until two in the morning and he would make what he called date custard and it would be real custard with dates in them and he'd have fruit salad and cream. He'd set the fruit salad first and then put the whipped cream, not whipped cream,

29:00 just cream over that and set them in. So they had to sit up until about two in the morning. He'd have different friends with him and they'd make these ice blocks, play cards in between while they were waiting for them to set.

Was this at home or at the shop?

This was at the back of the shop. It was a house, a two storey thing. Downstairs you could have living plus a kitchen and another bedroom in the top part and then the shop in front.

29:30 He used to make these ice blocks. I'd say Weiss's in Toowoomba might have got his recipe. He'd make

them at the night. Everyone would come in for these ice blocks, everybody knew them. 'Kitch's ice blocks' they used to call them. He used to pack them in a bag on the back of a bike and peddle them to the schools. Sell them at the school. He'd say, "My ice blocks can't be beat but they can be licked," that was his motto.

30:00 What else about Dad? He was a hard taskmaster. I got the strap quite often but that was quite common in those days. Today you wouldn't touch your child, today it would be cruelty. I can remember at fourteen getting a strapping from him and the girl that he had working for us in the shop, we weren't in the shop then but she had become a great friend and she used to come out and visit us. I was getting a few that day and she took it and hid it. She said, "She's too old to be beaten now."

30:30 So that was it then, I don't think he knew any different.

What sort of things would you have to do to get the strap?

I probably gave a bit of cheek. Or didn't do my practice, that was the main thing. I can recall one time pretending to do it. I went into the room and I went, as though I was doing a Tinsky or whatever and he saw me and I'd get the strap for that.

What about your mum?

31:00 Oh, Mum was adorable, Mum was lovely. I'd be her little possum. She died very young, about 58 and I missed her very much. Mum had lost her mother. Mum came from a family that were all teachers.

31:30 Her father, or grandfather came out from Britain as a teacher on board a ship and went to Adelaide. They ended up in Adelaide. Teachers ran right through the family and she was to become a teacher but she got butted by a goat and, believe it or not, got bad sight in one eye. She wasn't accepted. Since then, we have a daughter that's a teacher, we have a granddaughter that's a teacher, we have a grandson that's getting married to a teacher.

32:00 It seems to always run in the family yet my husband's side are all police. Mum was very good. They came down here after they'd lost the shops and rented, then after the war they bought down here. They bought a cottage where we are now. They lived here. He wanted to go to the islands to live. Over to Coochiemudlo Island across here. She said she wasn't going to be any Dorothy Lamour for anybody.

32:30 She wanted to stay on the mainland. He had boats then, he used to rent out boats. Then she passed away and then he lived with us until he died.

Can you remember the sort of things that mum used to cook?

Yes, cakes. That's an interesting one, you're very good at bringing this out of me, aren't you Peter [interviewer]? We had a Japanese friend during the war years.

33:00 We knew him when we were in the shop in Paddington. He had the laundry down the road and my sister used to wander down there. She got away with a lot more than what I used get away with. She used to wander into his shop and he was very kind to her and I suppose, a little girl, he thought this was great. He had one of those old fashioned, mother pot irons that used to fit into it and he did all these beautiful white collars and stick things like that all with designs.

33:30 In those days we used to have cash orders. I don't know if you've ever heard of those. You go to a shop and get say twenty pounds worth of goods or ten pounds worth of goods at the beginning of the year and you pay them off at five shillings or ten shillings a week until they're paid off. Everybody had cash orders, my grandmother had them, my mother had them, Mr Knitter was his name, he had them.

34:00 Once every couple of months an inspector would come out to look at your book and see that you had been paid. He used to go to Mr Knitter's to check his and Mr Knitter used to make lunch for him so he used to always send up to our place for six pennyworth of ham off the bone to make him sandwiches for his lunch. Also he used to get milk from the milkman in the billycan every day and when he went on holidays, Mr Knitter, he would tell my grandmother who lived down the road that she could have the milk.

34:30 So he never used to stop getting the milk because he had figured out that this man needs his business. We would go up and pick up the billycan and bring it back. He used to come out to our place and when we left the shop and we went out and lived at east Brisbane he used to come to our house every Sunday, unpack his little bag, bring out these snow white aprons, put them on and bake cakes for our family.

35:00 Every Sunday, well, not every Sunday, but maybe once a month we would have a party. My father never drank so there was never any alcohol in the house, you weren't allowed to have alcohol in the house. All my friends would come over and we would sing songs. We still had the pianola that he had paid cash for in the days when he had money. They'd all sing around the pianola and we'd play balloon games and we'd have supper with all the lovely cakes that Mr Knitter made.

35:30 Mr Knitter would never stay. We used to say, "Stay," and he'd say, "No, no, not with you." They interned him during the war years. Stories went around by silly people around the place that he was a fifth columnist and that he had this under his house. We knew that man so well and I don't believe for one minute. My mother and father used to visit him in the concentration camp but after a while he told them not to come any more

36:00 because the war is getting too bad and people will think that you're sympathising. So they didn't go any more and we don't know what happened to Mr Knitter.

Do you know how old he was when he was interred?

I don't know, it's hard to tell, a young child trying to figure out an age. I'd say about forty maybe, maybe not.

Did he seem as old as mum and dad?

Possibly, that's about all he would have been I'd say.

36:30 The dearest man. He did have Japanese friends here because my sister went on a picnic with them once and there was a Japanese family, a Japanese girl. So strange to have Japanese living here because we had the White Australia policy in those days. I often wonder what happened to poor old Mr Knitter.

Do you know where the internment camp was?

It would have to have been in Brisbane somewhere wouldn't it because they visited him. Would it be possible to find out? I suppose.

37:00 Then my husband, he used to do a lot with the internment camps because he was in the police. He was to join, he went to join up. They'd taken the batch before him in and when he went to join they said, "No, all the police have got to be here for the battle of Brisbane." They had made up their mind that Brisbane was going to be the frontline. You've probably heard that before. So they had all the equipment given to them. He's got a photograph in there,

37:30 he donned it all one day as a young person, took a photograph of the lot. He was the one that told me that during the war, I can remember the time the Americans and the Australians had the big brawl in Brisbane because of the canteen. The Australians wanted to use their canteen because the Australian girls were allowed to go in and use it with an American solider but not the Australian men.

38:00 Anyway, they were pretty hard done by, the Australian soldiers, as far as that was concerned. The Americans had everything given to them and of course they had the girls too, which was another thing, because they had the nicer uniforms and they had the money and they were quite gentlemanly whereas the Aussie fella in those days was a real ocker I think, in a lot of ways. However, they went in one night. Apparently one of the Aussie soldiers had been shot but that didn't come out until many, many years later.

38:30 A lot of them decided that they'd go in and they'd really get into these Americans around the canteen. They marched in a big stack of them and they got in and they thought, "Right, we'll go into this canteen, nobody's going to stop us." They had American soldiers in a van, the tarp was down and they opened it up and they were there with their guns so that soon dispersed that.

39:00 You've heard that many times I'm sure.

How did you hear about that?

I remember it clearly because at the time I had been to the American PX [Post Exchange – American canteen unit], I think they called it, for apple pie and, a la mode, they called it. It was apple pie and ice cream. In those days that was a treat because during the war years you just didn't get anything like that. Our favourite meal at home was roast rabbit,

39:30 that was special occasion, and bananas chopped up with Nestle's tinned cream. That was a real treat.

Being that your dad had the mixed business shop did you probably get a lot more food than other people?

That was before the war. In the Depression years he lost that.

In the Depression when food was hard to come by for a lot of people as well.

Yes.

40:00 The only time we ever saw a biscuit was if a visitor came. My mother would scrape up sixpence or something and say, "Go up to the shop and get sixpence of biscuits." Mr Kennedy, he was the real estate agent from Red Hill. That's the one my Dad used to do a lot of charity things with.

Tape 2

00:31 **You were just about to tell us a story.**

And I've forgotten what it was.

01:00 **What happened to your sister?**

That's interesting. My sister met an American when she was about eighteen and married him and went back to American and lived there the rest of her life. I never knew my sister very much because when we lost the shop during the Depression years she wanted to live with my grandmother. She lived with us but every weekend she was at my grandmothers.

01:30 We didn't have a closeness at all. Then at eighteen she went over as a war bride. She was in Wisconsin. She visited us on about four or five occasions and wanted to come back to Australia. She had a daughter and a son. The son was murdered at nineteen. He was coming back here to visit us and probably stay for twelve months.

02:00 He was at the university over there but to get money to come here and get the twelve months off, he was trying to accumulate his money and he was working for a newspaper company over there delivering papers any spare moment he had. He delivered papers when he was a young kid but this was in the van, he'd take the big lots out. A Negro held him up. He saw him get his paycheck that week and held him up and asked for his money.

02:30 He wouldn't hand it over so he shot him and just threw his money down in the snow. My sister at that time was working as a receptionist at a hospital clinic there and all the nurses knew Craig and when the body came in they knew who it was and they thought, "Oh my God, Joyce's only son." Anyway they got him straight away. He was drunk.

03:00 He got ten years. He was out within eight years and my sister was still working at that clinic and she just walked away when she realised that he'd only served eight years for murdering her son. Then she lost her husband many years later. He was a pigeon fancier and he used to be always in the loft with the pigeons. Apparently he got some sort of disease from the pigeons, a type of throat cancer. He passed away. I had met him.

03:30 We had been over to see them on two occasions and had the children out here to see us. There was quite an exchange between us all the time. Then she wanted to come back here and about five years ago she did come back for a trip but then when she went back she got very ill and she passed away about three years ago. She wasn't allowed to come because she didn't have enough points. She had given up her Australian citizenship when she married him. If she had kept it she could have come back.

04:00 She would have had to have so many points and you had to have so much money to get the points to get here. So she never came back. She never, ever danced although she was in one show as a showgirl in one of the American shows. I have a picture of her there of that.

What did a showgirl do?

A showgirl does nothing much except just walk parades.

04:30 I don't know if you've ever seen one of the old movies of the Great Ziegfeld or any of those and they'd be the ones who'd come down with all the exaggerated costumes. Just parade around. We were looking for extra showgirls for that and she was quite capable of doing it. She didn't like to dance, she wouldn't learn. She had had lessons but she would never, as I say, she got away with not practicing so she was lucky.

What was it that made you start dancing when you were young?

05:00 It wasn't me, it was my mother and father. They used to go to the Old Cremorne to see Billy Maloney. He was a great dancer or something and they said when they have a little girl she's going to dance, so at three years of age I was dancing. I have a picture there on my toes at three which is the wrong thing to do, now they say, you don't go on your toes at three. They used to always be at the Cremorne Theatre looking at shows and going to the theatre.

05:30 I think they were just a bit stage struck and thought ok, if they have a little girl she's going to dance. I had no choice. Like all those things if you do it long enough you just do it, don't you. I can recall one time at the theatre there they were having a competition at the Cremorne. In this competition you had to come in and be dramatic. You've come home and you've received a note from your wife that she's left you.

06:00 So you go and you take poison and you die. This was supposed to be funny. So my father used to enter this every week and he'd won it every week. He was quite a funny man really. You'd ask him how he felt and he'd say, "With my hands, how do you think?" Things like that. He would put on this dying act. He'd have the legs up in the air kicking and he'd have the last kick before he died, he'd move around.

06:30 The audience loved him and they used to say, "Bring him back again, bring him back again." He'd never been on the stage or anything that was just one thing that he liked doing.

Apart from the dancing what else did you do as a girl in your free time?

Well there wasn't much free time. There was lessons, that's why I resented it a lot of the time. There was music lessons as well. You think of it, ballet classes and tap classes.

07:00 The tap classes we went with, you wouldn't have heard of, Jack Rivkin. He was one of the great dancers

of all time. He came out here and he started to teach tap dancing. Everyone knew the Rivkin kids, it's a bit like Johnny Young's kids in those days, the Rivkin kids. I often see, when you put a group of girls together or a group of boys and all they've got to do is one step, one time step.

07:30 As long as they do it all together and make a lot of noise and they're all in precision, you'll bring the house down. I've noticed that. With these Irish dancers too, you look at how many steps they're doing, it might only be four or five different steps but they do it well. That's how he used to get his troupes together. The line had to be just right, no one out of line. That was Jack Rivkin.

08:00 **Did you have any time for dolls or games with your sister?**

Not a lot. I can remember nearly burning the house down once though with dolls. I wanted a dolls house. I thought, I can make one. I went downstairs and I got little pieces. I made the dolls house and then I wanted furniture. So I was making a fireplace out of celluloid.

08:30 In those days celluloid was a bit like plastic is today. You could bend it a little bit and I'd bent it and put some things underneath it and I lit it and thought, "There's the fireplace." Well, the whole lot went, luckily it wasn't so great when I come to think of it now but it scared me, I thought I'd burn the house down. Not a lot of playtime. I didn't play a lot of sport. I played vigaro once and got hit in the elbow. You know when you get that shock if something hits you in the elbow and that was the last.

09:00 I'm not a person for that type of sport. Swimming, a lot of swimming but no competition sports.

Where did you swim?

Maybe at the Paddington baths there? At Ithaca baths? Mainly baths that you'd go to. And surfing, we used to surf a lot. Naturally, living near the Gold Coast. It used to take us hours to get there, we'd stop for morning tea on the way.

09:30 It'd take two or three hours to get down to the Gold Coast in those days.

So you used to surf with surf boards?

Yes. Not the big surf boards today, more like a little boogie board. We didn't have surfboards in those days that I can recall. Nothing like that.

What were the swimsuits like?

All in one. They had two pieces. That was the time when, what was her name, she's very famous for the bikini, she used to sit on the beach and make the bikinis.

10:00 She made them for her daughters and they used to wear them and everyone used to ask, "Where did you get those?" and orders would come in and she's quite famous on the Gold Coast for making bikinis. Whether she invented the bikini or not, but she's certainly made them on the Gold Coast and she's still alive today. The other day I saw her on TV.

Apart from when you were in the shows, what sort of clothes did you have when you were doing your dancing lessons and practice.

10:30 Usually shorts and top. Very much like if you see the old shows on TV because we would copy what they would wear. You know, the old musicals. Very much that type of thing. Sometimes an all in one with straps over, a big thing. If we ever did go out.

11:00 I did forget to tell you that we did a lot of charity work for the soldiers during the war years. We'd put uniforms on from the theatre and one of them was, I've got a photograph there, of a snow scene. We went around the streets collecting money for war bonds. The other one was we were all in air force uniforms and went around with a big flag, each end carrying the flag and keeping the money in the flag.

11:30 Everybody collected for war bonds during the war. The memory is going a little bit at times.

Whereabouts did you say you went to school?

First of all it was Petrie Terrace State School and then I went to Roselea Sacred Heart and then after that

12:00 I went to St Benedicts at East Brisbane.

Were they church-run schools?

Yes, I guess they would have been church run schools.

Were there nuns and priests?

Yes, I can recall quite a few years ago when one of my grandsons was going to high school and he'd been in a state school in the early years and then he was going to high school. He was going to Mount Carmel, I think it was.

12:30 He was terrified thinking, "Oh my God, those nuns, my parents have talked about those nuns for years." So I said, they don't wear those things any more.

What were the nuns like when you were there?

Very much the habit and everything. Very hard, I learnt music with them and my girls learnt music with them. They were very hard. It was nothing for the ruler to come down on your hand. We used to take a few of them out for a picnic occasionally.

13:00 They'd sit in the back of the car. We would go up to Mullany near the mountains and it was pretty high and I think they were a little scared so they used to bring the rosaries out and be praying all the time. They were very strict. I think it's a good idea that they don't have them any more like that.

Did the family go to church?

My family weren't Catholic. I turned Catholic when I married my husband.

13:30 Our children all went to church. My mother's people were Presbyterian I think. There's a church down in Adelaide where my mother's uncle, there's a foundation stone where he started the church. Her people were very religious. My mother's father, he was German.

14:00 He was a real German. My mother never let me have anything to do with him, I don't know why. Her mother died when she was fourteen and she always said that it was because of his cruelty that she died so young. She said she was such a lady and she didn't know why she married him so I don't know anything about him.

What about your grandparents on your dad's side?

They were Prussians actually.

14:30 They came out here as a remittance man. My grandmother's father. They anglicised the name and they got Kitchener but it was Keuschner back in those days. He came out, probably the black sheep. In those days they used to send them out and pay for them to stay here while they came out.

What does a remittance man mean?

15:00 I've asked that question of the family. They don't want him at home, he's the black sheep of the family so they sent him out and they sent him wages. This is what I can gather, it may not be correct but that's what the story is that they told me. They sent so much out to keep him here, to keep him away from family anyway. He married a Louisa Frawlick, I know that.

15:30 That part of the family died out, that was my Dad's people. She was a lovely lady my grandmother, I loved her very much.

Where were they when you were growing up?

I was with my grandmother quite a lot. They only lived down the street from us. When my mother lost her mother she was only fourteen and she met my Dad then. Then of course she spent a lot of time with my grandmother so she told me.

16:00 Every second Saturday afternoon from the Cremorne theatre there'd be a break between the matinee and the night show. My grandmother had asthma, we think it was asthma. She used to burn some substance in a little tin and breathe over it so she could cough. She'd always sleep sitting up at night. I think it was some herbal thing that she had.

16:30 Every morning she had a little drink of rum in hot water. Maybe it was payday, once a fortnight, I would buy a bottle of rum and get on the tram in between the two shows and take it over there, have tea with her, give her the rum and then come back to the show. They used to rib me a little bit over there, "Where does Rhoda go with the bottle of rum every second Saturday?"

17:00 That was for nanny, she was a lovely old lady.

Were they special times that you spent with her?

Yes, very special times. The same with my grandchildren today. I like to model myself on her with them.

What was she like?

Apparently she was a very attractive lady in her young days. I have a picture, just the other day, my daughter got it enlarged for me.

17:30 I thought, "Oh lovely, I've got one of nanny now." Very attractive as a young girl. Going back to her day, she had never gone to school I don't think because I used to read the paper to her every Sunday. She couldn't read, she used to just mark something with a cross. When they came out from there and she married this remittance man, Louisa did, they lived at Roma.

18:00 She was the eldest in the family so the others went to school but she didn't. I forget what I was going to tell you about nanny now. When she was eighteen she worked at the Mansions. They're still here in Brisbane, down near the gardens. They've been done up, the Mansions.

On George Street?

Yes, she worked there as a maid. Then she worked at

18:30 the hotel in the valley opposite Jardenetto's. Across from there, the hotel is still there. She became pregnant to the owner of that which was quite common in those days, the maids were. So she had my father. He was illegitimate.

19:00 We often talk about that now and it doesn't mean much any more. They can get a partner, have a baby and it doesn't mean a thing, but in those days it was.

It's interesting that you mention that, a few people that we've spoken to have had similar stories. In your family circumstances was that very hush-hush?

Yes, very hush-hush. I joke with my husband that he's got no skeletons in his closet, they're all in mine. They used the word illegitimate quite often.

19:30 It didn't bother him at all. She was married three times actually. She had twins. Had a hard life, which they all did I think in those days. It was just a sign of the times. When I hear people speak about that I think well, everybody was in the same situation. So, everybody just got on with it, didn't they.

20:00 **Do you know what the circumstances were with her marrying several times? Was she widowed?**

Yes, she was widowed. One husband was murdered either in Sydney or Melbourne in a park. He'd gone down there to purchase, they were going to move down there and buy a house. He went down with all the money, apparently they found something and thought ok, we'll move there and he was robbed and murdered in the park and I don't know whether it was Melbourne or Sydney Park. That was the second husband.

20:30 The first time she wasn't married, that was the illegitimate one. The second one was Chislett, he was the one that was murdered and the third one was Bryant. She had twins with that one. He died with what they called 'miner's itus'. He had been a miner at Mount Isa and he came back and it was on his lungs. To me nanny always looked very old but I think she was very young really.

21:00 She was only in her forties when all this, she'd lost all the husbands and she reared the children from there on herself.

Where did she live?

She lived at number three Princess Street, Paddington and we were at Gibbon Terrace, Paddington so we were very close. It's amazing now, we have one daughter that lives about four streets from here and we have a grandson that lives about seven streets from here. It's just a reversal of things, isn't it.

21:30 **Where you father had the shops in Paddington, are they still there today?**

No, they're not. The theatre was there and they pulled it down and now, what is there now, a big café I think. It's right opposite a hotel. They call it a tavern now that hotel, it's been altered. Lot's of things have changed now in Paddington. It's quite a cosmopolitan little area now isn't it.

22:00 **So where Suncorp Stadium is now, was that the cemetery?**

That was the cemetery, you're right, and my father used to say that, there was graveyards there, that's right, a cemetery. And there was a big sewer used to run there and he used to often tell me about the way they used to walk through the sewer to go anywhere. That's where I used to go to school up until third grade.

22:30 That would have been the school opposite Lang Park, or the stadium as they call it today. Yes, things have changed a little bit around there, haven't they?

Were you ever frightened as a small child of the graveyard or the cemetery?

No, my Dad used to say to me, "Only be frightened of the living, never be frightened of the dead because they won't do anything." He did tell me that he used to whistle when he used to go there. I would say, "Why did you whistle?" and, "I don't know why," he said.

23:00 Probably to give him a bit of courage, he'd always whistle. I don't think I was afraid of anything really, except getting the strap, that was all, if you did anything wrong.

All of the different types of dancing that you were doing, what sort of music was it all to?

If you did a cancan, well naturally, and it was a real cancan in those days where you'd do what they call mounts and splits, tinskies and all that.

23:30 I used to hate it when they'd come in.

Can you tell me what the difference between those things are?

Well a mount is when you stand up and put your leg straight up in the air and hold it and then jump around. You know what the splits are, you just jump up and go down in the splits. The tinsky is where you are like that and then you go over. Not a cartwheel, a Catherine wheel, that's sideways, this is straight. It was very exhausting because you're jump, jump, jump the whole time.

24:00 Each one would come out individually and do something and some of them would do back jumps. You see the footballers do them. That's something very much in common with football is the knee, cartilage in the knee. Nearly all footballers get it and nearly all dancers get it. With the Russian dances they were what we call cobblers. You'd get down and shoot the leg out, you know what they are. That was a hard one to do.

24:30 We'd be terrified of that because we would have a week's rehearsal on it before we would do it. So that would be to Russian music. Ballet, well naturally you'd have the Nutcracker Suite or something like that. That was the hardest one with the toe dances because you'd come home with bleeding toes. You may only have one every six months so the toes had got soft by then and once you put the toe shoes back on at rehearsal

25:00 they used to start to bleed. The way you cured it was to come home, urinate into and pour that on top of the toes and that would harden the blisters and that was the way we used to overcome that.

I've heard that before.

I'm so pleased because I thought you'd think I was making it up, but it's true. So the music was what was current of the day. We did a lot of 'Boogie Woogie.

25:30 Bugle Boy from Company B', and that sort of thing. I used to like that style of dancing.

Was that extremely modern when that came out?

Oh yes, that was very modern in those times.

What was the reaction to that very modern music?

Oh no, that was quite acceptable because we only knew young people for that. We were just starting to come into the audience with the things too.

26:00 When they first opened with the Glorified Ten they had stages to the side of the stage or rostrums or whatever you want to call them. They'd come out of the sides and we would go out onto those and then you'd walk down the steps into the audience and that went over very, very well because you had close contact with people. The showgirls, they would have big staircases going right up to the back of the stage into the rostrums I think it was and then they'd come down there to the centre of the stage.

26:30 The music was very much Glenn Miller, Woody Herman, all the wartime music which I still like very much.

At the time when you were doing all your dancing lessons and going through school was it a given for you that you would be a professional dancer?

No, nobody thought of those things in those days because there wasn't a lot of entertainment around. We had an Empire Theatre and they had live shows.

27:00 Live shows were always there, I never thought about it but apparently my parents liked live shows and that was at the back of their mind. They used to get full houses because everybody wanted live theatre. Nobody went to the movies much in those days and there was no television so that was the name of the game then.

27:30 **So when you were coming through school what did you think you would go on and do.**

I always wanted to be a journalist and it didn't turn out like that with the Depression. If Dad had still had the money that he had when I was around about the nine, ten, eleven mark I probably would have done that but by then things had gone very, very bad. I can recall him paying cash for a car, cash for a pianola, there was no end to it.

28:00 Then all of a sudden it was just, 'whoosh'. I think everybody felt it then because the Depression there were very few people that, I think my husband's people were okay because he was a policeman in the country, his father was, and farmer's would bring in food, they'd bring in bacon and all that sort of thing whereas in the city you never saw those things.

So when you did leave school, you were about fourteen?

Yes.

And you got a job at?

28:30 At the Globe Furnishing Company which was a furnishing company down at Woolangabba but they used to sell lots of china and cutlery and things so they had a couple of assistants behind the counter. I recall the manager there could never remember my name and he always called me Reney. I thought, gosh. No, he said, "It's too fancy a name for me to remember." That was quite nice.

29:00 I had heard that the Theatre Royal was going to open again and I was just biding my time to go there. I thought, yes I will go there.

What did your job entail at Globe?

Just serving china or cutlery or anything. They had these things in the air, you put the money in a little, you probably seen those in the movies.

29:30 You put the money and the account, you put the money in this little thing, clock it up to this and pull it and it went along the air, along a wire and then it went up to the cashier who sat in a little thing up in the air there. She took it out, put the change in and pulled the pulley down, the pulley came back to you and you took it out. So there was no way of anything going wrong. She was responsible for all the things there.

30:00 Funny little things. Sometimes in an old movie you'd see them in a shop.

Did you have to wear a uniform at Globe?

No, no uniform.

Were there other young girls that worked there also?

No, I was the only girl because it was mainly furniture and the men took charge of the furniture. It's not there any more, it hasn't been there for years.

What was that like, being the only girl working there?

30:30 I don't know. Apparently it didn't make any difference to me. I think I was in awe of all the men there but I was only a young girl when I think of it. Not like today, I don't think we grew up very fast in those days, fourteen would be like a twelve year old today whereas fourteen today,

31:00 they'd probably be dating at fourteen, wouldn't they. Whereas in our day, seventeen, eighteen before you were allowed out. I can remember over at the Cremorne we had a dance hall called the Trocadero. It was about a block away from the Cremorne theatre and it used to open until about eleven thirty of a Saturday night and the trams stopped at midnight on the Saturday night. So we would rush through, get the make up off fast and then about six of us would tear over to the Trocadero to go into it.

31:30 Jitterbug was mainly the dance in those days and they had little alcoves. Everybody sat in these alcoves. You might have a group of eight, a group of nine and we would go over there after the theatre and the chap at the door would let us in for nothing because he knew us and he knew we'd only be there for about four dances or something. We knew a group that would be in one of these alcoves.

32:00 We were all the good dancers so we'd pick those and then we'd go and jitterbug until the time to go and I can remember missing my tram one night. I stayed behind talking and I thought I'd have to walk home. I lived at East Brisbane and this was South Brisbane and just down the road from there, unbeknownst to me at the time, was a few brothels. Right along South Brisbane, that's where they used to be. I'm walking along there, I thought this is the only way to go home, there's no money for taxis or anything.

32:30 I'm walking and then a police car pulled up and asked me where I was going and where I came from. I told them and they drove me home.

Did your parents see the police car drop you off?

Yes, dropped me off home.

Did they ask you questions about why you were coming home in a police car?

No, I rushed up and told my Dad. I told him why and how and he was all right. I can recall coming home one night from the theatre.

33:00 I used to live about eight blocks from the tram stop, so it was quite a walk. This night, I thought I better clean all those makeup bottles out. We didn't have plastic in those days, they were all bottles so I thought I'd take them home and give them all a good clean out. I had this big, black patent leather bag and I put them all in there. I got off the tram, walking home and this man came towards me. I thought no, he's not going to come towards me, he's going to veer when he gets to me.

33:30 He came towards me with his hands out and I got the bag and knocked him down. I remember him tottering off and I ran. When I got home I told my Dad and he came out in his pyjamas and went up the road looking for him but he'd gone by this stage.

Were you often a bit scared walking home in the dark?

No, not at all. I often walked there. A couple of times this American chap walked me home. I used to drop into a shop near the tram stop.

34:00 She was a Jewish lady there and she used to make a special ice cream that I'd go in and get coming home. I can recall going in there and he said, "I don't know many girls around here." And she said, "Oh,

there's a little girl gets off the tram here every night just about and calls in here for an ice cream. I don't know if it's every night, but some nights. You want to meet her." So, I did. I met him. To me, he looked as though he was old enough to be my father.

34:30 He was nice, he used to walk me home, no problem with him.

Where was the family living at the time that the war broke out?

That was at East Brisbane. They were living there.

And you were working by that stage at the Theatre Royal.

Yes, I was at the Theatre Royal. By those days everybody had a victory garden too. We all grew vegetables. We had about ten different varieties of vegetable.

35:00 I can recall going down the yard one day with a broom for some reason, the big butcher birds used to get in to the veggies maybe looking for worms or something. My father said, "Chase him with the broom." So I got the broom and he got on the end of the broom and I couldn't get rid of him, I'm just shaking it up in the air. Things like that would scare me but I wasn't afraid of anyone grabbing me or anything. You never heard much of those things in those days, thank goodness.

35:30 **Can you just explain what a victory garden is?**

A victory garden is where you dig up as much of your backyard as you can and plant fruit, vegetables, or anything. Why they call it a victory garden I don't know.

Would that just be for the family to live on or would it be sold?

Well, you'd give neighbours if you had too many cabbages.

36:00 I don't think we knew of broccoli in those days. I don't think we ever had broccoli. You'd have carrots and all that sort of thing. You'd give them to neighbours. Neighbours always exchanged things. Even today here, a friend will come over with a big fish for you or something and if you've got extra paw paws you'd pass those over. It's just something you do I guess when you've got plenty of land to do it..

36:30 **So when you went for that first job at the Theatre Royal, was there a big audition process?**

Yes, but not as strenuous as the one at the Cremorne. They were a bit more selective over there. The Theatre Royal, that was no problem. I can recall a murder happening while I was at the Theatre Royal, across the road. I can't think of his name, I thought it was a name like Zinsky [means Private Leonski,] or something.

37:00 We saw the police cars pull up and of course all the girls rushed over to have a look. It must have been rehearsal time and we went over. At that stage we saw the girl, the body, lying there. It hadn't been moved at the time. An American soldier had murdered her and he was caught. It was in the papers after that.

Did that change your opinion of American soldiers in any way?

No, not really.

37:30 There were so many of them around the place that I don't think we knew who had murdered her until later on when it came in the papers. They were very lonely boys. My father used to say, "If you see any of them roaming around and they want a home cooked meal, bring them home," to my sister and I. People did that everywhere, well, most people did. I don't know about other people.

38:00 Most of our neighbours would bring them home if they had young people with them.

What do you recall then about the war actually breaking out?

The war over in Europe didn't bother me greatly. I didn't think too much about it, being younger. When the Japanese war, then I started to get frightened.

38:30 I thought if they came in you'd be raped or something like that. We were all aware of that happening but we didn't know half of what happened until after the war when we heard that Townsville had been bombed. We knew it had been bombed but they said it was only, they lightened it down.

Do you recall once the war started either in Europe or the Pacific, all the young men leaving?

39:00 Yes, I remember that. Especially the Australian soldiers, although not having any brothers and not having any uncles I didn't have a lot with that. Poor Mr Knitter was the one I always remember, I thought that was a very sad case. I'm trying to remember if there were any others, I don't think so.

39:30 **When they introduced blackouts in Brisbane did that affect the theatre? Were there big signs outside the theatre that had to be black?**

I suppose it would have, yes it would have. They still had the show going on and we never ever stopped. We never got air raid sirens at night, that was interesting, they were always during the day. I think they were just practice.

40:00 There was no reason to use them.

So when did you first start noticing the military presence building in Brisbane, was it just when the Americans arrived or before that?

Yes, mainly. Our soldiers were mainly sent overseas. I can recall hearing that one of our premiers,

40:30 or was it the Prime Minister, had written over and wanted our troops to be brought back when the Pacific war started. They wouldn't send them back and he demanded they come back, this is what I've heard. Therefore, there weren't many soldiers around Brisbane. Obviously there were out at Enogerra there because they're the ones who came into the PX there, to that camp.

41:00 I think the Australian soldiers resented the American soldiers very much. I don't blame them in a way because they didn't have the food, they didn't have the uniforms, they didn't have the pay, they didn't have the girls, when it was all brought down.

Tape 3

00:30 **Now besides your dancing lessons did you also do acrobatics and trapeze?**

Yes, I used to have lessons for acrobatics. One day, and there was an old circus man used to teach me the trapeze, one day he said, "Now, I'll teach you a flying trick." I used to do they called the clinkers, which was, you'd be on the trapeze and you'd attempt to fall,

01:00 and as you fell your ankles would connect on the ropes each side. You'd be hanging down and that would stop you from falling. You'd just go like that, all of a sudden. I can't remember the names of a lot of the other things we'd do. This time he said, "We're going to do it while we're flying in the air." I'll let the trapeze go and as it's going you do the clinkers. So, I did the clinkers. No, that wasn't the trick, it was another one. He said, "Don't let go."

01:30 And I thought he said let go and I let go and came down and broke my jaw. I must have been about eight at the time. I can recall eating through a straw for so long. I think you recover fast as a child.

You were really in the wars because you, how old were you when you had your knee done?

Nine, I was in hospital when they had infantile paralysis was around at the time, which was the polio. I was in a ward next to that.

02:00 A lot of the children there had the polio so I was very fortunate that I didn't get it I guess. They were in for years, I was in for about nine months I suppose while I learnt to walk again. I can recall my mother asking, "What about the dancing?" and they said, "The best thing that she can do is keep dancing." So that's what I did.

Did you actually enjoy dancing or did you feel you had to do it because mum and dad were making you.

I don't think I thought of anything. I must have been a child that just did what she was told.

02:30 Sometimes I would rebel and if I rebelled I'd get it I guess. If he found out about it.

When your dad made you do your rehearsal out the front of shop how many people would gather round and watch?

There would be crowds all around outside the shop, on the street. I met someone recently that said, "I remember you as a child. We used to crowd around the shop outside." It was so embarrassing. I wasn't old enough to be too embarrassed I suppose.

03:00 I know I didn't like it. The shop had a big area where there were cane chairs. Those cane chairs upstairs were originally from the shop, that's how old they are. There would be little cane chairs and tables around. They'd clear all those away and he'd start the pianola up and I'd start to dance.

Did he put the hat out?

No, he never did that,

03:30 but I think underneath it might be more trade for the shop. You know, they'd come in and buy ice blocks and chocolates maybe. I never thought of that angle.

The shop must have had refrigeration did it?

Yes we had big refrigerators and we had big stand up refrigerators in those days. They had the ones where the ice cream scoops were but the other one was a huge big one, a bit like that cabinet behind me there and the doors that opened out.

04:00 So we had a lot of refrigeration. We had a lot of the mod cons there. The windows would be full of chocolates and lollies and things which I thought was great.

Being the daughter of the shop owner would you?

We were limited up to a point. My sister stole something one time. She said, “Dad will you go outside the shop for a while.” She was so naïve. He went outside, he knew what was on and he peeked around the corner. Here she is giving chocolates to some children outside.

04:30 They were pointing to what they wanted and she would pick them out and hand it out. He was pretty drastic with the punishment he gave her. It worried me. He said, “I’m going to put you in a sugar bag and put you in the river.” He put her in this big sugar bag. He didn’t take her outside. Whether he put her in or whether he threatened to put her in I can’t remember. I don’t think he would have done that. It was like one of our children when my husband said to her, “If you do that again I’ll skin you alive.”

05:00 She came to me crying and I said, “Father didn’t smack you.” “No but he’s going to take all my skin off.” So I guess maybe those days it was just talk.

Did they talk much about their parents, your father and mother.

No, my Dad didn’t. He never knew his Dad and we saw nanny quite a lot so he didn’t talk much about that.

05:30 He did talk about some things. He talked about one time when he found a sailing boat. The family used to get on a train, he and his aunts. My grandmother had about three or four sisters I think it was and a brother. They used to get on a train and go down to Sandgate and take all the children with them for a picnic. He found a sailing boat down there but it turned out to be a model and he kept it. He got into trouble for doing that.

06:00 I can remember him telling me about that. Another time he told me, we used to go for picnics down to the Brisbane Gardens. It would be a big walk from the top of town where the tram would let you off and you’d walk down George Street. On that way there there were, he called them, the ladies of the night and he used to get a stick,

06:30 there were corrugated iron gates and he would run that along there. One day he was chased out of there. He used to do some rather naughty things. He stole from a shop once. He stole some laxettes from a chemist shop and he got caught doing that. My husband often said if marijuana was around in his day he would have tried that too.

Can you remember as a child in the Depression,

07:00 **your father lost all his shops, can you remember anything about that, what effect it had on you?**

No, I think as a child you just went along with it. There were a lot of people in the same position at that time so I think that makes a difference. If you’d lost everything and they still had it would have perhaps been different.

07:30 There wasn’t a lot of food around, there were no luxuries at all but then nobody else had them. I can remember him working on the roads.

You were going to tell me about the sort of cooking your mum did before and you started talking about the Japanese chap. What sort of cooking did your mum do?

Yes. Always lots of cakes and all nice things. Not so much on the savoury line but very, very good on the cake line.

08:00 I’ve got a book up there with all her recipes still and I thought I’ll pass that down to the grandchildren when they get married and they’ll have some of those recipes in it. She used to make these mushrooms, she called them. They’d be a very nice egg pastry. She’d fill them with whipped cream and put cinnamon over them and make little stalks and put them in and they’d be mushrooms. She’d make peaches which were

08:30 little tiny cupcakes done in a gem iron so they were round, join them together with a cream then half melt jelly and dip them in that so that that stuck and then roll them in pink coconut. They were peaches. Lots of other little ones but they’re the two that stick in my memory. I can recall one of my daughters ringing me the other day and asking me, “Do you remember when you used to get a pawpaw and

09:00 put a savoury mixture in and tie it up and then slice it and you’d get slices of pawpaw with this mixture.” And I said, “Well, I can’t remember that and yet I can remember my mother’s recipes.”

Just going back to the shop you mentioned all the lollies that they had. Do you remember the sort of lollies that they were?

Yes, they were Texas chews, musk sticks, curls, which were toffee with chocolate curls down it.

09:30 Clinkers probably, maybe they came later I’m not sure, Nestle penny chocolates, they were my favourites. He was famous for his ice blocks more than anything and they were very good. As I said

before someone stole his recipes I think.

So whenever you see Weiss bars now you think of those do you?

Yes, everything was pure, everything was the best.

10:00 He was a good card player but he was a bad loser. As our daughters were growing up and they'd bring some friends home from college, or something. They'd say, "Let's have a game of cards 500, cooncan, or whatever." He'd finish up arguing with the girls, he hated to be beaten. Even when you'd play old maid or donkey, one of those games when you pass the cards.

10:30 The children used to laugh at him because he'd say, "You're not passing them fast enough." So he'd lose, he'd be the donkey first and he didn't like that.

Were they the sort of things, as a child, mum and dad would sit around the table playing things like that?

Not so much in my family, there were always too busy making ice blocks or doing this or doing that. When I got married we started all that. Maybe my grandmother might have done that, that it was in the family. Always had picnics, even to this day we still have lots of picnics.

11:00 We try to keep a lot of the old things going.

You mentioned Sandgate before, I've noticed that Sandgate was a big destination for people in Brisbane.

It was the closest to us to get to by train whereas the Gold Coast took hours. Because we had the car and we kept the car for many years. We would go down. We'd get halfway down there and stop for morning tea.

11:30 I can recall my uncle, there was a creek there, he was showing off one time with a big stick, putting it in and jumping from one side of the creek to the other and he got stuck in the middle, you see those movies and down he went. There wasn't much at the Gold Coast then, not a lot of motels or anything like that. A lot of camping grounds where you could go camping.

Did you ever have any family holidays?

12:00 Yes, we used to go down to the Logan River because my Dad was a great fisherman. There used to be a man there, an old German called Old Bill and he used to have all these cottages and you'd rent them for five shillings a night, or a week. So we'd go down there. I can recall one day I took a little girlfriend from school with me to stay for the holidays.

12:30 I must have been about twelve or so. There used to be a shop there too. She'd only open it for two hours a day and sell what she wanted to sell. She wouldn't open it any other time, the old German lady so you had to be there at that time. You'd get liquorice sticks and a few of those things. This day, I can recall I'm all dressed, I'd been for a ride on my bike and I walked out on the jetty and Old Bill, the German fella that had these, I must have given him some cheek about something,

13:00 I can't recall now. He said, in his German accent, he couldn't speak very good English, he said, "You do that, I'll throw you in the water." I went a little bit further. Next thing he picked me up and threw me in, clothes and all. I do remember that now.

Had you swum before that occasion?

Yes, we could all swim. It wasn't very deep. Just a little shark enclosure. Because there were sharks there, we had it all netted around from the jetty and to there.

13:30 It was no good going home and telling my Dad what had happened because he would have said I deserved it.

Do you remember learning to swim?

No. At school I think we were always taken. Living close to the Ithaca baths, we only lived up the street from there. All my family, my aunts and all had swam there. My Dad had won the swimming.

14:00 The name Kitchener, when you look back, he was a great swimmer, he was a cousin of ours. My aunt had a gold medal for swimming. My Dad had, of all things, a billiard cue he won for swimming. That was the prize. They all swam so we just naturally swam I guess. I can't recall learning but obviously we did.

Doing all the dancing, the costumes and everything that goes with that was that?

14:30 Yes, my mother used to do all those. I can recall once winning a prize. Every time there was a fancy dress ball I would win first prize because I went as the Indian Princess. It was sequins everywhere and big headgear with beads hanging down here my mother used to just love that. She'd sit there and sew sequins on to everything.

Did you have a natural flair for clothes as well?

At that stage, no, but I do now.

15:00 I like clothes but then that's a female thing I guess. There was never any money around to buy them. I went in for lots of eisteddfods. I don't know if you know, well you would, the radio man, many years ago, must have been ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation], was a well known announcer. He left about ten years ago. Now and again they'd call him back. He'd be my age now.

15:30 I used to meet him at different competitions. I can't think of his name now. There was one boy soprano and if he was in the competition I'd come second, if he wasn't in, I was right. Every time I saw him I thought, "Oh, there's the boy soprano, he'll beat me." We did a lot of competition that way, a lot of eisteddfods and a lot of work for the earphones, that was on all the time.

Can you tell us a little bit more about doing that work with the World War I veterans.

16:00 I was only a little girl, very little. Apparently they'd have concerts where they'd raise money to pay. I don't know how much the government put in in those days. This was to donate money for the limbless soldiers, that was the association. There's a letter there thanking me for that. Because Dad was in with a few,

16:30 the real estate chap from the area and Hanlons and that, they'd all call on each other. I was called on to fill in for different things in the shows I guess. One night I can recall being in bed and it must have been about nine o'clock at night. There was a law against children being used for anything like that. I was used, no doubt about it. It didn't worry me, I just went along.

17:00 It was about nine o'clock at night. Did I tell you this before? An act didn't turn up for the show, they were one short, so they rang my Dad and said, "Could Rhoda fill in for the night?" He said, "Yes." So they got me out of bed, I was dressed. I can remember going over Victoria Bridge, it's still there the Victoria Bridge, it must have been at the Cremorne in those days.

17:30 I'm only about eight or nine, maybe seven. I did the act. Whether it was Dad gave them to me or not, but it was this big box of chocolate. It was a huge big box of chocolates and it was completely round. I wanted to carry it and we had to cross the bridge before we got a tram home, or maybe the car, I can't remember. We're crossing the bridge and I dropped it and it rolled down, there's a section of the bridge there between the girders or what.

18:00 I didn't know that it was balancing on one of these girders and my Dad went to pick it up and I thought he was going to go down into the water and I can remember screaming out to him not to get them. He picked them up, that's where they must have been balancing there. That is very clear in my mind.

You've mentioned a little bit about the trams. Can you tell us about the trams in Brisbane?

Yes. They were about a penny fare, twopence was a long trip.

18:30 The other thing that comes to my mind though, we were talking about the dancing. Peters ice cream were having a picnic for their employees and I have an old newspaper clipping of this one, so they wanted Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse to go to the picnic and play with the children, take the children around. I think I got five shillings for the day to play Minnie Mouse.

19:00 I don't know who played Mickey Mouse.

How would you have been exposed to those characters before that occasion?

Everyone knew Mickey and Minnie Mouse. That would have been probably in comics and maybe, probably movies. I can't recall much of the movies in those days. We used to go to the movies. I used to sneak in

19:30 because I wasn't allowed to go at night and my father and mother would be so busy in the stall in the pictures and this lass that used to look after us she'd probably be busy in the shop. I can remember sneaking out a couple of times and getting in with the crowd so that I'd get in and go down and sit in the theatre and watch it and then sneak out after it. My sister had a nasty experience one day. She did what I did one day and went in, sat down in the front stalls there.

20:00 You couldn't see anything right up front but we used to think it was great. She must have been about seven, eight when she did this and they locked the theatre. They thought she was in bed. Dad said she must be down at grandma's who lived just down the street from us. He went down there, no, Joyce is not there, she's not home. She might be in the theatre so they rang Stephens. Stephenson or Stephens owned the theatre.

20:30 Actually his wife was murdered there at one stage because they wanted the takings from the theatre so they went home and shot her. That was another story. However when my Dad came up he heard, "Let me out, let me out." She'd worked her way from the front of the theatre, she said there were rats and everything running around, up to the front and he let her out. I don't know if that had any effect on her. We often used to more or less laugh about the episode but it would have been horrifying for her.

21:00 **The shop that your dad had near the theatre what was that?**

It was two shops away. There was one shop mixed business and then there was another one which was ours and then a paper shop, a sort of a newsagency thing and then a mixed business up the road. My

Dad and that man Mr Gooley, they were in opposition to each other, so they didn't talk to each other.

21:30 **What sort of car did you have? You mentioned you had a brand new car.**

We had a Ford Tourer I think it was. It had a hood but it had nothing at the sides. It had mudguards or something. Running boards. Sometimes they would stand on the running board.

Did you go for big trips in the car?

Yes.

22:00 We'd go down to the Gold Coast in it, and every second week was our turn to go out somewhere, and every first week my mother and father went out with their friends. The week that they went out with their friends, my grandmother and this lady would look after us. The following week was our turn, my grandmother and us children to go out. My mother loved boronia which was a flower that you got in the bush. She was out collecting one time.

22:30 We'd had a picnic and there was a bushfire around. I can recall being frightened, we were all frightened, that it was coming in. It probably wasn't as bad as I thought as a child.

What were the roads in Brisbane like at that time?

Terrible. I can remember when we had our first child and I'd go from Red Hill to Paddington with a pram and it was all big rocks and stones and you'd go over them. They were pretty bad.

Were there any bitumen roads?

23:00 I suppose there were. There would have been some. I can remember the governor used to pass our place, I was always excited, Sir Leslie Wilson, that was his name. He would pass and if you were outside he'd give you a wave. That was a bitumen road. That would have been a main road into the city.

You were going to tell us about the trams before. Where did they run?

They ran right outside our shop.

23:30 All suburbs had the trams I think, into the city. Then they had the big fire up at the tram sheds up at Red Hill I think it was, or Barden, round that way. One night there everything caught fire. After that I didn't see any trams. Whether it was that time or not, but they were being phased out. It's a shame because they were very good, the trams.

24:00 I can recall one time getting off a tram, stupidly there were two trams and I got off one and went to run across the road in front of the other one. Just in time I realised that it had started so I was very careful. I used to hop on and off them when they were going, I was very good at doing that. I look back on it now and think that was a crazy thing to do. Just when they were slowing down I'd think good.

You sound like you were a bit of a scallywag when you were a young girl.

24:30 Not really, just probably a bit stupid I think.

Did you have any really close friends?

I've never had really close friends until about ten years ago. Now I've got very dear close friend. In the theatre I did have one. Gwen Sharkey. She was a close friend.

25:00 Two of us there were, one was Ronnie Elliot whose father used to teach Esperanto, the language that they tried to bring it in, a global language. He taught that, she was a good friend. Then they all went their different ways, they didn't sort of get together again over the years. Although, I will say we have had a lot of get-togethers over the years with the girls who I worked with over at the Cremorne.

25:30 I've never been to this particular one but there's one every Spring. The first Sunday in Spring I think it is they meet at the botanical gardens. They probably still do that. I forget when it comes around over the years and after the day's gone I think, "Oh, that was the day I should have been down at the gardens." We've had a few get-togethers. A lot went to America. A lot of the girls married Americans and went over there.

26:00 Which would have been natural at that stage. A lot of them have naturally passed on now.

When there was that big American influx into Brisbane of servicemen, what did your father say about mixing with them?

He was all for it, he felt sorry. Dad always bought the wounded dog home sort of thing, and my mother too. They always had somebody there if they were lost or anything they'd end up at our place.

26:30 I can remember one little girl, she'd been in an orphanage, I don't know if somebody had adopted her or what. Even to this day if I meet her she'll say, "I'll always remember your mother. She'll say come up and I'll bake cakes for you, and do this for you. I'll always remember her doing that." My Dad, when he had that fruit shop in there, there was a girl came in there one day and

27:00 she didn't have a fare home or something. She'd been married to one of the southern Americans. He came from Arkansas, he was a real southerner. He'd been sent away and his money hadn't come through. She'd married him before he'd gone. She came to live with us for about six months until he came back from the war. He hated Americans, he hated the northerners. She'd say, "For goodness sake don't say that I spoke to anybody," because if he thought it was a

27:30 northerner he'd be very upset.

Can you remember the very first time you saw an American in Brisbane?

Yes, I do. It's amazing how you bring it back. This was the one that was eventually killed, drowned. I was walking down Queen Street which is the mall now. I was trying to sell.

28:00 We had a pianola and I wanted a radiogram. My father said if you sell the pianola you can have a radiogram. So I went into Parlings which was a music store and I felt these footsteps behind me. Then when I came out, I felt these footsteps again. I looked around and he hadn't spoken and I hadn't spoken. That night I went down to post a letter and I had to go to a post office to do it because I didn't have any postage. I walked across Victoria Bridge

28:30 down to the GPO [General Post Office] in Brisbane and here he is again and he spoke to me then and that's how we started our friendship. I brought him home and he had meals at our place and everything. Then, that's when he didn't want to go back to the war and he went AWOL. That's when they put him into that, whatever it was, that they put him into. That was the first American.

29:00 **Can I just ask you, what was it about him that you really liked?**

Very polite and very attentive. That was something we didn't get in those days, to be perfectly honest. Maybe it was the young Australians we knew. Butter smooth, I'd say they were real smooth talkers and we fell for that to be honest. I think that was it.

Was there an inquisitive thing as well because they were from somewhere else?

29:30 No. The accent would have been charming, when I looked back on it. They found the same thing. We went to America at one stage and took our youngest daughter with us. She was about nineteen we went to Milwaukee where my sister was. She said, "Oh you've got to come and have a look through the brewery there." I can't think of the name, they had a TV program on it at one stage.

30:00 It used to be a series. We went there and of course the Australians are known for their beer drinking aren't they. We had a tour through the brewery and then there was to be a tasting afterwards. So we went into the tasting. I don't drink beer but my husband enjoys it and he was there. The guide that was taking us around was talking to our daughter quite a lot. He said

30:30 "Oh, I'm fascinated by your accent." As we would have been fascinated by theirs. So when we came back apparently it was a lunch time while we had the tasting he would go out and he came back and said, "Have those Australians gone yet, I want a date with the daughter." That was the difference with the accent.

Can you remember in your case did he ask you to talk just so he could listen to you?

No, he didn't do that.

31:00 He was staying on different occasions. Somebody else had befriended him before I met him, where there were three daughters in the family. One of them must have been very keen on him because I can recall she worked at David Jones in the city and then he told me one day he'd heard some stories about me from this girl. I had never met her before, didn't know,

31:30 we don't even get out anywhere, which we didn't but probably, being in the theatre, she thought, okay, there'd be stories here. So she told him some stories, I don't know what it was and he confronted me with them. I said, "Who said this?" So I went into David Jones and I remember speaking to her and I thought, "No, I'll ask her just straight," I said, "That was terrible to say things like that when you don't even know me." She said, "I'm terribly sorry."

32:00 And she apologised to me. That's vividly in my mind because I thought that's the way you approach those things, you don't just go and do it the other way. I'd see her first about it. I think they had their eye on him because with three daughters in the family they thought, "Right!"

So you took him home to meet mum and dad?

Yes. They had him there for meals and different things. He'd come when he had leave or anything but then he did the wrong thing by not wanting to go back.

32:30 **What did he tell you about where he was from?**

Well he had a girlfriend at home. I can't recall where he was from now. He wasn't a southerner, he would have been from the north. Not a lot because it wasn't for very long. I didn't know him very long, probably a month.

Did that bother you that he had a girlfriend back home?

No because we were just starting to be boyfriend and girlfriend.

33:00 Probably he convinced me otherwise I suppose. They were pretty smooth talkers in that way.

When you're starting off a new relationship with someone like that that's just come into the country, how far ahead are you thinking?

You're not. It was a different time, it's different to the youth of today. My husband can't comprehend today. He can not. It was like that in those days. We were very, very slow. I was amazed at the American women.

33:30 They were outspoken. We weren't outspoken. We were very, very shy. The male was the dominant one, particularly the Australian male in those days. The American women, no, I was surprised the way they could speak out. I can remember going to the movies with an American once, he asked me for a date and we went to the movies and there was a long queue.

34:00 I just stood there and waited and waited and people were getting front of us. Finally he got a little bit upset about that and said, "You don't let people get in front of you, you move too." So we were very, very shy. There was no drink around to any great extent in those days although I can remember them talking about torpedo juice. "What's torpedo juice?" And it's the juice, the alcohol that they used with torpedoes,

34:30 that's all I could work it out to be. You didn't get much alcohol here although the Australians were selling what was supposed to be gin to the Americans. It was mainly water. They'd be going away and they'd sell this gin to them. You've probably heard that story. Taxi drivers used to do that they said. Our laws on drinking were very restricted.

35:00 I can recall walking down where the mall is now near one of those hotels just before, I'm not sure of the hours but they'd only open for two hours at a time or one hour at a time and the Australians would be waiting there to bombard that place and they'd knock you over to get into that hotel, drink like mad for the hour or two hours and then out. It was very restricted.

Being in that showbiz environment were you ever asked to have a cigarette or a drink?

Well I smoked.

35:30 We all smoked, it was quite the fashion to smoke. I look back on that and think you were crazy to do that. Drinking no, we never drank. We did drink one night. Everybody was going out to some special thing but because we had to work at night we couldn't go. It might have been victory celebration, I don't know, it might have been. We had to be there that night. So we got a bottle of wine

36:00 and I think there were three or four of us sat on the banks of Brisbane. Because the Cremorne was there and you came out the dressing room and you were on the bank of a river, a nice grassy bank. We sat there and drank that and all got as sick as anything. That was about my only experience because no drink was allowed into the house. It wasn't until I was married that I was exposed to anything like that. We'd go to a party or anything and there was never,

36:30 very seldom there'd be drink.

The first American boyfriend that you had, when you were told that he'd been killed, how did you take that news?

That was terrible. I can remember going home and couldn't believe it and getting in bed with my mother and crawling up there. The funeral, they sent a car out and took me to the funeral. I used to go to the graveside, it must have been a war cemetery here.

37:00 I'd go there every Sunday until my mother got very angry with me and she said, "You've got to stop this." Then I stopped it. You did what you were told in those days too, I suppose. I'd have been about nineteen by that stage I think. When we were at the Cremorne they'd bring American soldiers in to be photographed with us backstage. But they were always officers, they'd never bring enlisted men.

37:30 There are a couple of photographs there of being photographed with them. I don't think any of the girls dated them I don't think they even asked them. I think they were just happily married men, I'm not sure. I can't recall any of the girls ever going out with them. Some of the girls married Americans and went back. About four of them I think and had children over there. One girl comes back every few years.

38:00 She'd be the same age as me now I guess. Lost her husband but the family's over there so she's never bothered to live back here again.

Did that change the way, did you make up your mind you weren't going to date any more?

For a little while, until I got over it and then that's when I met my boyfriend from the submarine and the same thing happened then you see and I thought, "Well, this is no good."

38:30 Then, the war finished and my sister had gone away. I had another friend who was determined she

would not marry an Australian, she would marry an American. The war had finished but there were still merchant navy ships coming into Brisbane so she met a chap from the merchant navy and she went over there. She went to America and is still there. Very happily married. Comes out to visit every now and again. In the meantime,

39:00 I wasn't going out anywhere. My mother was making her usual cakes with a friend, a Saturday night. This was for Sunday because Sunday was a celebration time. She said, "For goodness sake, go somewhere. Go to a dance or something. I'll even pay your fare in." So she gave me the money and I went and I was to meet a girlfriend outside the Ritz dance floor in Brisbane down at Petrie Bite there, I think it was.

39:30 She didn't turn up, the girl. So I got on the tram and came home again. My mother said, "You get back in there and go." So I went back and I went in and my husband came over and asked me for a dance. He still swears to this day that I put my foot out as he passed and got him. The funny thing about that was his first opening line was, "How's Sandy Robinson's." Sandy Robinson's was a dance school in Brisbane.

40:00 In between working for Maxim Navigation company which I'll tell you about in a moment, I saw this ad in the paper that they wanted a dancing instructress and I thought, "I might go for that." I went in there and he took me around doing different dances around the floor and then I got a telegram to say come in, you have the job. And I thought, "I can't do this." Because I can't instruct ballroom dancing, I don't know anything about ballroom dancing. If it was tap, toe, or something I could do it, but I don't.

40:30 All I did was follow him. So I didn't go and then when I first met my husband he said, "How was Sandy Robinson's," so I thought this was a line because I have never been to Sandy Robinson's at night, only for an audition for a job. He always says I can't dance with somebody else I can only dance alone.

Tape 4

00:34 **So it was very different from today, obviously.**

Very different in every way.

With the girls being very shy, demure.

Yes, very shy. We could tell the difference between the American women. The American women were so outgoing, outspoken. We were actually a little bit shocked really. We thought, "Oh gosh," you know, you don't come out.

Were you seeing American women in Brisbane?

01:00 Yes, I think they called them WACs [Women's Army Corps]. I think that's what they referred to them as. We had a lot of them here. They looked lovely and beautiful uniforms.

Were they as interested in Australian men as we were in…?

I don't know about that. They'd be all officers, because there were no privates with the American women that came out here, they were nearly all officers. So that they could, I guess with the enlisted men,

01:30 they were able to give them orders whereas if they'd been lower ranks they wouldn't have been able to give them orders.

Did you have any interactions with the American women?

No, I never ever met any of them. Even if you went to a party or a function. Although I noticed that they were very outgoing. None of them were shy, big difference.

02:00 **What was the situation then with sex education?**

Well there wasn't any at all. You never heard of condoms, you never heard that. There was nothing, when you look back on it. It wasn't Victorian days, it wasn't Edwardian days it was just coming out of that. I can recall our three daughters, if you recall that movie the Brides of Christ.

02:30 That was our three daughters, about that era. They were questioning, they were asking, they were telling them. Not revolting but just saying, "Hang on a moment, this isn't all true."

So back then how did you learn about sex?

Your mothers never told you anything. It was just something.

03:00 I was always told that once you became engaged you could never go out with anybody else. You could never have a baby unless you were married. I remember telling one of my daughters that once and she laughed in my face. This was when she was a teenager. She said, "Mum, you used to tell me that when I was asking you questions." I think she was about eight when she was asking questions. I'd tell her so

much, I made up my mind I would tell her, but in such a way that was enough for you to handle, wait until you get a little older.

03:30 She said, “Mum, to think you told me that, you can’t have a baby until you’re married. What a lot of rot.” I didn’t know but something inside of you must tell you because I can recall at about twelve. My father thought I can afford to have this man teach you, keep up with your acrobats. I used to do this trick, not a trick, but you’d sit on a chair.

04:00 The glass of water would be on the floor and you’d bend right back, pick up the glass of water and come back and have it swallowed by then. I could do that but I’d have to practice it. That was one of the tricks that he taught me, if you call it a trick, an act or whatever. This day, his name, I’ll never forget it, was Gazza and he came from the circus and he was give us cheap tuition. That was why my father thought, he can teach you just the same.

04:30 He used to throw a cannonball, supposedly a cannonball, up in the air and catch it on the back of his neck. My father must have befriended him as he befriended a lot of people. He lived at South Brisbane, we must have been at South Brisbane before we went to East Brisbane at the time. I’d go along for lessons and this day he said I’ll teach you an extra piece with the one with the glass of water. He said sit on my lap,

05:00 put your legs around me and bend back and as I did he touched me. With that I just jumped off the chair and ran. I knew a family that were in a circus. They were a very poor family but a very close family. There were about three girls and two boys in that family. They were so poor that when we would go to concerts and do anything, we all had lovely clothes. Their underwear would be made

05:30 of, that the flour came in, calico with the print on. That’s how poor they were but they were a very, very close, lovely family. I ran straight to them. Mrs Stokes was her name. I told her what happened and she said, “Well, we won’t tell your father but we’ll tell your mother.” No-one ever mentioned it to me, I was never made to go back but no-one in the family ever spoke about it. I often wonder why wasn’t it brought up

06:00 in a conversation but no, it wasn’t.

So how did you learn what was acceptable once you got to the age that you were going dating?

I think you were old enough then. I’d read. There were books that you weren’t allowed to read even. Lady Windemere’s Fan, I’d read that. What was another one? That was banned for years.

06:30 Lady Chatterley’s Lover. Quite a few of them that were on the banned list but I’d get hold of them and I’d read those.

How did you get hold of the books that were banned?

You could get them around, at different bookstores at different times. Unless somebody had one and you’d loan it around. I can remember getting hold of a Little Red Book from China one time. I don’t know where it’s gone to now, but no one was allowed to have the Little Red Book either.

07:00 I think that’s probably where I got most of my information from. Your own emotions come up don’t they, that way.

Was there a lot of talk amongst the girls?

Yes, a lot of talk about the girls. Especially the older girls. A lot of them had been around a bit too, the older ones had. We had some there that were thirty-five, forty and were still dancing.

07:30 A lot of those had been married even and probably divorced by then. I can recall one time. This didn’t dawn on me. I wasn’t innocent as far as sex or anything was concerned. I knew what that was all about, but I was as far as gay people and lesbians because they just weren’t spoken about in those days. I can remember in between the matinee and the night show one of the older girls got married.

08:00 She had a reception in between that time and so we all went there and I’m sitting on a lounge chair and this male impersonator, she was a female and she used to do an act dressed as a man. She was sitting next to me and her arms were around me, rubbing my shoulders and my arms and some of the older girls said, “Get Rhoda away from so-and-so.” Which she did and afterwards they told me.

08:30 I had never ever heard of anything like that. I thought because they were impersonators that’s just all they were. In the show we had a Lee Sonia who was a female impersonator. We had a wardrobe mistress. She could call a spade a shovel. She must have been about sixty.

09:00 Carrie Sewell was her name. She used to tease us a lot. Our costumes would change every fortnight and she would dress us. She’d have them all in a line. Yours would be there and so and so’s would be there and your shoes, your tap shoes, your toe shoes, they’d all be there so there’d be no in between getting off and on again. She would fit your costumes for you. She’d say, “This week you’ll go topless.” No, not topless, “See-through bras this week.”

09:30 She would tease you on those things. The girls would be shocked and say, “I’m not going on.” “Well,

you'll have to go on." This sort of thing. She used to dress Lee Sonia. I asked one of the other girls one day, how do you hide it. She said, "We'll ask Carrie." Because Carrie used to dress him. She used to tape it back so that it wouldn't show. That's how we found out that he could go on looking like a girl.

10:00 It was all taped back. Those things for us were real, we'd talk about those, they were sort of exciting things I guess.

It must have been quite a different experience for you than a lot of girls your age?

In what way?

Well a lot of people we've spoken to, things just weren't spoken about. In a way you were very lucky to be in an atmosphere where you could talk about things like that.

10:30 We used to talk about, the older girls did. Learnt a lot there. I can remember, this has nothing to do with that though, you've heard of Bob Dyer and Dolly Dyer. Well, she was a ballet girl in the Tivoli and a lovely, lovely person and a beautiful girl. He walked in one night and saw her, he was out from America. You weren't allowed to

11:00 leave the theatre once you were there for the night, and the girls wanted ice creams or something. She said, "You keep guard and I'll go out and get the ice creams." And she went out and got them and on the way back she bumped into Bob Dyer. He didn't tell anyone that she'd been out to get these things and eventually a romance started and they got married. They were up here on their honeymoon and she used to come into the dressing room and play penny poker with us in between. She was a lovely, lovely person.

11:30 I can't recall what I was going to tell you about her now. He wouldn't let her out of his sight. He was always, "Is Dolly in there?" She was a lovely, lovely lady.

Was it very competitive amongst the girls?

No. Nothing like that. You were all, if anyone had a solo, which every now and again they would ask for a solo. I did a couple there dancing, but I would never do any singing or talking.

12:00 Quite often you'd do that but there was never any jealousy there. The only time I came across something like that was one of the girls, there was an actor called Calloway, Alec Calloway and Cecil Calloway, they were brothers. One went to America as a film star and the other stayed there. He was a lot older than me. If I wanted to go out with somebody I wanted to go out with someone just two or three years older.

12:30 He would have been around forty at the time and to me he was an old man. He'd asked me out. Anyway I refused. One of the girls went out with him, said, "Oh, I wouldn't refuse him." It all depends what your taste was that way. There wasn't a lot of dating in between the people on the show and the show themselves.

13:00 I must say though, the Americans were very, very good to us when we did the shows with the Americans. They were very considerate and very good. They were very good to work with. It was rather a nice concept I thought, the khaki and the lace. Very popular show. It was full every night that they had it on

13:30 but I can't recall how long it played for.

This is the show that you did with the USS wasn't it?

Yes, the USS.

And what does USS stand for?

United States Services.

Can you tell us how that came about?

It was through George Creatham, then he changed it to George Lawrence. He used to do a lot of work round the theatres. Very, very good pianist, extra good.

14:00 He must have been in touch with them or they got in touch with him. They said, "Look, we should put on some entertainment for the servicemen." Then the public were allowed in as well. That's how it started, by combining mainly the males from the United States and the females from Australia, they combined it that way. There was one film star in it. Ross Ford.

14:30 He only made a few films because I can recall seeing it after the war and thinking, "Oh, there he is." He was very good in that. They were very, very considerate, very nice.

You were paid for that, weren't you?

No, that was all voluntary. Nobody got paid for that. Michael was very, very good to work with. I wish they had tapes in those days that you could have taped those shows because they were very good.

15:00 **What sort of acts were in 'Khaki and Lace'?**

I can recall doing 'I want to buy a paper doll', I can recall being a paper doll in the window. You'd know the song, "I want a real live doll instead of a paper doll."

15:30 Then we'd do a rumba number, a South American sort of number. We had showgirls, we had tap, very much the American revue tap shows. We had toe dancing in it, we had everything. The same as what you had at the Cremorne, we had there except they did the sketches and things, the Americans did mainly. They would use some of the Australian girls in those.

What were the sketches like?

I never have a chance to watch them

16:00 because we'd be changing and getting ready for the next. In the theatre you very seldom hear any of those things unless you want to sit down at rehearsals and hear them. Because you're up there changing your costume and getting ready for the next one to come down. Even if you're standing in the wings you might hear a little bit of it before you go on. Very few that I could ever remember and they never interested me, that style of, it wasn't humour to me anyway.

16:30 **What time would the night time show start?**

Around about eight o'clock and finish about ten thirty or eleven.

And was there an interval?

Yes, they'd have an interval. Exactly the same as any variety show of that day. Where the costumes come from I can't recall. George made all mine. Quite brilliant at it too. You'll see them in the photographs, he made all those costumes.

17:00 **Was it difficult to get the supplies to make the costumes?**

Yes, but our rationing, people would use curtain materials, they'd use anything. If you had any velvet drapes around the place or damask drapes they'd cut those up and use those to make costumes and there were a lot of costumes left in the theatres from before then that were in the wardrobe rooms. Even later on,

17:30 if I went to the theatre I could go, that's right, we used that costume in such. And they'd use them over the years, quite a big collection of costumes.

In a show each night how many acts would you do?

On a rough estimate, about twelve different dances. Someone said to me once, "How do you remember the routines."

18:00 I said usually the music is a guide, if you were doing the cancan you'd know straight off what you were doing and you'd just remember the sequence of steps that you would do and usually a cancan is pretty basic once you've done one and even to watch one now. I was waiting for it in 'Moulin Rouge' I thought, "Oh, I'll see the cancan," but they didn't do it.

18:30 They just did a bit of a flash at the beginning. You know that it's not going to be hard to remember that. We'd do shainers too, which they'd call them. They were easy, they were just floating around the stage in a nice long dress and just movements and that. They were easy ones and then sometimes we'd have practical jokers amongst those girls. If they didn't like a particular principal, as we called them.

19:00 There was one in particular who was a soprano and we would do a shainer around her and she would come out and we were used as a backdrop for her. It's like the singers today, as a background and we'd be the background for her and she was really nasty apparently. One of the girls, and it would have been one of those from the Tivoli in Sydney came up with this idea, of getting the stink bombs. Just as we exit.

19:30 They would drop one of those. Those girls down there were much braver than we were up here.

What was that interaction like with Sydney and Brisbane girls.

Great, no problem there. In fact there used to be a bit of an exchange sometimes. Some of the Brisbane girls would go down there. Mainly they would come up here because we didn't have a great lot up here that were eligible, but down there, in the Tivoli in Sydney.

20:00 I think they changed their program every two weeks the same as us, and a lot of the routines would be the same as what they did. You'd do an opening, there might be a comedian come out and do a skit on soldiers, particularly at that time, they'd do a lot like that, or airmen and you would come as a backdrop to him and I remember this routine, with guns. That was a hard one because that's something you don't do every day.

20:30 Everyone had to be in precision and flip them around this way and tap them and do that. What was the other one? The magic one. There'd be a magician and that was really good because we had to be little magicians and just work in the back of him as a routine. We had a little cylinder up here that you could

put a cigarette into and put it out. You'd come out

21:00 dressed as a magician, smoking a cigarette then you would put it in your hand, smoke and then just go like that and come out. Well the cigarette has gone up that little thing with a spike out and it went straight up there. The other one was you'd walk out with a cane. You had a hat and the cigarette and you had the cane and you'd have gloves. This cane concertinaed right in like that then you just took your gloves off.

21:30 As you walked around you would do that, the audience wouldn't see it. You'd take your gloves off and put them in your pocket. With the cigarette that was down there that you poked it into because sometimes the smoke would still be wafting out if you didn't get it out. Then you pulled out a sheet of paper out of your hand. Just a sheet of paper, it was like a tissue paper but it had a back stuck to it.

22:00 You'd rip it down one, down the other one, fold it around, stick it out and here was your hat with the pompom on the front, which was the paper. Quite a few tricks and you would do that. That was something you'd have to learn, it wasn't something you did every week. I can't think of any of the other tricks you did with that. I liked that one, it was quite good.

What was being used for music, was that a live band?

Yes, overtures and beginners. They used to come through every night about five to eight.

22:30 Little Herbie, I think it was, used to run through, he was quite a pansy looking little fella. "Overtures and beginners, overtures and beginners." And the girls would say, "Oh my, overtures and beginners," and have a go at him. They used to give him a hard time. He was only about sixteen or seventeen but he felt very important so they used to take him down every now and again. That was the big orchestra in the pit.

23:00 We had quite a big orchestra there, just like you see in most of those big shows there. The ballet mistress, she was a bit of a hard task one. Nobody got very close to her. I think she was married to the stage manager, so she was.

What about the actual theatre where you were doing 'Khaki and Lace' what was it like?

Lovely. Old Theatre Royal.

Where exactly was it?

It was Elizabeth Street.

23:30 I'm just trying to think what is there now in Elizabeth Street. Part of Myers, the side of Myers. That would be where it was. It was a big theatre, a lovely old theatre, I think there were a lot of ghosts in that theatre that they used to talk about. We used to have a flyman as we called him because I think they call, up in the flies,

24:00 that was where all the scenery would go up. He was a little hunchback, of course there was always stories about, and he lived there too. He ate and he slept there. He knew everything about curtains and flies and backdrops. They used to say that he had seen the ghost of Nellie Melba [Australian opera singer] there. She had performed there and they used to say, "You can see the ghost of Nellie Melba." I don't know how true that was.

24:30 Their dressing rooms were downstairs in the dungeon part. That was at that theatre. Ours at the Cremorne were overlooking the river, which was quite nice. We used to go swimming in that river at lunchtime sometimes. A very dangerous thing to do because it was full of sharks. We'd only dip in and dip out again I guess. They were full of rats all those old theatres underneath. A bit like Phantom of the Opera,

25:00 underneath there, that was very much like that. That's where the dressing rooms were in the Theatre Royal. That bag I told you about before eventually got a big hole in it where a rat had chewed. I probably had chocolates in it or something and he chewed right through it.

Did you have your own spot in the dressing room?

Yes. I had a makeup towel one time around the light in between the show.

25:30 It was so dirty and I thought, "I'll wash it now," because we used to use cold cream to get the make up off and we didn't have tissues in those days so we used to have little squares whatever you cut up of old towels or anything or rags and I'd run out of them and I thought, "Oh gosh, I'll try and get this clean." I wrapped it around the electric light bulb didn't I and went on. Then it started to smoke and then it dropped down. We had baize,

26:00 like an oil cloth, in front, if you were proud of your little area. It dropped down there and started to burn and Evie Hayes was in the dressing room opposite us and smelt it and rushed in and put it out and never said a word to anybody just put it out and was very quiet about it. I always appreciated that in her.

How many girls would be in each dressing room?

Ten of us, in a big long room and we all had

26:30 a section of about that much each. There's a photograph of us where we're all crowding round one little area, I'll show you that later. We all had to buy our own makeup but we were paid pretty well. My husband was getting about five shillings a week, he was only a police cadet at the time and I was getting three pounds seven and six.

27:00 An usherette was getting two pounds seven and six. We got three pounds seven and six but then you did buy your own make up which was German makeup. Lushness I think they called it, I think they still have it around, it was pancake stick, you know, and you'd have lots of that and lots of mascara and you'd come out to the sides of your eyes, like this and put a red dot, why I don't know why you'd put the red dot there. I used to make false eyelashes.

27:30 I think it was Dolly Dyer taught me how to do it. You get your own hair but it's not a lot you need so you just take a little piece out of here, another piece out of there and then you get two nails and put them against your dressing table, just poke them in there and then get some black cotton, nice strong black cotton, thread that over. Then get two of your hairs and put them there and bring it out through there and knot it through there until you get so much.

28:00 Then cut them in half. Then get a thin pencil and a piece of paper, we used to get toilet paper or tissue paper and then wet them and roll them in the little pencil and leave them overnight and then shape them the next day like that. Then get a type of glue and put them onto your eyes. I used to make quite a lot of false eyelashes in those days.

How long would one of those last?

28:30 Probably a few weeks. We used to make them for each other. Who could make them the best would be making them, but you had to remember to roll them every night so that they'd be curled, otherwise they'd be just straight out. So you'd wet them and roll them and just tie a bit of cotton at each end and when you took them off they'd be all nice. I can't remember what sort of glue we used. It wouldn't have been glue that you used on shoes or anything, I don't think. They'd be on. I've got photographs there with these big eyelashes.

29:00 **What about the lipsticks what sort of lipsticks did you use?**

Some very strong lipstick it was. I can't recall what it was but it was in a long tube. It had to be very dense. All the makeup was very dense, you'd never go outside with it on. That was why the cold cream, you'd have to get that off. One thing about it though, when you took it off you'd only need lipstick on because your face would be so fresh from everything.

29:30 It took a long time to make up. We used to get in there about seven o'clock for an eight o'clock show. You wouldn't dare get in at half past seven and try to be made up in time. You couldn't do it.

Do you know how you were regarded by ordinary girls?

There was a mixture there, I suppose. I don't think it was quite as bad as what it was say in the 1920's,

30:00 the roaring twenties. I don't think it was like that. I think that we were looked up to a little bit. A little bit like when the shows on TV come. A lot of them went on to TV. The ones that were still in the business of course. I'm trying to think of some of them.

30:30 Evie Hayes, she went on because she was on 'Young Talent Time' as an adjudicator, and of course Dolly Dyer, she was there doing 'Pick-a-box'. A couple of the other girls went on. I think they brought Theatre Royal to the TV screen at some stage and some of them did that. A lot of them were younger than I was, at that stage, they would have been lot younger.

So you would have been somewhat of a celebrity then?

31:00 In those days, yes, in a lot of ways. All the Cremorne girls. I can remember when we went out to do this out at the Archerfield and somebody said two of the ex-Cremorne girls are coming out and they were all excited when we went out they said, "Well, they're no different to us are they." They didn't accept us that well, I don't know what they were expecting.

At the Theatre Royal where you were doing 'Khaki and Lace' how big was the theatre, how many people did it seat?

31:30 It was a big theatre, I'm trying to think what it would be equivalent too. Bigger than when you go to the movies today, they're very small movie theatres aren't they. I can't think of an original theatre that we have any more. We don't have them any more, they're all sections aren't they. Very big theatres with the boxes at the side.

32:00 Cremorne didn't have boxes but the Theatre Royal did. They had the Theatre Royal box on both sides like you see in the movies. About four of those boxes, you sit up there and look down. Sometimes they would do sketches and they'd put the stooge in up there and he would heckle back and forwards.

General public could go to these shows, it wasn't just for servicemen?

I think they were allowed.

32:30 I can't recall that. It was for service personnel so I'm not sure. I'd say that they wouldn't have charged them to go. I'd think it was probably just for servicemen, possibly Australian servicemen could have gone too. I doubt that they would have prohibited them. There was enough of both of them here.

33:00 **Was that a job for a lot of the girls, or was that their way of contributing to the war effort?**

That was contributing to the war effort, definitely. I had a girlfriend who was a nurse. She was going to study as a nurse and they wanted to put her into, what would you call it, we called it an insane asylum in those days.

33:30 Her mother didn't want her to go there, she was too young and too innocent. Anyway, she paid to become a nurse at the Mater Hospital. Ended up marrying the doctor in charge of the hospital there. Became a theatre nurse but you had to pay for your tuition in those days. You just didn't go and get a job and work at it. It was called manpower, everybody had to do something. If you weren't in an industry that was,

34:00 like my husband, he couldn't join because he was in something that they wanted him there, for the battle of Brisbane as I said before. Most people wanted to do something, even the elderly people would be knitting or crocheting and sending things over. I remember that joke, "Why'd you send me three socks? You'd heard I'd grown a foot." They used to have that in the papers. I can remember too Arphoo, did you ever hear of him?

34:30 He used to be a little character, just drawn, a little circle with two eyes and a nose, peeping over a fence and they say, "Shh, Arphoo's here, don't talk about the war." Because everything had to be very quiet, you wouldn't say where the troops were or anything. Arphoo was always around and you'd find him on fences and walls everywhere. I'm amazed that nobody's brought Arphoo up.

Do you know where they got that name?

I don't know.

35:00 Probably because of the Japanese, their interpretation of Arphoo. That's all they could think about I guess.

When you were on stage doing the shows for the servicemen what could you see from on stage?

Usually you don't see much, you might see the first few rows because of the spot lights that are beaming down from where they have the lights up in the room there.

35:30 The lighting box up there and they'd have all the different spotlights for different acts. So you are more or less blinded by that but you'd see the first few rows and you'd see the orchestra pit below. Because a lot of people worked to that, a lot of the sketch people worked down to that pit. They were very accomplished musicians down there because they had to play a lot of music during the thing, not only the dances. They'd have all the different

36:00 principals to play to and that. A girl just died recently, she was there, you've heard of Topano, she's an actress here in Brisbane, Peta Topano. Her mother used to be there as a violinist, a brilliant violinist. I just read her obituary just recently in the paper. She would be accompanied by that orchestra down there

36:30 even though she was a great violinist herself they'd still have to accompany her.

The servicemen that were coming to the shows, were they coming in uniform?

Yes. I think they were always in uniform. MacArthur was here about that time near Saint Leonard's.

Do you know if he ever made it to any of the shows?

I don't know. It was just around the corner from where he was staying anyway.

37:00 I believe they had to make a bed for him because he was so tall. Did you hear that? They had to make a special bed. I didn't ever see him. He could have been there and I wouldn't know.

The Cremorne Theatre, where was it?

Cremorne is where the Performing Arts is today. On the side where the art gallery is actually. Therefore it was right on the river bank.

37:30 **What was it like inside?**

Very nice. It had been playing for many years. Years and years ago when my parents knew it, it had sawdust on the floor and then they made it into a proper theatre. It was quite nice. They didn't have any boxes. They had just, as I said, the two rostrums at the side.

38:00 The first show we ever did there was 'Stairway to the Stars' I can recall that particular one. Funny how

some things stick in your memory and some doesn't.

Was there any particular occasions that you can remember during the shows where you had a really great sense of what you were doing towards the war.

At 'Khaki and Lace' yes, definitely.

38:30 Because there were so many personnel around you that you did feel as though you were doing something. Then as I say, when that stopped, I suppose it was getting near the end of the war by that stage, that's when we thought we'd do the other, you know, by going out to Archerfield. As I said Land Army didn't do anything for me, although a lot of the girls did, as I said before, went into the Land Army.

39:00 **In the dressing rooms did the girls talk a lot about the war?**

No, I don't think we did. It was so remote to us. It was so far away. Even though you'd go to the newsreel theatres and hear it on the newsreel. I don't think we wanted to know. It wasn't as though we were being bombed. The only thing is the rationing, was a little bit tough but everybody the same.

39:30 It wasn't like today when you can just go out and buy a new dress if you feel like buying a new dress, you just wore what you had and you made do with a lot of things. I have a picture of us there at rehearsal in our civilian clothes and I look back on it and think, "Oh my gosh, we wore those things?" We weren't afraid. The only thing I was afraid of was when the Japanese war came in and it was getting close. When they were bombing Townsville I thought they were getting very close here

40:00 and you'd hear the air raid sirens quite often. But you just went on. I always think about Britain there how they went on with their life and they were being bombed so it just didn't get to us that much.

Do you recall hearing about Sydney, about the?

Submarine? Yes, that was scary, that was a bit close.

40:30 I think everybody used to try to boost everybody else up and say, "No, that can't get here. There's no way they're going to get here." It's a bit like Singapore, the way they sort of said, "No, they'd never take Singapore." Well, Brisbane was a bit like that. In my circle of friends we all said, "No, no, they can't get here." If I spoke to any of the older people and say, "I'm frightened." They'd say, "There's no way they're going to get here." So that sort of convinced you a lot.

Tape 5

00:31 **When you were working in the shows was there Actors' Equity around then?**

No, that's an interesting thing. We didn't have Actors' Equity. We worked six days a week and an extra show on the Saturday. There were no holidays. After a while one of the girls married a chap that started Actors' Equity up here.

01:00 We joined and we paid sixpence a week. He tried for holidays for us. I had left before we got the holidays. We didn't have it then.

So at the time when you ran into that problem when five of you walked out, that was before Equity?

01:30 No. We had got Equity just a little bit before that but they weren't strong enough to do anything about it. They had just started maybe one year beforehand. We hadn't even got to the stage of having holidays then. It was interesting because we were all willing to join for sixpence a week out of our three pounds seven and six or whatever it was. So that was quite good. He was just a chap,

02:00 actually he worked in the funeral parlour of all things. One of the ballet girls married him and lived with him upstairs. That was interesting.

Did you ever go to visit?

Yes, I did and I thought, "Ooh." Yes. It was good that they gradually got a union because now as you know Actors' Equity is so big.

Was it called Actors' Equity?

Actors' Equity, that's right.

02:30 **The dance hall that you used to go to at the Trocadero, where was that?**

It wasn't very far from the theatre. It was about two blocks away. Even though south Brisbane was for the Negroes, as we called them, they weren't allowed into the Trocadero even though that was on their side of town. There were quite a few characters used to go there, mostly American servicemen but we used to have a little Australian fella.

03:00 He was a short chap but he could dance so well. He was always in our group as well as any Americans that we knew. We weren't dating them or anything but they knew that we'd be there and we liked the way that they danced. We really enjoyed that. We had one character there called 'Trocadero Annie'. None of us wore long dresses in those days but she always came in a long dress.

03:30 She was so different from everybody else but she always went home with a yank, we used to see that. She was a lot older than us too. Why the long dresses I'll never know, when nobody wore long dresses.

What were you wearing after the shows?

We were wearing, very much the same clothes I noticed the other day in, did you see Mona Lisa Smile? You saw the clothes that they were wearing, the dresses down to about there. Very, very similar to that.

04:00 **For people who may not have seen the movie can you describe it for us?**

Yes. It was what they called the new look. Dior brought in the new look just after the war years. This was around about the same time. You'd wear bobby socks. Little socks rolled down and skirts around about to mid calf, I suppose. Usually a sweater and a string of pearls or something like that. That was more or less the uniform everywhere.

04:30 Hair tied back in a pony tail or something. A little bit Grease style of things, very similar.

What sort of music was being played at the Trocadero?

Very much, as I said before, Glenn Miller, Woody Herman, 'String of Pearls' I can remember that one and 'Golden Wedding'. I don't know if you ever heard that one. It stops and starts all the time. It's a real jitterbug music and then it fades and you think it's stopped and all of a sudden it comes back again.

05:00 They do that about three or four times so everybody starts jiving again, if you call it jiving, we called it jitterbugging.

What actually happens at those dance halls? You go in and there's people sitting in alcoves.

Yes. You go along you ask somebody to dance. I think the alcoves were just a gimmick of the Trocadero to make it look quite ritzy or something. They have all the alcoves. No drink. Although I think at the Australian dances, although I'd never been to an Australian dance until after the war,

05:30 the fellas would stand outside with a few beers before they'd come in and ask a girl to dance. I'd never come across that with the Americans but there probably were some that were drinking before they came in, to get Dutch courage [confidence that comes after drinking alcohol] too, I guess.

Did people dance in a group or was it all one on one?

No, not like today. It was always one on one. No one would ever dance with anybody else's partner.

06:00 I can recall my husband saying once at a sound lounge, they came in after the war, sound lounges, that's when they'd have a group of girls would get up and dance, a group of boys would get up and dance and they'd sort of wander off from each other. There was a fight one night, I remember my husband breaking it up said, "What was that about?" and he said, "Oh, he wanted to dance with my girl." And my husband said, "But nobody dances with each other they're all dancing alone out there."

06:30 You never got up and danced with another girl either in those days.

Would girls ask boys to dance?

No. That would have been great, wouldn't it?

So if a boy comes and asked you to dance would that just mean he's entitled to dance with you for one song?

That's only for one dance and then he'd probably bring you back and he might ask for the next dance and you could refuse if you wanted to, or not.

07:00 If he was a good dancer you'd think, "Yeah, I'll have another one." Most of the Americans were good dancers.

Did you ever say no to any of them?

No, I don't think I did. Because they were all pretty good. It was mainly the dancing too that was so great. Whether it was war time or what with the music but I suppose with all young people you hear the music and you want to dance. Even the children are like that with hi-fi and those other groups.

07:30 It was good music in those days. I believe it was anyway, it was music. I know my grandson sometimes says, "They used to tell stories in the music in those days grandma, didn't they." And I said, "Well yes," because now he said it's just the beat, but they had a beat. I remember when Glenn Miller was killed, I think he was killed in an air crash. That was a sad time for all of us.

08:00 The other one was Frank Sinatra, we all loved Frank Sinatra in those days. He was the favourite.

At those dance halls was it okay to say no to a boy if he asked you to dance?

Yes, it probably was, no problem. I think they were used to that but the yanks had more nerve to ask the girls than the Australian soldiers I think.

08:30 I know a lot of Australian men or boys I spoke to in those days they would be so devastated if a girl said no to them. They'd be so embarrassed, they'd have to walk back where they were without a partner. Whereas I don't think it bothered the yanks much.

If a girl couldn't ask a boy to dance how did a girl let a guy know that she wanted to dance with him?

It's interesting you should ask that because today can a girl ask a boy for a dance?

Yes.

I didn't know that. Good, at last, you can pick and choose.

09:00 No, no it's the same as ringing a boy. You never ever rang a boy. You always waited until he rang you. Things have changed for the best.

If you saw a boy that you liked though, could you somehow let him know?

Yes. Probably body language or something would work that way. A glance would be over there and if you got a glance back, then another look. I think there was always a way around that.

09:30 **When you were dancing with a guy are you talking to him?**

Yes. Although in jitterbugging you didn't talk much, you were so concentrating on everything. As you know, the dance where they threw you up in the air and through their legs and around like that. It was just real great.

How did that work, were there set dances?

There were set steps that if he was a good dancer he would just give you the little movement and you immediately knew that meant to turn around or he's going to put me under his legs now or he's going to throw me up in the air next time.

10:00 If he was a good dancer he had the way of, just a little pressure here and there that you knew.

Why do you think the Americans were better dancers than the Australians?

The Australians didn't know much about it. They weren't as outgoing because they were more mateship, with the boys all the time. This is what I believe. Maybe that mightn't have been it but that's the way I worked it out. That they'd rather be seen with a group of their mates than they would be with a group of girls.

10:30 That was something they did just privately, you know.

Were there many romances that started in the Trocadero?

I'm sure there would have been lots. In fact I know of a couple of girls from the theatre that met, they went over. One went to New York and the other one somewhere else in America. They met their future husbands there. There was a lot of that.

11:00 **I know it's a big generalisation but in those war times with those cross-national romances, what would an average courting time be before you might get asked to be married?**

It wouldn't be very long. You could get a proposal within a week. Which was ridiculous but a lot of girls fell for it. Another thing too, if you became engaged to an American you had to go to a doctor and be examined.

11:30 It wasn't so much engaged. If you were going to marry him. Before the authorities in the army would give permission, which they had to have permission for you to marry. You would have to go to a doctor and be examined before you could be permitted to marry him.

What were you being examined for?

I don't know whether they wanted to know whether you were a virgin or what. I don't know but I had two girlfriends that had to do that. They'd get a certificate from their doctor to say that they could be married.

12:00 That's the only conclusion I could come to was that. I don't know whether they were entitled to that. A lady, Cilento, was the one that used to do most of the girls because she was a female doctor and they'd prefer a female. At that time I guess most of the females went to a female doctor. She was quite famous for doing the American ones.

Do you know if there was much sexual activity, pre-marital sex going on?

12:30 Very, very little. If it was it was very private. I'd say it would have been going on, no doubt about it,

since time began, but it wasn't out in the open. Nobody lived together. They probably might go on a sneaky little holiday or something together but there was no living outright together. I always say to my husband too it went on just the same in those days as it does today but it's more out in the open today. Probably try before you buy now isn't it, very much.

13:00 **You briefly mentioned earlier that condoms were unheard of…**

They called them French letters in those days. No one ever spoke about it. You'd know from the movies, you'd go and see and the man would wait outside. Even when we were married my husband would hesitate before going into a chemist shop and buying something like that. It was just, particularly if there was a female attendant there. They wouldn't ask her they'd ask for toothpaste or something like that.

13:30 That was quite common knowledge nowadays. Now everything's out in the open which I think is a darn good thing.

Were there any other options for contraceptive?

No, except if you were a practicing Catholic and a very strong Catholic. You'd probably have, maybe, I think I've heard of it, the rhythm method or something. I don't know what that's about but I have heard it. There was another apparatus too that they talked of, I didn't know much about that.

14:00 A coil, different things like that. I think there were. I don't know if those things are used today, they wouldn't now with the pill.

How was menstruation dealt with?

That's interesting also because when you're at the theatre. In those days you did not have tampons.

14:30 You couldn't always afford to buy Modess [sanitary napkins] so you had little towels cut up and they'd be washed and hung out to dry. You were lucky if you got all the stains out and you'd only do it in cold water not hot water and then you'd feel, are they sterilised, sort of thing. Nobody could afford to go and buy a packet of Modess. You'd be very wealthy if you could afford that.

I wondered about that, I've heard of that before, but I wondered in the theatre if you're wearing tight fitting costumes.

15:00 Yes well, they weren't as brief as they are today you wouldn't have a g-string or anything that way. Nothing as brief as that. They'd be like a brief more or less. And all the pants were lined. And, as I say, a little towel and a sanitary belt would be about the most you'd have. You'd be pretty safe most of the time unless you ran out of towels or anything like that.

15:30 Very unhygienic when you look back on it.

What about, nowadays there's lots of different medications around for period pain but back then if you're doing dances?

I can't think of the tablet we'd take. There was a tablet, it was like a Panadol or a Panadeine. I can't think of it, it wasn't one of those it was another brand that we had in those days and I can recall taking those at different times.

16:00 Not a Bex. It was a tablet. I can't think what it was. I know I used to use them occasionally. You didn't have much trouble that way. A few little episodes there, not connected with that, one girl's shoe flew off, one night, into the audience. She's kicking away and next thing it flies, Joanie Bertan, I remember her. She's the one that married the American and went over to New York. Hers went flying.

16:30 That was a big joke around the place. Another time one of the girl's bras snapped and it was during an Egyptian dance when they had cymbals that went up and down like that so she just put them across like that and went off to the side of the stage.

Did anyone ever fall over?

No I can't recall anyone ever falling over. It was just silly little things like that but she never lived that down for years, the shoe falling off. I think because the tap shoes were tied with bows in those days and probably the bow came undone and it flung out.

17:00 Don't know if it hit anybody.

When we were talking earlier about your father's family and illegitimate children and that sort of thing. By the time it got to your generation if someone had an unwanted pregnancy was there any option for abortion?

Yes, but not legally. It was done. In fact I can recall one found at Paddington, the abortion went wrong and she died.

17:30 It was under, of all places, a mango tree out at Paddington there, where they found the body. That was one abortion that went wrong and they just put her there. It was very bad in those days. I suppose they used different methods to try get rid of children in those days. I did know a lady, who was a nurse from

Toowoomba.

18:00 I met her daughter, lovely lady, she's still alive today. A little older than I am, I was speaking to her the other day. As I said my mother and father always took anybody in. I don't know where my parents met the mother but they came down and said would they have this particular person, could she live with us in Brisbane for about six months. Apparently she had a pregnancy. She got the best room in the house.

18:30 That was my mother and father's, they moved into another bedroom and gave her theirs. She lived with us for about twelve months, became a very dear friend, still is. Her mother had aborted her herself. She was a nurse and used to do that in Toowoomba. She was what they called an illegal abortionist. As I say she became a very dear friend of the whole family. She married the chap that she had the abortion to and they lived happily ever after I guess.

19:00 **Did you know any other cases of people who had an abortion?**

No, she's the only one and I didn't know that at the time. It was kept very secret from me. It wasn't until years later that my mother told me and it came out that her mother was a practicing abortionist in Toowoomba. Being a nurse. I had been up to visit them once and I thought, "Oh what a lovely home." Everything was so expensive around the place and I could understand why when I found out later.

To get an illegal abortion would it have been very expensive?

19:30 I should imagine it would have been because she was very wealthy. I'd say that that's where she got her wealth. That was only until recently, is it still illegal here?

It mustn't be because I think you can get it on Medicare.

Can you really?

In certain circumstances I think you can.

In certain circumstances, yes. Because there was that doctor that recently died that was aborting them over in west end somewhere. He was in a lot of trouble. So I thought maybe the law's changed.

20:00 **Do you know how illegal it was back then?**

Yes, and the sad thing about it was the backyard people were doing it and weren't doing it hygienically and people were dying from it. So they did try to make it legal so that that wouldn't happen. Certain circumstances I suppose, today, you'd be able to, in rape cases. Maybe in rape cases they might have. I'm not sure.

20:30 **While we're talking about medication and that sort of thing. What about in the theatre if you had an injury that wasn't a major one that required surgery, was there any circumstances of that?**

I can remember when I was there I had appendicitis one night. I went home and I was vomiting and quite ill. I thought it was something I ate. I must have been about seventeen at the time.

21:00 I went to the doctor and he said, "Your appendix have got to come out." They took those out and I was about seven days in those days. I know the girls would come up to see me and I said, "Don't make me laugh," because that really hurt. I was back doing a Russian dance the following week. Somebody said, "It's a wonder you didn't have adhesions from doing that." But no, nothing happened. It was all done and that was it. That did happen occasionally. I had about a week off work for that one.

21:30 If anyone did get sick, although, I don't think many people got sick, I can't recall them ever getting sick.

Were there minor injuries that people would dance with? Twisted ankles?

No. Very little. You always limbered up before you went on. You always did a lot of exercise, a lot of loosening up before you went there. You never went out cold. I think that's something, particularly if you were doing any ballet toe dancing routines, you really limbered up before you went out so you're very warm.

22:00 I think that's when the injuries start, when they're cold.

What about the submarine gentleman that you became involved with, where did you meet him?

I must have met him at a dance. We had Sunday night dances. Eventually they came into being. We could never go to a dance any other night except that few dances of a Saturday night or Sunday. So they opened Sunday night dances at the City Hall for all servicemen.

22:30 That's where I would have met him. I can recall, he gave me, I had turned twenty one. In those days people just didn't celebrate twenty one, some people did, but we never thought of it I suppose. Anyway, he knew I was turning twenty one. I had a big surprise party at the Princes restaurant in town. All my family was there. The week after that, that's when the proposal came.

23:00 Then he went the next day and that was the last I ever heard or saw so I'd say he probably went down

in the submarine.

How did he propose?

I can't recall that now. I was quite willing to become engaged. The fact that he was going away too, we decided that we'd become engaged. He'd bought the ring, gave it to me.

23:30 I just said, "Yes." When I look back on it now I wonder if it could have lasted because I wouldn't have known him long enough. But this was what happened in those days, you did rush into a lot of things.

Do you recall how long it was from when you first started seeing him to when he proposed?

No, it was only weeks. That was the silly part of the war years, it was just too soon. You'd never do that today. I think it was happening everywhere and some things turned out all right and some didn't.

24:00 **At the time that he proposed had you actually discussed what would happen about you going back to America or?**

No, nothing like that. You just lived from day to day. My sister, she had known her husband for quite some time before hand. He had been here and then he was sent to New Guinea. Then he was sent back and when he came back he proposed and she was married here in Brisbane and everything was done in the formal way that we do it today.

24:30 She did have a lot of time even though she was very young at the time when she met him. She only would have been about seventeen and a half. Then went back there and had a very good life back there in America.

So the gentleman that you became engaged to, you got engaged and then he left on the submarine. Did you have a big farewell with him?

No, no, you couldn't do that in those days. That wasn't on at all because everything was very secret. Half the time you didn't know where they were going.

25:00 So you didn't hear. That's where Arphoo came in. Everyone had to be very silent.

How did that transpire? He left and?

That was it. You never heard where any of the ships went or anything. Nine times out of ten though, the submarine was sunk, most times. That was it, you never heard any more.

What were you thinking when days and weeks?

After about six months I realised what would have happened.

25:30 Because I'm sure I would have heard something from somebody there. Never a word. There were so many submarines that had been torpedoed that you just took it for granted that that was it. You waited about six months, twelve months and that was it. I never ever heard anything. They didn't even tell you the names of them. Probably after the war you could have found out. I know, I had an uncle that was on the [HMAS] Sydney.

26:00 It wasn't for years after that you found out what happened with that. It just went across the horizon or something I believe and they never saw it again.

So around about that six month mark when you were realising that more than likely his submarine had been sunk there was no avenue for you even to try and find out?

No. Because everything was very secret you didn't ask about anything like that. There were movements in the war that you weren't allowed to find out and they'd never tell you anything.

26:30 Probably after the war you could have probably found out but not during that time because everyone had to be very silent. They had little signs up everywhere, "Loose lips sink ships." Something like that. You'd see these signs about so nobody asked questions.

That must have been fairly devastating, was it?

It was. Although not so devastating as the first little episode because I knew that that was definitely what happened but the other one I don't know.

27:00 **I suppose you weren't the only one that it was happening to?**

No, this is it. It's just like, as I said before, getting a spanking or a hiding with the strap. Everybody got it in those days, most people did, so it wasn't anything unusual. Being without during the Depression years, everyone was in the same boat so it didn't matter.

When did you first start becoming aware that the Americans were moving out and being posted elsewhere, was it gradual?

27:30 Yes it was rather gradual. Once the atom bomb was dropped and Japan surrendered that's when. They didn't move out straight away, they were very, very slow at moving. I think a lot of merchant navy started coming in then, the merchant marines, whatever they call them. It was pretty gradual. They

were around for a few years afterwards but not so much the soldiers. The soldiers left pretty fast.

28:00 I remember my sister being sent back and it wasn't long before he was back with her. The merchant marines were here but why that was I don't know. After the Americans had left I worked for Maxim Navigation company which was an American shipping firm here. I went there as a telephonist. They were here for a couple of years.

28:30 I was with them for about six months, twelve months before I was married. After I was married they took their agency away from Brisbane. They had the big Mariposa and the Monterey. They were great big luxury liners that they must have used them for troop carriers during the war years I should imagine. They wouldn't keep their agency here because the wharf labourers used to hold them at ransom. They would go on strike all the time.

29:00 It was costing them thousand of dollars or pounds a day to stay at berth, to keep it at the wharves. They decided it just wasn't economical for them to stay here so they took their agency away. I don't think they sailed much after the war years. It was just too expensive for anybody to go on their ships.

I just thought of another question I wanted to ask you about those dances. So, the Trocadero, that was primarily US?

29:30 Well it was for Australians too. Anybody could go there but Americans went there a lot.

And the ones at City Hall?

That was open for everybody too. Americans or Australians. That was a bit rare in those days because it was Sunday night. Nobody had much to do on, you didn't have sports or anything on Sundays in those days, and to have dances, but because it was war time I guess they permitted it. That was a great thing to look forward to every Sunday night. That was good.

30:00 **That would have been quite a change. Did the older generation frown on that a little bit?**

I can remember one night I was going there and my father said to me, "Where do you think you're going?" I must have been about nineteen, twenty at the time. I said, "I'm going to the dance." "Where?" "City Hall." "That's what you think. You didn't ask my permission." I think I just went. I got to that stage in my life that I thought, "I'm old enough, I'm going." So I just went.

30:30 I think he realised then, "Okay, that's it."

At either of those dances was there ever trouble between the Americans and the Australians at the dances?

Oh, yes. A lot of times. There'd be fights but they always had the MPs [Military Police] around. They were always pretty close and they had the Australian soldier police, whatever they called them, I'm not sure the term they used.

31:00 We had our police there, belonging to the army. Americans had their army police which were, I can't think of the term they used for them. But they were always in evidence around the place. You're right, provos [Provosts – Military Police] and the MPs, yes.

Was that ever a scary situation for you at all?

No.

31:30 I was never worried about that because I thought they had it all under control. There were lots of us there together in crowds. If you just sort of stick together it didn't matter. That didn't scare me. We had a lot of dances around the city then. Different avenues would start up. There was money to be made I suppose, big money because they used to crowd into the dances. They had quite a lot. In Addlow Street there was a dance hall.

32:00 Dances everywhere.

How much would it cost to go to a dance?

I don't know. I can't remember that. Probably the girls, it'd be a bit like today. You know they let the girls into the nightclubs and they don't have to pay. Maybe it was like that.

With the tension that was going on between the American and the Australian soldiers, did the Australian soldiers ever give you a hard time for being with the Americans?

Yes. You would be. If you were in that situation anywhere near them.

32:30 If there were a few Australian soldiers together they'd have a few remarks. I never came across that but it was quite a common occurrence.

What sort of things would they say to girls?

Not so much the girls, but yes, it was the girls too, now that I come to think of it. "Yankee something or other," they'd call them. "Yankee lovers," or something that way. I don't blame them when I look back on it, the poor things.

Do you know if the girls ever used to anything back to them?

No. They were too quiet to say anything back.

33:00 Not like today, they'd soon tell them, wouldn't they.

When you were telling us earlier about George and Michael, those two?

Yes, that was a big surprise. It wasn't until years later that I realised what it was. I didn't have any ideas about Michael. Michael was just a dance partner, very nice. Just a lovely person. I didn't have any romantic ideas about him but George I did.

33:30 I met him when I was about sixteen and I can remember my sixteenth birthday party. He was very talented as an artist in every way. He could draw, he could paint, anything. He'd drawn this beautiful picture of me with 'Sweet sixteen, so-and-so' I thought, that's one little inkling that I misread. Then his aunts, they all lived at south Brisbane. He had aunts and uncles.

34:00 They were an all Lebanese family. The old aunts had never married. There were two of those. There were two brothers. They had a garage there. I'd go over there at weekends and George would cut out costumes and different things. I used to just like being there. The aunts would ask me, "Has George kissed you yet," and I'd say, "No," he'd say good night and that would be it. I think they were trying to find out whether he was gay too.

34:30 I think the brothers had an idea, the uncles. Of course then, naturally, he would have met Michael and they might have come up with the idea of the show. He and Michael got on very well together and when I look back on it I think perhaps there was something there.

When did you find out?

It wasn't until years later. Somebody said, "Did you know?" They didn't call it gay in those days they called it camp, he was camp.

35:00 In the theatre, anybody camp, I knew about that, they used to call them 'Mother so and so'. Here's 'Mother Johnson' and as soon as you heard that you'd think 'yes'. You'd hear expressions like, "They're as camp as a row of tents." After a while, as you grew a bit older you thought, "Yes." The word gay was never used in that context at all. I don't know when that started. Much later.

35:30 Or they were a queen. And fairies was another one. I must have heard it somewhere along the line and put two and two together then, after we'd known each other for three or four years.

Mixing in the theatre circle where that wasn't that great a shock

It wasn't a shock to me. It would have been a shock to outsiders.

36:00 **Actually in that theatre scene, the men that you knew were queens or camp?**

Not all of them.

But the ones that you knew that were, were they ever together with another man?

No it was kept very quiet. I always think that our stage boy the one that used to come out singing, "Overtures and beginners please." I'm sure he had the makings of one, very much so. The girls used to give him a really hard time.

36:30 **When was it that you actually left the theatre?**

It would have been when I was around about twenty two when I left the theatre. Or was it twenty one maybe.

What made you leave?

That was the episode. Or do you mean the theatre all together? I got married then. That was about twenty three, I got married.

37:00 I used to even have nightmares thinking I was back there on a day that they'd finished all the rehearsals and I'd gone in there and I didn't know what they were doing and so I had to go on. What's the word? Pretend to know all the dances and copy them, improvise. I was going to improvise. I'd wake up and think, "Oh my god, that would have been terrible." To do all those things and not know what you were doing.

37:30 That went on for years I can remember that. Then I got a call one day to say would I join the Galloping Grandmas. That's a troupe that are here in Brisbane. I knew a few of the girls that were in there. They were a lot younger than I was. I just thought, "No," it was just something I didn't feel was quite dignified for me anyway. For them yes, possibly.

38:00 It wasn't long after that that a lot of them went off with their knee complaints and a few other things. One lass is still going. She just loves the theatre and loves being in everything. They go along to the aged homes and do a lot of dances which is very, very good but I just couldn't see myself doing that.

What was it that made you want to get the job out at Archerfield?

The war effort. I think everybody was very patriotic in those day, I think you had to be.

38:30 Everyone was talking about the war and what you could do and what you couldn't do. We didn't have women in army. I don't think we did, only in nursing professions and Land Army and that. That was it then. I knew that that was about the only thing we could do at that stage. As I said, I didn't want the Land Army because I didn't want to go away from home anywhere. There were girls that went away to New Guinea entertaining the troops.

39:00 Again I just wasn't too keen on going that far away. A lot of them did go up there. I don't know why I didn't go really. I think the other was more interesting.

Did you ever hear stories from the girls that went to New Guinea?

No, not really. The ones that went, you have a different group in the theatre. I had three or four that I kept with and the others, they came after me too.

39:30 They were a lot younger. By that stage, they were seventeen and eighteen and sixteen and it was all exciting for them too go I guess. They were the ones that went, I didn't have a lot in common with those as I did with the other ones.

What was the recruitment process that you went through for the job at Archerfield?

We must have gone along to manpower. That's what they called it in those days.

40:00 We would have gone along there and asked if there was anything we could do. I think that was suggested to us. The format, as I said, was to go along to the school for three months and then after that if you could read your micrometer you went out there I guess. That would have been the case. Manpower was very much on to anybody that wasn't employed. Everybody had to do their bit anyway.

40:30 At that stage it was getting close to near the end of the war so I don't know if it would have been so strong. But at the beginning of the war they were just taking the young girls and putting them into different positions.

Tape 6

00:33 **Of all the Americans that were in Brisbane do you know what proportion were sailors and air force and army?**

No I don't but I know there were lots of soldiers. There were marines too. That would have confused the issue, soldiers and marines together, same uniform. More so the navy I would say. It was just near the latter part that the submarines started coming in.

01:00 **Can you remember the submarine base being in the Brisbane River there, near South Bank?**

No I can't. That's where it would have been, wouldn't it.

Can you remember seeing much of the vehicles that were on the Brisbane River at that time?

No and yet the theatre was on the river. I can't remember. It would have been further down near the wharves. Down Newstead way and Hamilton. I'd say they couldn't come up the Brisbane River, I don't think.

01:30 Maybe not, no, I don't think they would have been able to come up the Brisbane River. I know that there was Newstead House down there. That's where I used to see some of the ships, there.

What was the river like? We see it these days and it looks quite horrible.

Well it was worse. You mean the colour? Yes it's always been like that. They've always been dredging it and doing things. It's never been a blue river or anything.

02:00 It's always been a bit that way. A lot of people used to go crabbing there and fishing. As I said, I used to swim there sometimes in the hot weather. We'd be rehearsing and we'd have a lunch break, we'd go for a swim. My mother heard about that and she was horrified. She made me promise not to do that again. There were a lot of sharks around there so I could see why she was horrified. It was just something you never thought about.

What other things in Brisbane did you notice were different as far as war time Brisbane was concerned?

02:30 We didn't have the, I was always hoping that we'd have a café that you could eat outside. We never got one until Christie's opened and they put a couple of chairs and tables outside for a short while. Until the council told them to put them inside again. We had the Black Cat milk bar and the Pig and Whistle. That

was the thing. I could never afford to go there.

03:00 They used to serve college straight ups, that sounded good to me. There was another place in town. During the war years you couldn't get a lot of fruits and cream. One place in town I used to go to regularly. They'd make fruit salad and serve cream with fruit salad. That was a treat, always. We had a rock and roll George in Brisbane. That was near the end of the war years. Have you heard of him? He's worth interviewing, the rock and roll George.

03:30 He was Lebanese, lived at south Brisbane and he had one of the first Holdens that were ever made and he still has it. I think one of the radio stations recently wanted to do it up for him free but he wouldn't accept that. He didn't want them to touch his, thing. He used to drive up and down Queen Street where the mall is today. He'd have ribbons from his car, it was always polished up and honk his horn at all the girls.

04:00 He'd go up and down every Sunday. The girls christened him rock and roll George because he played the music as he was going too. We never saw a girl in the car. I don't think he ever got one.

Can you remember the big pipes that used to run through the streets in case Brisbane was ever bombed?

No. I remember the air raid shelters but not the pipes. What sort of pipes?

Some of the fellas have said

04:30 **that they ran pipes straight out of the Brisbane River, through the streets, so if Brisbane was ever bombed they could use them as fire hydrants.**

Really? I never knew that. That was too technical for me I guess. I remember everywhere there were air raid shelters.

Can you describe what the air raid shelters were like?

They looked like they were made of big concrete boxes. There could be one still around somewhere in Brisbane. Someone mentioned one the other day. Probably as big as this room across this way

05:00 and all concrete and that was it I think. Everybody would rush in there. I don't think there were any seats. I don't think there was anything, you just ran in there. There were a lot of them around Brisbane I know and some of the homes used to dig a big hole in the backyard and sort of make one. Some went to the extremes where you had little ladders going down and they had supplies there. We didn't have one of those,

05:30 we had a victory garden instead.

What about, with all the different Americans that you saw, you mentioned earlier that you met one that was from the south and he didn't like the guys from the north, could you tell eventually where they were from?

No I couldn't tell by looking at them but by speaking to them you could because one would have a southern drawl and the others had the normal Yankee voice. They did not like each other.

06:00 Not so much the northerner, it was the southerner that didn't like the northerner. That was very prevalent with them. What was that? 1940, when was the civil war? That was a long time before that so they should have got over it by then, shouldn't they.

What sort of presents would Americans try to ply women with?

I never got any from any but the old saying was, they used to talk about nylons or silk stockings.

06:30 That was always the talk you'd hear. Probably taking you to the PX to buy you a dessert or something like that I think was about the equivalent. Although my sister's husband, many's the time he used to bring out a ham to home or a apple pie or something like that. He would get hold of something from his PX and bring it home. Nothing,

07:00 although my sister did get a ring from a soldier, I remember that now. One of my daughters has it. It was a party sapphire and before he was leaving he gave her this ring and when she went to America we swapped rings. I gave her a ring I had and she gave me this sapphire. When our middle daughter was getting engaged I gave it to her and her husband had diamonds put around the outside and

07:30 it's still in existence that ring. That's the story of that ring.

The ring that you were given as an engagement ring was that the one that you swapped with her?

Yes, that would have been the one I gave her, that's right.

When they went to visit your parents did they bring gifts to that?

No, not gifts as such, but food. A lot of times they'd bring, as I said, an apple pie or a ham or something

like that that they'd bought from the PX that they'd bring out.

08:00 Because food was rationed and that was the most appropriate thing you could bring anybody. I don't think they had a lot either you know, to spare. More than what our lads had anyway.

What did you learn from the Americans?

08:30 That they were more polite. When I look back on it, probably a lot of it was a lot of baloney too. There was a lot of that amongst them. They used to say the Americans were over here and over sexed. That was the story we used to hear quite a lot. They were very, of course they could use aftershave and our boys didn't use aftershave lotions. They smelt better than our boys.

09:00 **Did you learn anything about America from them?**

Yes. They knew nothing about Australia, that was interesting. They didn't know a thing about Australia. I think they liked our Australian accent from what I can gather from them. We'd heard, anything that we'd heard of Hollywood, we knew of Hollywood, that sort of thing but we didn't know of any other parts of America until we'd learn about Wisconsin.

09:30 We knew about Chicago but any of the middle eastern countries we didn't know about. I had one girlfriend, I'd met her just by going into Penny's in town, was a shop. She married an American here and he used to only ever listen to western music. They got married. She was the one that had to go to Lady Cilento to be examined before she was married to him. Everything was country and western so no doubt

10:00 she went to somewhere like Missouri or Mississippi or something I should imagine when they went back.

What sort of things would they say that made you realise they knew absolutely nothing about Australia?

Well, all they were talking about were kangaroos and koala bears. That's all they knew. They didn't really know much about Australia at all. Well they wouldn't have because it's amazing when you're overseas as you probably know, you don't get much news of Australia. Well you didn't in those days.

10:30 A lot of them were just from little country towns and little farms so this was a big thing for a lot of them, wasn't it.

What sort of things might you have asked them about America?

We always asked about Hollywood and the movie stars, silly things like that because that's all we knew of America. Whatever we'd see in a movie, you know the west and that. I know when my sister went over she thought it was going to be party time every night until her sister-in-law told her

11:00 "You're married now, it's not party time every night over here."

What were some of the American movie stars that you would have seen in the movies?

In those days? Walter Pidgeon, who I liked a lot. Who else? Robert Taylor. They were out of the men. Walter Pidgeon, he was my favourite. The girls were Betty Grable and Dorothy Lamour.

11:30 That'd be a lot of those.

Can you remember what the movies would have been that you had seen?

Yes. They were a lot of musicals in those days. More musicals than anything else because that was the popular thing. Musicals and westerns and as I said the Great Ziegfeld, he did the Great Ziegfeld, the Ziegfeld Follies and then they had, they did a show on it recently of, no,

12:00 I can't think of it now. There were a lot of them, mainly musicals. And maybe dance, like Ruby Keeler, Sid Cherise. They were the dancing stars of those days. Powell, Anne Powell I think her name was, she was another dancer. Ester Williams, the swimming star. That was another one.

12:30 They were all great extravaganzas. That was what you were looking for. You weren't looking for any human stories you were looking for bright stars to forget everything.

Would most of these movies, would they have been ones that you snuck into the theatre to see?

No. I can't even remember the ones I snuck in to the theatre. That was in the latter years, those. I think I went to sleep. I used to go down there and go to sleep after a while. Then the lights come on you'd wake up and you'd sneak out again, sneak back into bed.

13:00 **The Russian dancing that you spoke of, where did that originate from, learning that?**

It was part of your ballet thing. It was included in that in certain times. There'd be interpretive dancing where you'd interpret something. I can remember doing with the tapping, you'd do a sand dance where they'd put sand on a piece of board and you'd do a sand dance.

13:30 It was very much a black, you've heard the song 'Mr Bojangles'? He used to do that sort of dancing on sand. Getting back to your Russian dancing. That'd be, they'd say, "This week now we'll have Russian dancing," and that's what you were doing for the next term, so you'd do that. That would be mainly cobblers. It was very hard

14:00 so you'd take weeks to get into doing that. There was a lot of acrobatic stuff in the Russian ones.

Did you ever notice any influences of the black Americans being in South Brisbane in music and?

No I didn't because we were never, ever allowed to associate with them. I suppose I was the only one that ever spoke to a couple of them. They were never allowed out with white girls.

I just wondered whether any of their dancing and their style of music whether that came in to the entertainment industry at all?

14:30 No it didn't. They were almost ostracised, the black American. He was just a non-entity to everybody there. Not to the Australian people because we'd never come across that sort of segregation so we spoke to anybody, but the Americans themselves, no.

Had you ever seen any aboriginals in Brisbane?

In those days? No, see, they were south Brisbanites too, the aborigines.

15:00 They weren't outspoken so much in those days either. Round probably one of the parks in south Brisbane, and they're still there, Musgrove Park is it? They're more outspoken now than what they were in those days.

And besides the American movies that you would have seen, how often did you get to see newsreels?

All the time. We used to have a theatre that just showed newsreels and nothing else in the city.

15:30 **Do you know where that was?**

Yes. That was in Queen Street, just where Myers are now.

How did that run?

I think it ran nearly all day and you'd just go in and see newsreels all the time. As I can recall. I don't know if they had sessions there and I'm just trying to recall what the name of it was.

16:00 Then they had a hotel there afterwards that was the same name, or before that maybe. It was just right at the top of town anyway, I recall. If you wanted to know how the war was going you'd go in to a newsreel and that's what you got.

Did it cost you to go into a newsreel?

Oh yes.

Was it as much as a regular movie?

I don't know if it was. We weren't great movie goers. A big night out would be the movies of course. I suppose it would,

16:30 I don't know how much. I know in my early days it was about sixpence. In my childhood, sixpence to go to the movies and you still had enough to buy something at interval. Threepence to get in and threepence to spend I think.

What sort of things would you buy with that?

You'd probably buy as much as you could to last. Like a nulla-nulla stick and a musk stick and something else you'd get.

Did you, in those early days,

17:00 **have your own thoughts on marriage?**

Yes, that was my ambition, to be married and have children. I can remember one of the programs there they used to bring a little piece in sometimes of the different ones in the theatre and they said, "Here comes Rhoda tripping across the stage, blah, blah, blah and I asked her what her ambition would be and she said to be married and have children." You wouldn't ask anybody that today. It wasn't anything to do with the theatre or anything.

17:30 **That would have been the norm back then?**

Yes I think it was the norm. It wasn't until about the 1950's I think and I can recall this with my three daughters at school they were starting to question the nuns and priests, just like the Brides of Christ, I could see that exactly. People were starting to question, there's more to life than just, we can have a career, women. I wasn't allowed to work when I got married because

18:00 policemen's wives were not allowed to work.

Do you know why that is?

No. Maybe, it was a government position. I can remember also in Toowoomba I think it was, there was a mayor up there, in Toowoomba or Ipswich. There was a mayor and one of his staff got married and sacked her immediately and it was a great thing. Because she'd married he wouldn't re-employ her. That was a very common thing and I don't know when that stopped.

18:30 Women just could not go to work. Maybe because after the war, when the men came back and they needed the jobs back. They had the jobs during the war years, they were quite willing to have the females but then when the war stopped and the men came back, I suppose they thought they'd give them back their jobs.

You mentioned earlier that you might have liked to be a journalist. If somebody had said you can either have this spunky looking American as a husband or you can take this job as a journalist, what do you think you might have chosen?

19:00 Oh dear, that's a question and a half, see you ask me now in retrospect. I don't know. Possibly now I would have said journalism although I wouldn't change my marriage for anything. We've been married fifty seven years. I wouldn't have changed that.

At the time you would have said?

The journalist, I think, at the time. Even though that was my ambition, I thought, "Oh, here's the opportunity to do this."

19:30 It was just coming to the time when women were starting to speak for themselves.

The war really gave women a lot more chances didn't it?

Definitely, a lot more chances. They made them speak out for themselves a lot more.

Was that a tangible difference that you knew the women's movement was starting to?

Yes. We had Germaine Greer [feminist], of course she came later. But remember the one, there's an actress here in Australia

20:00 and her mother tied herself, chained herself with another friend, to a bar out near the university there. You would have heard of that.

Was that the one at the regatta?

Yes, the regatta it was, that's right. Because women were not allowed in the bars. That was the actress, she was in The Man From Snowy River, that was her mother.

Sigrid Thornton?

That's her, that's her mother. Tied herself there.

20:30 They were just coming out of everything and standing up for themselves. I can recall also even when we were first married, we went away on a holiday and women were not allowed in any bars in Queensland. We went up to Tambourine Heights and this man up here opened the bar for women. He had crystal glasses and float bowls of flowers on his bar and he wore a different lamé tie every day.

21:00 Everything was just lovely. You'd go in there and have your glass of wine with him. That was a real opening for me.

Where was that?

Tambourine, Eagle Heights. The hotel is down now. Mr Cresley I think his name was. It was just something that was so different.

Was that the first bar of its kind that you know of in Brisbane?

I don't know if it was the first bar but it was the first bar that I knew of. Of course it was out of the city, it was up there in the mountains. It was just so nice. He put a lot of effort into that.

21:30 **When you went to start working on the aircraft, how did you feel about leaving the dancing behind?**

Well it was a change for a while. Because working every night, that was starting to get a little bit, I was starting to resent the fact of not being able to go out at night like everybody else was. But I did miss my dancing, I'd say.

22:00 I kept it up at home for a long while. Even the acrobats. When the kids were small I'd show them different ones. But none of them became dancers or anything.

And you spent three months learning the micrometers? That's a long time.

Yes. Probably I must have been dumb or something. No, the course was three months. We'd only be there for an hour a day or something. That's how it worked.

And where were the actual classes?

In Brisbane somewhere but I can't tell you exactly where.

22:30 A lot of those things were around Woolangabba because they had a mail exchange at Woolangabba. They must have put a lot of stuff in that area because across near Somerville House they had something for the army as I said, sort of a detention thing there. And across from there they had a mail room where a lot of the mail, maybe they had other things too, there seems to be a lot of things centred around that area.

23:00 **And when you finally got to working on the aircraft, can you remember what type of aircraft they were?**

No, I can't. I've thought of that many times, I've thought, "Why didn't I take notice of that."

Was it exciting still to be working on the?

No, I didn't like it. That's probably why I didn't take any notice of it. I didn't like that at all. I think it was the hours, having to get up, being a night person for all those years,

23:30 even today I wouldn't go to bed before midnight most nights. I'd say being a night person always that business of getting up at four o'clock in the morning in the middle of winter, that didn't go down. Everybody else was doing something so we did.

Did that drive the war home to you, seeing the aircraft coming in?

Yes, it did. That's what kept you going with that because you knew there was something there. You couldn't let yourself get too much like that somehow.

24:00 You used to put a lot out of your mind. Maybe being young. Maybe if it had been a bit closer to us, if we'd have been in Townsville or Darwin it would have been a different story. By this stage we were probably getting a bit complacent, thinking, "Well the war in Europe's over, this one's going to be over soon too." It wasn't until later when you saw a lot of the newsreels that you realised.

24:30 **Can you remember VE day, Victory in Europe?**

Yes I can. Just jumping around the street and everything like that. I don't know if it was just the lunch hour thing that I went out or whether they stopped work. Probably if I'd had brothers or a father or a husband in the war, I might have. But we got through very well on that issue.

25:00 My father was at a wrong age for the war years. I had no brothers, no uncles. Well I had an uncle that went to the war and was killed but he wasn't a close uncle. See my husband didn't. I didn't have that close connection that way but my father always had a lot of time for the soldiers.

Can you recall how you would have heard about VE?

No. Probably everyone yelling out. I think that was what it was.

25:30 **With the war still raging in the Pacific, could people allow themselves to get too carried away with celebrating victory in Europe?**

I don't think we celebrated that much. You were talking about VE day, sorry. No, I think it was too close at home to be concerned because I think they were trying to bring our troops back at one stage and they couldn't get them back here.

26:00 Although we didn't find that out until later. We thought we'd have plenty of soldiers here but we didn't have many of our own poor fellas, no.

When all the Americans were leaving Brisbane to go further north, up into the Pacific, did you start to get the feeling at that stage that the tide was starting to turn?

Yes, possibly. We were fed so much propaganda at that stage. That, "Everything's fine, everything's great,"

26:30 so we got a bit complacent by then. "Yes, we'll win, for sure." It wasn't until after the war and you heard all about the Kokoda Trail and all these other things. I can remember Singapore. That was what shocked me because I can recall them saying that Singapore would never fall. And I thought, "We're safe, we're right." When it went I did have a thought there. I thought, "No, this is getting close."

27:00 A lot of those thoughts came after the war when they let out a lot of the truth as time goes by you think, "Yeah, I remember that now." If I'd have known that then I probably would have felt different.

Can you remember hearing about Darwin being bombed?

Yes. That was scary. That's when I used to get scared going to the theatre at night. And the air raid

sirens would go. They only were practice, or whether they were practice or not, a couple of times at night,

27:30 around about eleven, I'd be leaving the theatre and think there were Japanese running down the laneway there. That was frightening there. I knew it was getting close.

How was the propaganda machine portraying Japanese?

Little yellow devils. No, they couldn't win anything. As I said it wasn't until later when we saw the movies about them.

28:00 We didn't realise how cruel they were. Knowing Mr Knitter I couldn't associate them being anything else. Although when you saw the newsreels, that used to hit home a bit.

Can you remember hearing about the atom bombs?

Yes. And I suppose it's terrible to say but we were so pleased

28:30 that it stopped the Japanese. It stopped the war I think, looking back on it, that's hard to say. I often think that day a lot of times they commemorate the atom bomb falling. I think, "Why don't they do the same for Pearl Harbour, because that was pretty bad too." They never seem to put as much emphasis on the tragedy of Pearl Harbour. I realise why, but that was so many people lost over there.

29:00 Unexpectedly too.

Just mentioning Pearl Harbour. When that happened and you realised the Japanese were involved in the war, also obviously that the Americans had been brought into the war, how was that?

That was good. We got some more soldiers now. We got help. Of course always America was always glamorised in the movies.

29:30 We thought, "They can save us."

And then the end of the war is declared. How was that celebrated?

I think mine was a very quiet day that day. I was just pleased. I'm sorry I wasn't one of those that were jumping around everywhere. I just took it and that was it. I can't recall much of that.

30:00 I know you see movies of them all jumping around in the street and running around and that.

How long was it after that before you met Robert?

Around about twelve months after that.

And in that twelve months how had Brisbane changed from being a war city?

Well, the rationing had started to come off. I know that when we were married and we went for our honeymoon, we went to Mooloolaba to a hotel there

30:30 and on the table was a big box of butter. I can recall that because we just buttered everything in sight, we hadn't seen butter. We had the coupons and meat. So I don't know how my mother made the cakes. That was before the war got really bad over here, she must have. I know with the rationing for the clothing and that. I know that nobody worried about clothes much.

31:00 You had a good dress and a couple of other dresses, not like today.

When that rationing started to ease and all of a sudden things started to turn up again, did people start going a bit crazy?

Yes, I know we did. There was sugar and there was butter and then all of a sudden we realised that there was such a thing as cholesterol and everything else. So we started to get a little bit sensible again. Lots of meat, we used to get plenty of meat. I have a friend from Britain and

31:30 she said theirs went on for five years after the war, they couldn't get anything. We were pretty lucky. Once the war ended we started getting everything.

And besides the rationing easing off did Brisbane itself change in any way, the city?

No, not very much. It stayed like that for a long time. Brisbane didn't change very much in my estimation until the expo, 1988.

32:00 It didn't change until then. Once that happened, I can recall speaking to someone from overseas and I said, "What do you think of our Brisbane River?" and they said, "Oh, no, pretty ugly." And then all of a sudden they did South Bank and all that and that didn't happen until after that particular time. We had a lass from Rotary, my husband was from Rotary at the time.

32:30 This girl won a competition from over in Perth. It was to come to this state here and she would be billeted with different ones. We had her for a week and we took her into town to a buffet dinner or

something in one of the hotels. It was the time they were doing them all up and it was filthy. Everything was pulled to pieces. She came from Perth where everything was absolutely spotless and I thought, “Oh my God,” but if she came back now she’d see a different thing.

33:00 We thought afterwards, “Whatever did she think of Brisbane.” Brisbane didn’t change until then and all of a sudden it started. Once the mall was built, I could start to see a few changes. I think it’s a very livable city now. Especially with the river the way it is. We never used that river before, never used it for anything. That was a plus.

How long did it take for all the Americans and all the military things that were going on in the city,

33:30 **how long did it take for that to leave?**

Gradually I’d say, over a few years. Because the merchant ships used to come in. They were American, a lot of them. They were still hanging around. My sister’s girlfriend eventually married one of those merchant men and went back but that was about three years after she’d gone over there. They were just dwindling back. Maybe they were the ones that were taking the troops back, I don’t know. Maybe that’s why they were there.

34:00 They were gradually going. A lot of them stayed of course, married and stayed here, a few of them still here. A few of the girls married Americans and the Americans stayed here from the theatre. They made a life over here.

How did it feel to see all the shows and theatres closing down in Brisbane after the war?

Well, we got TV. That was the big thing.

34:30 I don’t think. Yeah, there were a lot of devotees of live theatre I suppose. They would still go. Like when you get people that are interested in the opera, I suppose. They gradually closed those theatres. The Theatre Royal became a sound lounge, it would be a disco, I suppose, the sound lounges.

35:00 Very, very loud music, that we didn’t have in those days, we never had loud music. The Cremorne closed because they put it into the Performing Arts. They made that into the Gallery. It just wasn’t money making any more. When they put that complex over there at South Brisbane with the performing arts and that, that was upgrading all that, well the Cremorne is still there.

35:30 Our pictures are still there. You know in the foyer? Of the Cremorne, just to give us still a little touch of the old theatre. So at least it’s still in the Performing Arts Complex.

I was going to ask you about cloud land. Did you ever get to go there?

Yes, I went there once with my husband to a police ball. I remember sitting in a boat. It wasn’t a real boat, just to get the photograph taken you know, you sit there and pretend you’re on a lagoon or something. I remember that.

36:00 They used to sneak the drinks in then. No, they didn’t sneak it in. We were with a girl and they called her Tiger. I had never met her before but we had a party of about twenty of us, a big alcove there or whatever it was and they had beer in jugs. You know how someone would often steal a glass if they went anywhere? She stole the jug when she came outside. Oh my goodness.

36:30 They wore little capes in those days and I thought, “Oh dear, at a policemen’s do, too!”

When you look back you had a very different type of war?

We did. We didn’t have a bad war. No, I can’t say that. Not to a soldier that’s been over and everything like that. It sort of stinted our teen years, I think. We probably missed out on certain

37:00 educational things that we probably would have wanted to follow. The opportunities weren’t there but we didn’t make the sacrifices the soldiers did or anything like that. It was just a time that stopped. I know after the war years when you’d think of your children, you’d say, “What sort of biscuits do you want today. Do you want ginger nuts, do you want this, do you want that?” and I’d think, “Gosh, I’ve never known that in my life.” There was no choices, you just got it.

37:30 It wasn’t there during the war years to have.

And how do you reflect on your war service, because you did provide a service?

Well, I didn’t look at it as being a service at the time. It’s only that I look back on it now. It’s only when I heard that radio program and they were asking and I thought, “I didn’t do anything in the war years.” And then I thought, “Hang on a minute, that show we did.” We put a lot of effort into it but it didn’t seem like a lot of effort at the time. It was enjoyable.

38:00 We all enjoyed that and I thought maybe that might be a bit of service, I don’t know. You felt proud to do it anyway.

What are you thoughts on Anzac Day?

Yes, we should keep Anzac Day. I really do. You just don't belittle something like that. I hope they always keep Anzac Day.

38:30 I have a son-in-law that was in the army there and he's there every Anzac Day. It's good to think the young ones are knowing it. At least they can still go out and have their day, can't they? If they want to go to the movies, they think they're deprived but one day wouldn't hurt anyway.

What sort of things do you think about on Anzac Day?

I do think of the soldiers. I think mainly of the families that are left at home.

39:00 The children left without a father. And also, getting back to those limbless soldiers. I know that was the First World War that I was involved, that sort of section, and I think no, they've got to have their day. And of course they have, that other organisation that looks after the wives and children, Legacy. Yes, I think that that's something that should keep going too.

39:30 It's a sad day.

Can you remember the old fellas, the World War I folks that you used to perform for?

No, I was so young. I'd have only been seven, eight or something like that. My Dad impressed on me that that was something you did for those people.

40:00 **If you imagine this as a time capsule, what sort of message would you like to give people that might read this or see it in the future?**

Well, that's an interesting one to think about for a minute. There's going to be big changes, whether they're for the better or for the worse, I don't know. I'm just hoping that they don't want to have any more wars.

40:30 Please God, they don't. This is a very profound question that one and it needs a profound answer too. I know with everything that's going on in the world today I don't know if they'll ever learn to sort of get on with each other. No, I really can't answer that.

INTERVIEW ENDS