

Australians at War Film Archive

Ellen Margaret O'Malley (Squirt, Thumper) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1979>

Tape 1

00:50 **Right, if you just want to introduce yourself?**

My name is Margaret O'Malley. I was born on the 11th March, 1923.

01:00 I was born in Brisbane.

And what's your earliest memory, Margaret?

I think the earliest memory I've got is seeing over the dining room table. I can remember saying, "Mum, I can see you over the table." But my mother's people had a hotel, and I can remember going in there as long as I

01:30 can remember, and I loved it.

Do you know where that hotel it was?

It was the Hotel Carlton. Where Myers is now.

What do you remember of the hotel?

Oh, I remember sitting there like a lady and ordering a Barmaid's Blush, which I guess was lemonade with raspberry in it. I had to have an olive or a cherry in it, and no, the hotel was always there. It was there like after, all the way through.

Who owned that, your Mum's family?

Yes.

02:00 People called Winterbottom.

What was the family home like?

My family home. It was at Kelvin Grove and it was built in about, I should imagine, 1922. It was a nice big home, a big, well, we had a big lot of ground. And it was just a nice house. It was a new one, and it was a big house.

Can you imagine you're a camera

02:30 **for me and just walk through the house, telling me what rooms are where?**

This is the, yes, all right. Well, you walked up the back steps - better go in the back way - you walked up the back steps and you walked into the breakfast room, which had this great big table, a big oak table. The bathroom was beyond that and the kitchen was on the right.

03:00 There was a big kitchen, we had a big pantry, as big as a bedroom now, I think it would be. Then you walked through into the dining room, breakfast room, dining room, and then there were three bedrooms and a hall that went straight through, and verandas all the way round.

How big was Kelvin Grove at that stage?

Well, it wasn't far from the city, because sometimes if there was a strike on I'd walk to work.

03:30 It was in Herston Road where the hospital is now, a bit down the other end.

And there was you and your brother?

Yes.

Did you have your own room?

Oh, yes, with opening doors onto the veranda.

How did you get along with your brother?

Not much. He was five years younger than me and he was always getting into fights, and I always got a hiding because I was older and should have known better. But he's

04:00 still alive, he's in Townsville now in a nursing home.

What was Dad like?

My Dad was awful. He used to, he was so strict, you know, and he'd get the strap out and he'd go for you. I didn't like it. I always thought, "When I'm a big girl, I'm going to leave home," and I did. He did drink a bit. But Mum used to leave him occasionally. But I had a grandma who used to come and interfere, she only lived down the road. But I did,

04:30 I cleared out as soon as I got a job.

In what ways was he strict?

Just everything. I'm the one who got into trouble; as I said, my brother never got it. But he had this big strap, and it was about that big, and it was cut like a cat-o'-nine-tails, and you got that on you. And I stuttered badly, I think I was just a nervous wreck. If I was doing homework and I asked him, you know,

05:00 "What does this word mean?" he'd say, "Look in your dictionary." And that was all he'd tell me. He was no good. But anyway, I got over it.

How did he get along with your brother?

Oh, he liked my brother. I think it was because I was a girl, he didn't like me that much.

What did your dad do for a living?

He had a foundry, him and his brother had a foundry. But they never talked either, they used to work together but never talk. They'd have a few fights here and there,

05:30 but they had a brass foundry down the road, in Kelvin Grove Road. That's where Grandma lived, and Grandpa, and so did the other uncle. And he did all the outside work, he went and did, you know, the interviewing people and seeing what they wanted. He made a lot of things through the war, like big propellers and things, I can remember.

06:00 And Uncle Dave just stayed, I think Uncle Dave was really, all the family when they came out to Australia were foundry people.

And did you ever go to the foundry and see what happened down there?

Oh yes, I played in the black sand, and I'd get filthy. And I'd watch some casting and moulding, and all those things. So yeah, I used to like the foundry.

Were you a real lady, or were you a bit of a tomboy as a kid?

06:30 No, I did everything I was told. I wasn't game to speak up about anything. But I'm better now.

Did you have friends in the neighbourhood that you used to play with?

Yes, I had the girl next door and the girl up the road. And the girl next door and I used to go to school up the, do you know Kelvin Grove up the long hill? And we'd leave home at eight o'clock and we'd stop on the footpath and start

07:00 to chatter. Sometimes we were late for school. School was what, half past nine in those days.

Can you tell me about school, what school was like?

It was a girls' school; oh, it was an infants' school first and then a girls' school. And we had all lady teachers, and we also, too, seemed to stay in the same class all the way through. I still meet four of my girlfriends that I started school with.

07:30 Once every three months we have lunch. And then when I was twelve I went up to the intermediate school, which is the QUT [Queensland University of Technology] in Kelvin Grove there. We were there when it opened. From there I did scholarships and went on to college, business college.

In the early stages of your schooling, what were your teachers like?

08:00 Oh, the teachers were nice, because I used to stutter and they were sorry for me, but they didn't know how to handle me, and I used to faint in the middle of physiology class, you know, and then someone would have to take me home. But no, I was a real good girl, I didn't do anything I shouldn't.

What sort of things would you do in physiology class that would bring on a faint?

Oh, I can remember they cut up a bullock's heart once, and I was standing outside for talking – yes, I was talking –

08:30 and I fainted and someone had to take me home. But I used to faint a lot in those days.

Did they have a way of trying to help you with the stuttering?

The only thing was when they had reading around the class. I used to get terrified when it came near my thing, and when I couldn't speak the teacher would say, "Help her," and I hated them doing that. But I learnt elocution and it stopped all that, and when I left home, because I was a bit of a nervous wreck as a child.

09:00 **And besides physiology, what other subjects would you do?**

We did botany, you know, and we did just the ordinary subjects – history, geography, mathematics. Had to recite tables and recite the ABC [alphabet] and things like that, just the old-fashioned way. And we counted.

Did you like school?

09:30 Yes, I think I did, because I had some nice friends there. And it was Depression time and lots of the kids were very poor, and they'd come to school barefooted and so forth.

What do you remember of the Depression?

I don't remember that much because we were alright. I never ever, except the only thing is, my brother and I could have half an egg each. My brother always used to say, "I want an egg with a yolk in it."

10:00 Anyway, but it was on our side of the street the people seemed to be all right, but on the other side of the road, Kevin Grove Road and those streets, they were poor and I just knew there was something wrong over there. And I can remember the local alderman coming up with fish, and he saying, "Stand up the children whose people are on relief work, whose fathers are on relief work." And they, he'd

10:30 give them, he'd wrap them in newspaper and the kids would take them home.

What other things did you see that made you realise that something was different with the kids across the road?

Just that they were poor. You know, they would come dressed in anything, sort of thing. That's about all I knew, because I was born '23 I perhaps, well, you know it was in the '30's or late '20's. But I didn't

11:00 know much about that because we were all right.

So Dad's foundry was still doing pretty well during the Depression?

Oh yes, he did a lot. I think he used to hide ingots of aluminium down underneath our house during the war. But I couldn't lift them.

Was he working long hours there?

Sometimes. But he'd go to work at seven o'clock in the morning, and we all had to sit down to breakfast, the four of us. And he'd

11:30 come home for lunch, and then he'd come home at about five o'clock.

So he would just walk to work, would he?

Oh, it was just down the road, yes. But he had a Studebaker that he used to drive around to go to, you know, all the other places that [were] needed. And then his people before that, their name was Sargent, and they had a big foundry in Alice Street, so it seemed to be all in the family.

And you mentioned your grandparents were close by, too?

12:00 Oh, yes. They lived actually down at, the foundry was from one to the main street to another street. Oh yes, they all lived down there, I used to go down and talk to Grandma. But my Grandpa was fun. He used to sing to me and teach me things, you know, he used to take me for a walk. But Grandma was terribly strict.

They were your dad's parents?

Yeah.

But you got on all right with them?

Oh yes, within reason. If I did what I was told.

12:30 **You were a bit of a scallywag, were you?**

I don't think I was. I don't think, because I always did what I was told. I wasn't game to speak up much.

How big was your world? Besides going to school, how far would you go in the

neighbourhood?

I was allowed to go and play with some of the girls from school occasionally. But I had the girl next door and the girl up the road. But they didn't come down to play,

13:00 I went to their place.

Why was that, do you think?

I don't know. It was just my father, I think. Even when I got boyfriends I wouldn't bring them in, or let Dad know, because you know. The people at the back used to have a party when I was about fifteen - fourteen, fifteen, I think - and they used to have a party, and if I wasn't in by midnight - and it was only at the house down the back, and they had a pianola and we used to sing, the two boys would bring me back -

13:30 and if it was after midnight Dad would start yelling and they'd throw stones on the roof.

Would Mum and Dad entertain at all?

Very seldom. They used to have some visitors occasionally.

What about when you had a birthday or something like that, would you have a party at home?

I don't think I ever did, no. I used to go to birthday parties.

14:00 **What about Christmas, how was Christmas celebrated at home?**

Christmas was never at home. Grandma and Grandpa had a place at Maroochydore and I was taken away for six weeks, so I didn't see my mother at Christmas or anything like that. Maroochydore was good, it was on the beachfront and I used to go fishing and catching yabbies with Grandpa, and doing that [sort of] thing. And I liked that, and I liked fishing, but

14:30 I used to come back sunburnt because I wouldn't wear a hat, brown. My mother always reckoned when I came home - and I loved red, and always Santa Claus would bring me a red dress, I never got any toys or anything, red dress and a little packet of nuts or something - but Mum said I'd come home in this red dress and I'd look like a little "half-caste." She said, "Many's the tear I'd cry when I saw you." Because Mum came from England, too.

15:00 But they wouldn't take Jack, my brother, but they would take me.

So you'd spent six weeks up at Maroochydore just with Grandma and Grandpa, on your own, just with them looking after you?

Yeah, but I wouldn't go far. I was allowed to row the boat up and down. First of all I was allowed to row the boat, but the anchor had to be out so I just went round in a circle. And then later on I was allowed to go between the two jetties. I had to be where Grandma could see me. And, you know,

15:30 I'd go fishing sometimes, but they wouldn't take me fishing much because I talked too much.

That must have been the highlight of the year, was it, at Christmas?

No, I used to cry for my mother.

What was Mum like?

Oh, my Mum was sweet. She was nice. She came out from England when she was sixteen. She came out to her grandparents who were, always had hotels, these people, Winterbottoms. And they,

16:00 she went to Charters Towers. They came out on a ship called the Baronup, something like that. And her sister came with her, she was seventeen, sixteen, seventeen. But Auntie hated the pub, and Mum went to Charters Towers first and she loved it. My mother always loved the hotel life. And even through the war Uncle Tom got Mum to come back and be housekeeper because the Yanks had

16:30 taken the hotel over. But Mum loved it, but Auntie used to sort of, she didn't mind doing the rooms or anything, but the bar and the miners would come in and say, "What's that pretty little Pommy [English] girl over there?" And she was a pretty lady. And she'd shrink down, but Mum used to laugh and carry on, so she likes life.

What sort of special relationship did you have with your Mum?

Oh, good. Mum was good, yeah. Yes, even

17:00 when I joined up. See, Dad wouldn't sign the papers for me or anything. Mum had left him at that stage. Because first of all I thought I would like to join the WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force], but I... You know, I had a boyfriend in the navy, not that that was, he was my first boyfriend, sort of thing. And my mother's family were naval people. Mum's cousin was skipper of the Queen Mary. No, he wasn't,

17:30 he was skipper of the Aquitania and he was first mate on the Queen Mary. And then I had an uncle in

the First World War in the navy, and then he was in the Second World War too. But, oh no, Mum was good.

Did she know that your Dad and you didn't get along so well?

Oh yes. Well, he used to beat her up too.

So when sometimes Mum would leave, would she take you with her?

No.

That must have been horrible for you.

Granny Mayer had to come up and mind me. Yes, it was.

18:00 **Where did Mum go during those times?**

Back to the hotel.

Do you know where your Mum and Dad met?

In the hotel. Dad came in and Mum was serving in the bar. They went to Townsville after Charters Towers and then down to Brisbane. And then they had the Theatre Royal and then they built the Carlton. But that's where he met Mum, at the pub.

18:30 **After primary school, what was the next level? Intermediate, was it?**

Yes, intermediate for two years.

How was that different to primary?

It was just doing, it was like, I don't know, other schools went right through to scholarship, but there was a North Brisbane Intermediate and there was a South Brisbane Intermediate and from there we went up, and there we were first with the boys, which was most embarrassing. And

19:00 the Head up there was marvellous, because he taught my father and he thought I was wonderful. So anyway, when I'd be put outside for talking - and all my reports said, "She'd do much better if she didn't talk so much," - he'd come along and he'd say, "What are you doing out here? Talking, Sue? Come on." And he'd take my hand and go to the teacher and say, "Put her back, she didn't mean it."

Why do you think you were such a big talker?

I don't know, because I stuttered.

19:30 But I only, I think I stuttered mostly when I was out and embarrassed. And I can remember even later on, not that Mum had the telephone on - Dad wouldn't let us - but later on the 'phone would ring and if I'd be on my own I would think, "I wonder, can I talk." But anyway, I learnt elocution, went right through and I lost it, and I was performing at the Theatre Royal. Not the Theatre Royal,

20:00 the Cremorne Theatre, and I won a lot of eisteddfods. But I didn't keep it going because the war came.

You said it was embarrassing with the boys at Intermediate. What was embarrassing?

Oh well, I'd never sat next to boys before; and I had two mates, one each side, they used to, they brought bees to school one day and put them on me, and because I yelled, because I was not going to put up with that. And the girl in front of me, Pauline - I always remember her - and she

20:30 had black hair with a plait, and they'd get her hair and stick it in the ink well. Then when we'd go to domestic science and the boys would go to woodwork, the boys would always be waiting outside to sample what we had. But a couple of them, three of them turned out to be sailors in my class.

What sort of things would you cook in that class?

Oh, we learnt how to cook cakes and we learnt how to,

21:00 sponge cakes, and fish and chips. Then we'd have sewing, and I can't sew, it's an effort to put a button on even. I know that we had to do it by hand, and I had a, we couldn't use the machine, and by the time I did it by hand I think it took me a whole year to do the side of a petticoat, you know, a slip. But I wasn't any good at that. And then we learnt a bit of laundry work,

21:30 which I don't think did us any good much, but never mind.

Did you have to do, not so much for that subject, but did you have to do homework for school?

Oh yes. Yes, always lots of homework, and I had to be in doing my homework when my father came in of an afternoon. My brother would have to too, but my mother would put the books on the table and say, "Hurry up, Jack, your father's coming." And Jack would pretend he'd been working all afternoon.

But he hadn't?

But Dad used to,

22:00 you know, you'd do an exercise book which was like a copybook and you'd have to copy it and write properly. Well, Dad would stand over me, and he had me so nervous that I'd just muck it up. So he put "Cancelled," across it, and by then, I'd got it to school and it was a mess, and I know this happened often. And one of the teachers said to me, "The inspector's coming tomorrow, I think you'd better

22:30 take your exercise book home."

Can you ever remember your Dad being nice to you?

Yes. The only nice thing I remember about my Dad was Saturday night Mum and Dad used to go to town and he'd jump me over the gutters, and I can always remember saying, "Jump, Daddy." I don't know how old I was there, I was only little. But anyway, I was telling you about how I joined up. Mum said, "Tell him I'll come home

23:00 if you sign the papers." So he had a family on his own then in Merryvale Street, but he said, I went in to the office.... That's right, I met a girlfriend. She said, "I've just joined the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service], I've made an application." I said, "Are they taking WRANS?" and she said, "Yes." So I went and got the papers and I had to take them, because I was under twenty-one so your parents, your father had to sign them, the papers. But I think

23:30 Mum could have done it and I'd have got away with it, but I didn't, I was too naïve for that. But anyway I went into Dad's foundry, and I can always remember Dad's head moulder and he was looking at me like this, and Dad was looking at me like this, and he said, "What the hell do you want?" and I said, "I want to come in your office." So I came in the office and I said, "I want you to sign these," and he said to me, "You can go to hell." And I said, you know I was terrified,

24:00 but I boldly spoke up, and I said, "Mum said that she'll come home if you sign the papers." And silence. He said, "I haven't got much choice, have I?" and I said, "No." So he signed them. And when I got into the WRANS I was in, we were living out but I was in a boarding house then. And we were living out, we had to go, it was along behind Parliament House, that was the depot.

24:30 And oh, I wanted to be a writer because I was a public servant then, all I could do was shorthand typing. And a fellow said, "We haven't got," - a writer's a clerk, you know - so the fellow said, "We haven't got any vacancies for those." And I said, "Well, what have you?" and he said, "We need stores people," and I said, "What, Supply? What do they do?" and he said, "Well, you don't need shorthand, you need typing and you need to do bookkeeping."

25:00 I said, "Oh, I can do bookkeeping," and I hated it. But I'd never ever done that much.

Had you done it at school?

No, I did that at college.

Well, if we can just fill in the gaps then, from Intermediate did you do your scholarship then?

Yes. Passed scholarship and then I went to business college.

Where was the business college at?

Down near Creek Street.

So how would you get in from home?

Oh, I'd get a tram.

What sort of subjects did you do there?

Well, we just did shorthand-typing, bookkeeping,

25:30 maths and English.

Was it all ladies there?

Yes, I think we were all girls there. Strict ladies that did the thing, but they taught us well.

Who were the teachers there?

Oh, Miss Brookes, who used to go out with my father once. It always reverted back to my father. But I can't remember the others. I know that Dean girls were pupils. You know the Dean girls that pull the things down? Well, those girls were in my class.

26:00 I quite liked that, I'm glad that Dad, and I only did that because Dad said I had to go to business college.

It seems that anyone who knew your father had held him in high regard. Do you think so?

Not much. They used to call him "Misery". And I mean, and Grandma, there were lots of sort of cousins and second cousins who used to say, "I was terrified of your grandmother and your father."

So Grandma

26:30 **was a bit like Dad, was she?**

Oh, yes. And when Mum and Dad would have a row, Dad must have done, I reckon he must have hung a towel out the window, because the moment it started Grandma would be up like a rocket. And the people next door used to say, "We'd time it. We'd wait for your grandmother to come up." She was a tartar.

Were there any other uncles or aunts or anything that you used to mix with?

27:00 Yeah, well, there was.... Well, Dad only had one brother, Uncle Dave. He was all right to me but his wife was very nice to me, and I had a cousin. Oh, and then on my mother's side I had three cousins, they were all boys.

Did anyone in your Dad's family have any service history?

No. They didn't want me to join up. My cousin did because he was called up. He went to New Guinea. He's still alive, he's about eighty-six.

27:30 You'd think he was about sixty.

So after college, well, while you were doing your college, did you have any ideas of what you'd like to do?

No, because I was told I had to do this. But I liked it. But Mum paid the fees, I think.

What sort of hours did you have to work there?

Oh, just like school. Begin I think nine o'clock till four, or something like that.

28:00 **Did you have to work Saturday morning?**

No. Well, I wasn't working then, see. No, we didn't have to go Saturday mornings. But I never worked Saturday mornings because after that I did Junior and I got into the public service. And it was just when public servants didn't work Saturday mornings; instead of nine to five we worked from half past eight to six past five. And if we did work Saturdays we didn't get paid

28:30 for that. But the pay was good, and I liked that. And it was the Department of Health and Home Affairs. I was just in the typing pool for a while.

That was in near Parliament House there?

Yes, it was down at George Street. Right down, it's all been pulled down now, but it was right on the river.

What sort of things would you do in your spare time, when you weren't working?

29:00 I don't know. I was at a boarding house so there were people there to talk to. I used to go out a bit, to the pictures or something like that. And then I went to church, and this was at New Farm, and I made friends with some of the girls there, who were friendly with the boys. I was Anglican, you see, but my husband of course then -

29:30 but I didn't even know him, he was in the army out at Goondiwindi. But, that's right, we only went because the boys were in the choir, and they'd sit and go to sleep. But afterwards, after church we'd go to have, there was a milk bar and we'd go to have a milk or something. When my husband come back, he come back early from the military, he used to wait outside because he was Catholic, see, and we were Church of England. And he'd come,

30:00 but it was just a group, we were a group together, nobody was going with anybody. And then on a Sunday, well, the girls would go for a walk to accidentally-on-purpose bump into the boys, and they did the same thing. They were nice little boys.

Did you have any religious upbringing at home, with Mum and Dad?

Oh, I went to Sunday School, yes, and I was Confirmed.

And were Mum and Dad both Anglican?

No. Dad was, I suppose he was Methodist, he was nothing. Mum was Church of England.

30:30 But that's how, when I married my husband he was a Catholic and, oh God, you've no idea.

Did you have to go to Sunday School on your own?

No, I used to go with the girl next door a bit, but I used to go.

Did Mum and Dad go to church as well?

No, Mum occasionally did. It was just Sunday you went to church, but that's all.

And which church did you go to

31:00 **to spy on the choirboys?**

Oh, this was at New Farm, St Michael's and All Angels.

How would you get over there?

Oh well, I lived over there, see, at the boarding house.

How did you go from home to the boarding house?

Well, when I cleared out I went to a boarding house.

But was that a spur of the moment decision?

No. When I was a little girl I said when I was a big girl I'd go.

How old were you when you decided to move?

Oh, I don't know, I must have been about twelve, I suppose,

31:30 or before that.

What did Mum and Dad, what was their reaction?

Oh, I didn't tell them.

You just cleared out?

I just went.

Mum must have been worried for you.

She was, but then I always kept in touch with Mum. As I said, she was working through the war at the hotel. Well, I used to go and see her at lunchtime.

You'd just go to the hotel to see your Mum.

Mm. She was upstairs in the linen room, she was housekeeper.

Was it, I mean it

32:00 **seems strange to me, is it common for twelve year-old girls to go to a boarding house?**

Oh no, I didn't go at twelve. I didn't go until I had a job, because I knew legally, if you left home you had to, your father could bring you back if you couldn't support yourself.

So twelve was when you decided you wanted to go?

About twelve, I think, when they used to have a row and fisticuffs and things.

Do you know how old you were when you cleared out?

32:30 Oh, about sixteen, seventeen, sixteen. But I came back occasionally for Mum's sake, but then I always went again.

How much did it cost to stay at the boarding house?

A pound a week. But then that wasn't too bad, because the lady used to do my washing for me, and I think I got three-pound-something a fortnight when I started. But I was all right, and I'd put money away.

33:00 I know once I bought a beautiful leather handbag and it cost ten-and-six, and I had to put it on the lay-by.

Was that your first big purchase, was it?

I don't know, possibly. I think it was, yeah.

What was it like, being independent?

Oh, great. I could do what I liked. I didn't get up to any trouble or anything.

33:30 Used to go down to New Farm Park and meet the boys but, as I said, we used to go to Redcliffe. They'd all get on the train except me and another lass. One of the boys had an old car called a Flivver, and Flivver was an old Chev [Chevrolet], I think. He used to drive us down, we'd go down there, we'd have a day at Sandgate, not Sandgate, Redcliffe.

It was very popular back then, wasn't it, Redcliffe?

Yeah.

34:00 **What sort of things would you get up to down there?**

Oh, we'd go swimming and just sitting in the, probably had something to eat. I can't remember that bit.

Can you remember the crowds down there on weekends?

Yes, there was always people going down on weekends. Like, not for the weekends, but for Sundays anyway. Suttons Beach.

At the boarding house, what exactly did your pound get you there, besides your washing?

34:30 Oh, she fed me, but, you know, I used to eat it but I didn't like her cooking much. She was a sort of a dirty old thing. But that was all right, I stayed there, and there were a few other people there.

So would you eat out a bit?

Yeah. Well, I used to go, what I did each day when Mum was in the Carlton there, I'd come through the back from

35:00 Elizabeth Street and I'd go into the big kitchen and I'd take a piece of fish and a few other things and go and eat them with Mum, so I always had a good meal. But she was an old, she was kind but she was mean, you know. She used to go through your stuff and see what you had and things like that.

When you'd go and spy on the boys, did you

35:30 **have your favourite then?**

Yes, I did. I'll tell you this story. I'm not waffling on too much, am I? This particular day we were at the park and along comes this, there was this fellow, you know, he was the one that used to drive me down and so forth to Redcliffe. And along comes this tall fellow with white shorts on, and he's riding his bike.

36:00 And he came along, this is the first time I ever met him. They introduced him to me, you see, and I, that's right, I was just waiting to get into the navy. And he said, "You should join the army," and I said, "No, I don't want to," so I didn't. I thought, "Gee, he's rude," but the other one was his best mate, you see. Anyway, he always told the kids that Mum picked him up at the park.

36:30 And we'd just go walking around the park, you know. No nonsense, no nothing. But this one, he wrote to me all through the war, and this Brian, my husband, was out of the army by then so he wrote to me a lot. But then it was good, because when I'd come home on leave I'd have someone to take me out, and he was a very handsome man. And he told me he often saw, the movie I wanted to see he'd often seen with another girl during the week, you know, and things like that.

37:00 **It didn't bother you that he was courting other ladies as well?**

Well, I didn't know, I didn't care. I mean that was it. I mean I never ever wanted to get married until I was about thirty, but I did. And then this other fellow sort of came, in the meantime I'd come home after I was demobbed [demobilised, i.e. discharged], I came home and I was going out with my Brian. This other fellow came back

37:30 from Balikpapan, see, and it was getting serious with Brian and I, and I had to tell him that I had found someone else. So what he did, he went to my Brian and said, "Look, Margaret, I've waited for her all through the war and she's found somebody else." And I said to Brian, "What did you say?" and he said, "I didn't say anything." But he finished up our best man and he still keeps in touch with me.

That's nice. Can you remember the war being declared?

Yes.

38:00 I was working at the public service and then when Civil Defence was a sub-department, that's when I was involved in that, and I worked with two policemen. Civil Defence was just two policemen and me and the boss. He became Premier eventually, a fellow named Hanlon. So I was in a secret job then, and we worked on paper salvage and all these things, we had to go easy on the paper and things like that. But I worked

38:30 with these two policemen. Their names were Dick Whittington and Happy Day, so I just did that, and I helped type that out. Then they had to go from Bundaberg right round South-East Queensland and they'd come back, and in the briefcase was that (indicates poster about blackouts). And Happy Day had it and said, "I couldn't put another one on a post at all, I'm sick of it," he said, "Here, Margaret, take this,

39:00 and when you get to be an old lady you can serve tea on it and show your grandchildren." So then eventually I got it and I kept it, and I've had it framed. So it was the last one left, the rest were on the poles.

How did you hear that war had started?

On the radio. I was allowed to listen to the radio at home; I was maybe - no, I wasn't, I was in the boarding house then.

- 39:30 I went back up after that. But anyway, just on the radio. I can remember when the first fleet came in from America, the Arizona was one. And the whole of Brisbane was on holiday, and all these fellows came and they walked up, marched up the street. I finished up with some sailor, I forget his name, and so he took me out for a couple of times there, but that was all.
- 40:00 I never ever went out with any Yanks other than that.
- When the war did start, was there a feeling before that that it was coming anyway?**
- Well, I used to listen to a fellow called Goddard on the radio, he was a bit boring but I used to listen, and he always said it was coming. Mum was horrified, you know, because she was alive then
- 40:30 in the First World War, and Dad. But, you know, they didn't even want my cousin to join up. Well, he was just called up. But no, but then Brisbane was pretty, when the troops came it was very crowded and so forth. You just knew we were at war.

Tape 2

- 00:32 **I might just get that story on camera that I just asked you: you're actually born Ellen O'Malley, aren't you?**
- Ellen Margaret Marshall, my name was.
- How did it come about that you became Margaret?**
- Because I liked my grandmother Margaret and I didn't like my grandmother Ellen. I thought it was an awful name and I just changed it myself when I moved out of school. I told everyone that I was Margaret.
- Did that sort of thing go on often, do you know?**
- 01:00 I don't know, but I mean my son is Brian Glen, but we always call him Glen. A lot of people do that, go by their second names.
- So Ellen was the grandmother that used to come and interfere?**
- Yes.
- What did she used to do when she came to interfere?**
- Oh she would get on Dad's side and abuse Mum and so forth. You know, she was just, even to her daughter-in-law who lived there, she was mean to her.
- 01:30 Just a mean woman.
- Was that unusual, in that era, for your Mum to leave?**
- Yes. Because I mean you had no maintenance, no nothing. But she used to go to the Carlton, see, so she was all right.
- That was very courageous, to fly in the face of what normally happened.**
- She hated leaving the kids, and I can remember at school once that I was in the infants' class, she must have
- 02:00 left then too, and she came up to school and brought me a yellow necklace. I always remember, lovely milky yellow beads, yeah. She came to see me for my birthday, so she was gone then. But I don't know how long when she first left. But Grandma moved in.
- Did you ever talk to her later about how difficult that must have been?**
- No, but I knew that he gave her a bad time. I mean if Mum left home I never ever said, "Go back."
- 02:30 But she did, always did.
- When you left to go to the boarding house, was there ever a thought that you might go and live at the Hotel Carlton as well?**
- No. I lived at New Farm. Well, see, I was getting a wage, I was independent.
- What was New Farm like then?**
- Sort of like it is now, although there's high-rise now, but they were all old houses, but beautiful houses were there, lovely. Really lovely houses,
- 03:00 and we used to walk down by the river; we'd walk, the whole lot of us, we'd walk anywhere round there.

It was lovely. But they were sort of all just old, I suppose 1920's houses, a lot of them.

They've done a lot of construction down there with the cement paths and everything down by the river. What was it like when you used to walk around the river?

Yes, well, it was just I think a road through it. It was very nice, you know, it was

03:30 even later on when I lived at New Farm when I got married and I used to push the pusher through there, with the kids in. But no, it was nice. The roses, it was famous for its roses. But no, I liked New Farm. My in-laws lived further down near the butcher, so I used to go right down Mirth Road and go to the butcher there and come back laden with meat

04:00 and my kid's there, especially the first one, the pusher and the pram, there was meat all around him. But no, I liked New Farm.

When you lived in the boarding house, who else lived there?

There was an old uncle of mine there, his wife was in a hospital, she died. And then there was a family of a woman who had left her husband with two, I think he

04:30 left her, with two children. And then there were two boys who came out from Eromanga to get a job in Brisbane. That was about all, and she had a son, he was there. It was a big enough house, but it was old. But she only rented that, she owned a lot of houses at New Farm. It was falling to bits, it has been pulled down since.

05:00 **What space was yours in the house?**

Well, just the little side veranda, that's all. I slept in the same room as the lady first, because she felt sorry for me.

Was there much privacy there for you?

No. She never cleaned the bath. I bought a wooden mat, you know, and I put that under the shower. I would never get in the bath. She never seemed to clean it, it

05:30 was all green and gluggy, but I managed.

Did you say she sometimes used to go through your things?

Oh, she was always going through your things. Everybody. I know one of the boys was saying he got a letter from his mother, and she used to go and read it when he'd gone to work. He worked at the refinery, and what he did he put a note in, "Keep your bloody nose out of my bloody business," or something. She'd have seen that. But she did, she used to poke

06:00 around and see what we had.

Apart from that incident did anyone ever confront her about that?

No, never bothered. We knew what she was like.

When you moved out of home, what were your worldly possessions that you took with you?

Just my clothes. Nothing else.

And at the time did you tell Mum and Dad that you were going, or did you literally just clear out?

No, I just went. Oh, I told Mum.

06:30 I said, "I'm going, I can't stand it here any more." But I used to go back occasionally for Mum, but always then leave again when it got hot.

Did many of your friends live out of home like that?

Only ones that came down from the bush, like, that worked with me. Some of them lived in boarding houses. One came from Dolby, and I don't know, the others they came from,

07:00 there were only about three of them and they were in boarding houses.

Was there a seedy part of New Farm at that time, or the valley?

Yeah, but it isn't like it is now, but you know, going right down Brunswick Street was always dark and funny. But my husband lived a street from the church over the road. His family had a bakery.

07:30 But they were all just old houses, but people lived there and they were quite happy, nice people.

When the war broke out, do you recall what you thought?

I felt very patriotic. And then I thought that, you know, I mean I had a good job and I was doing my bit for civil defence. Oh, civil defence came a bit after, but we [would go] downstairs,

- 08:00 you know, I'd go down and watch them testing out incendiary bombs and things like that. But everybody, I think, got patriotic. We worked late at night on things. Sister Kenny was down, have you heard of Sister Kenny? She was the lady who looked after kids with polio and she went over to Roosevelt eventually. But she was down in George Street there, was doing a lot of her work.
- 08:30 And [it] was only because of the office, like where I worked, not the doctors. They said she was a quack but she got off to America. No, it was all right, you know.

So that patriotism that you talk about, is that a patriotism for Australia or was it more for England and the "mother country"?

No, I think it was for Australia. I sort of did voluntary work then at night, going serving the troops and things like that.

- 09:00 Or one week, we used to go once a week, all the girls from work, and there would sort of be dancing or you'd be washing up or you'd be serving out the food.

Where was that?

There were quite a few. This one was CUSA, I think it was Catholic something-or-other [Catholic United Services Auxiliary] , but they were all down and Adelaide Street.

- 09:30 And there was another place called Oslam House in the Valley, that was for navy people. But we just, everything was open, lots of places were taking over and feeding the troops, you know, when they were in town.

That was the Australian troops?

Yes; any, I think. Any of [them] , they were all welcome. But it was down sort of, the one I went to was down past the City Hall, further down Adelaide Street

- 10:00 there. And that's where that big shooting was on, when the troops, did you know about that? The Aussies and the Yanks had a big fight and somebody got shot. It was an aboriginal, a Negro fellow over there, he got shot, but they weren't allowed over the bridge, they had to stay on the south side and he came out. But that was pretty rotten. But then I'd come home, I was still at work then, I would come home and I got my tram up in

- 10:30 near George Street, so I never was involved in that, I didn't know a thing.

How did it come about that your job changed from working in the typing pool to doing the civil defence work?

Well, I suppose we had a bit more experience. Oh, and I did, I used to go and take notes from anyone, I worked for Sir Raphael Cilento. [government minister]

Is that Lady Cilento...?

Lady's husband, yeah, Lady and Sir Raphael. He was a hard boss, but he was alright. He liked me. But he wanted

- 11:00 me on his permanent staff, but I didn't want to go, and I told the Under Secretary and he said, "Well, you shan't go." And, you know, we looked after local authorities and paper salvage.

What did he do?

Who?

Lady Cilento's husband, sorry, what was his name?

He was the Director-General of Health. And then I would go down and work in the laboratory sometimes, only just doing reports. The inspectors

- 11:30 used to go out of a morning and trap the milkman and see if they'd put water in the milk and things like that.

What did you think of Lady Cilento?

I didn't like her, I didn't like her at all. She'd come in, and I'd go relieving in his office too sometimes or when they were busy, I wasn't there permanently, but she'd come in and she'd just ignore us completely, and then Sir Raphael would go crook because there was a book missing from the library. And she'd taken it and not informed us.

- 12:00 So I didn't like her. But Diane [Cilento's daughter] used to come in, Diane Cilento [movie star,actress] , and she used to come and she was going to school, and I think she was at All Hallows, I'm not sure, or St Margaret's. And anyway she used to come in and she'd, I know she was doing Shakespeare, she was doing As You Like It and she was Puck in the school play, and here she did us an impression of what she did with Puck. Puck was the, I don't know whether you've read

12:30 As You Like It? Yeah, you would. She was Puck. But she used to come in and just used to wait for a ride home with her father.

So then the job that you ended up in in Civil Defence, was there a recruitment process for that job, or someone just said, "You're going here, Margaret"?

No, they told me I was to go there. But, see, it was only two policemen; it got into a big sub-department after. And a lass called Margaret Gilmore, she took my job over, and she was Flo Bjelke-Petersen's [wife of Queensland Premier Sir Jo] sister.

13:00 **How did you like that, just working with you and the two policemen?**

Oh, I didn't mind that at all. But I'd have to come back and type in the thing, you know, we had. It was all sort of things that we did, you know. No smoking, not that I smoked back whenever, but the rules were pretty strict, you know, with the public service. We had a head typist who was good. She trained us well.

13:30 We'd just come straight from college. The boss was good. Hanlon, the Minister, if he worked late at night, he'd stay back and he'd be on the Gestetner [copying machine] and helping us do it. Not like today.

That's nice.

Yes. And he was the one who brought in free hospitalisation and free immunisation. And I always remember he'd come around in his,

14:00 his wife had a baby, his last one, and it was called Edward. And he would come, you know, "I've got another boy. Another boy and I'll have" - that's right, he had three girls and another boy, and this boy, and he said, "Another one and we'll have a good team." And it was him that brought in free.... Oh, but the little boy died with diphtheria, just as Hanlon was trying to bring in free immunisation. So that was sad.

Were there

14:30 **rules about what you had to wear to work?**

Yes, we had to look decent. Even through the war when it started because, you know, stockings would cost us coupons. And I got a bit sick of this, so went and got this brown stuff that you put on your legs, you know. And then I got, I was only talking about this the other day to somebody, and then I got an eyebrow pencil, and I browned my legs, and of course they had seams up the back

15:00 and I put that on, and I went like that for about a month. Someone was saying, "Oh gee, my stockings are going," because in those days they laddered before you could turn around. So I turned around boldly and said, "Look, I've been doing this for a month." So they decided they'd let it go, they didn't notice.

What was the brown stuff that you put on your legs?

Oh, it was brown like suntan lotion sort of stuff. And you'd put this on. But we had to

15:30 look decent and respectable and, you know, the public service was pretty strict then.

It was always a skirt?

Oh yes, never any pants. Well, you only wore shorts and pants outside anyway. No, you wouldn't even think of it. You have to be decently dressed.

Was that just an unspoken rule that everyone knew, about not wearing pants?

No, the women didn't do that.

16:00 I think they were called the "beach pyjamas" years ago. They were floppy ones, you know, flarey ones. But no, I wore shorts a lot outside. I was young then. I still do.

Can you tell me in a little bit more detail about some of that civil aid work you were doing, or civil defence?

Well, It was mostly for ARP, Air Raid Precautions

16:30 fellows. They used to go out and they used to train these fellows, that's how it started. And testing these bombs, I mean I don't know why we ever had to go down, I just went down.

What happened with the bomb testing?

Well, we'd go down on the grass between the two buildings, and I had to stand back of course, but maybe they probably lit them, I don't know, and they'd all fizzle up like fireworks. I remember doing that.

17:00 **Do you know what they were actually testing them for?**

No. Didn't have a clue. But see, I wasn't there that long. And then I thought, "I'll never be able to join up, seeing I'm with Civil Defence," but I was allowed to go.

I know you were telling us the story of that poster before, but can you just explain for the camera what that poster actually is?

Well, it's - oh, I'll have to read it again.

17:30 It's all South-East Queensland and it was just a test, the first test of a, you know, because they thought the Japs [Japanese] had come over. And it was South-East Queensland and it went from, I know it started at Bundaberg and went down and around a fair way out west. But then there were air raid warnings everywhere. Everybody joined up more or less for the old fellows, for that.

And that's a

18:00 **poster for blackouts, is it?**

That's the poster for blackouts, that's just a trial one. We didn't, we had a couple of blackouts but I don't think they were reported. But that was the poster that went on from Bundaberg right round to say that you had to, everybody had to put things over their windows and not let any light out. It was just a trial thing. The Air Raid Precaution fellows were out doing their bit, doing what they should do.

18:30 Just training them in case the Japs came.

So you would have typed that poster?

I typed that out but then it was printed by the Printing Office, I think. But they were all on calico like that.

They were printed on calico?

That's calico, yeah.

And where did you say the policemen used to go and stick them up, on telegraph poles?

Yes, well, when it was coming on, it was to let everybody know. And they went from Bundaberg right round all that country and put them on the telegraph posts.

Do you know why they were printed on calico and not on

19:00 **paper?**

I suppose because, I think because if you put paper ones on telegraph poles and it rained, it wouldn't be there. But anyway, that's on calico.

So doing that sort of work, typing out blackout posters and such, did that give you a feeling that you were doing your part for the war?

Doing a bit, yes. And I that's when I thought I'd never be released now, when the WRANS came. But anyway

19:30 I did. But it turned into a great big sub-department after that. There was a big staff down there.

At what point during the war did you actually think about joining one of the services?

Well, I thought I'd like to try and join the WAAAF, but my father wouldn't sign the papers, and that must have been about a year or so before. And then I heard that they were taking girls down south, because they,

20:00 you know, only took girls for wireless telegraphy and things like that. The navy, we weren't welcome at all when we first went in. Oh, I've lost track. Then, that's right, and I met this girlfriend in town and she said, "I've just put my papers in," so I went down and got them, as I said. Well, then a bit of a hassle signing up and I had to wait about six weeks, and then I was called,

20:30 and I was in HMAS Moreton behind the thing. Well, then I went in there but I didn't, I was still at the boarding house, we didn't have uniforms or anything, just "WRAN" written there. I didn't know who to salute when I went in there, I saluted everybody with gold buttons, which I shouldn't have done. But anyway, I worked in the stores. Well, when they knew I could do shorthand typing I was put in the office. And believe it or not the lieutenant commander there I worked for was a fellow

21:00 called Beedham and he had been from the public service from the Aborigines Department, but after the war he was sent back to the office that I worked in. And he was rude and he used to yell to you across the deck and he was really rude. But he was happy enough and I, you know, but by the time he got back to our office none of the girls wanted to go and do any work with him. Well, I volunteered, because

21:30 I was frightened of him, we were all frightened of him, but then he became my friend, and eventually he became manager of Frysburg Hospital. I always kept in touch with him, but he died.

You said the first thing you thought about doing was becoming one of the WAAAFs, but that wasn't possible.

Yeah. No.

Did you consider the Land Army or the (AWON UNCLEAR)?

No, I didn't want to join the army and I didn't even think about the Land Army. But anyway,

- 22:00 I blackmailed Dad into it. But as soon as I got in the depot, then I thought, "Now we've no quarters," so we had to live out. And there were about five girls in stores there, supply. When I went in, I went with them, up near the Terrace somewhere just to have our medical on the Terrace, and there were all sorts of girls. There was WAAAF and there were WRANS and there were army girls, and this fellow, I don't know who he was,
- 22:30 but he examined us. I was as thin as could be because I was only sixteen, and I was talking to a girl called Marion. And Marion, she was joining up the same as me, WRANS. Anyway Marion said, she always called me "Squirt", anyway, she said the doctor came out and he said, "Well, everybody's passed but one," and I didn't realise but everyone just turned and looked at me. But I didn't, I got in.
- 23:00 I don't know, I think it was a WAAAF, she couldn't make it. But anyway, as soon as I got into the navy then I didn't tell anybody, and we only had one officer then, Third Officer Fenton. She was in charge of the WRANS, so I asked to see her and I told her about home and I was unhappy, and I said, "If there's any chance of a draft, could you consider me?"
- 23:30 you know. She really felt sorry for me, so I was I think five months it was in the stores there, getting on, doing my job well, because all my reports I've got there are all what an excellent typist I was and so forth. Anyway, Third Officer Fenton then called me, and there were no other WRANS in Queensland but just these few, and she said they want some supply girls in Townsville.
- 24:00 She said, "The only thing is that we haven't got any quarters for you. If you've got someone that would take you in, I think you're home and hosed." So I went and I said to Mum, Mum had a friend in Townsville, people called Jones. Mum wrote to her and I can see the telegram, "Margaret more than welcome."
- 24:30 So, she'd always called me Margaret this one. Anyway I got this and took it to the office, and I said nothing and she said, "Well, just hang on." So anyway, then the boss came in one day and he said, "You've got a draft," and I said, "Oh, that's nice," and he said, "I'm trying to stop it, but that Fenton won't stop it," and he didn't know that
- 25:00 I appealed to her first. So there was Marion, she went up to Cairns, and there was another one that went up to Cairns, two went up to Cairns, and five of us went to Townsville. There were three girls there, I think, who were Townsville girls but they were living at home. So the other girls found somewhere to go up there.

Had many of the boys that you knew joined up?

Yes, they had to. Just about all of them, except a couple

- 25:30 in the office that were really needed. But most of the boys in the office joined up.

Were you getting much news of them or from them?

Oh yes, I used to write to a lot of the fellows.

Where were they generally?

Oh, overseas, New Guinea, England, Horn Island. But anyway when I got up to Townsville of course that was fine.

- 26:00 I didn't know anything about stores at all because I just worked in the office. So anyway when we were sorted out two girls went up to victualling, that was bedding and food; two girls went into naval stores, and they, because that was bookkeeping and so was the other; and I went into a store called transit stores. So there was only the boss and me and
- 26:30 one sailor at that stage. And the ships used to come into Townsville Wharf, and that would have stores on it that had to go to ships further on, but they weren't going that way so they'd put them and we'd take them until another ship was going up, say up to Milne Bay in Papua or something. So they'd have to be taken out, and that's my job, I worked mostly on the wharf. And I had a working
- 27:00 party, these were the boys that were just passing through, and I'd give all the orders and you know, but it was all in code. Every day I got my list of codes. Number 20 was the Australia, I know that, and a couple of others I remember. But it was always just (in the diamond UNCLEAR) the number, so I knew exactly where that ship, and when the ships were coming in where they were going. But I had to burn
- 27:30 that every night. I didn't tell anyone, not even the WRANS knew what I did. So you know I did a bit of shorthand there and we did a bit of bookwork, but just what cases we got. We got on well. My boss even asked me after the war, he rang from Melbourne, he said, "I can't find a decent typist, would you come down?" but of course I didn't go. But he was good. He was good, and all the boys there,

28:00 we had a fellow who was a Baptist minister but he joined supply, he wanted to know the boys on the deck. And he used to propose to me every morning. I didn't marry him, of course, but. Then I got another girl eventually, and she came up from Sydney.

Before we actually get too far into your service, I might just go back and ask you about more details about when you actually joined up. So, you got Dad to sign the papers, you went to the depot.

Yeah. It wasn't the depot, it was right back down,

28:30 it was an old building they took over there for recruiting.

So did you sign on for any particular amount of time?

For as long as they wanted me. And I also signed to say I'd go anywhere.

And you had that choice?

For the duration. Yeah, well, I mean the WRANS didn't go to sea then. I went out a couple of times in corvettes just for a day.

So you went and had the medical, and what sort of things were they checking you for

29:00 **at the medical?**

Oh, you know, your feet, your eyes, your chest, all those. You know, you had to get in the raw with your jacket off and jacket on, and they. Don't know who he was, I haven't a clue. And then because when we were going away, we didn't have any uniforms. So they couldn't let us go without uniforms, so some tailor,

29:30 I think it was Wolf, he had some diagonal serge: Marion and I, oh, the lot of us, we got our suits tailor made, which were lovely.

So you had the medical and then did you know where you were going?

Well, I knew I had to report to HMAS Moreton which was Brisbane.

Where was HMAS Moreton?

Down behind Parliament House there were government garages and that, and the government garages were changed into brick store.

30:00 But I never knew a thing about stores ever.

At HMAS Moreton did you actually live there, or were you still living...?

No, there were no quarters. I was still living at the boarding house.

Still at the boarding house.

And some of the girls who, they were at GFS House, a boarding house for girls that were down working, you know. I never lived in there, the quarters, but mostly hardly any girls got out of Moreton, they were there the whole war.

How did the pay compare in the WRANS?

30:30 Oh, well, I've got a list there. I think I got about four shillings a day, and they fed you and gave you uniforms.

Was that more or less than you'd been getting before?

Oh no, I was getting a good wage in the government. I finished up I think I was getting about eight pounds a week.

So you went into the WRANS on less money than you'd been on?

Oh, yes.

Did they pay your board then?

Only six weeks. Oh no, they didn't pay my board, but for six weeks the government paid me.

31:00 Then I went home for a while. I got dengue and went home for a while again.

Do you remember going in to work in the public service and telling them that you were joining the WRANS?

Yes, oh yes, I told them.

What did they say?

Well, I was the only one, but they didn't object because we were very patriotic. And in the meantime,

this boyfriend that I'd had, he'd been drowned. His ship, the Japs sunk his ship,

31:30 he was drowned.

How did you find out about that?

He was a child of an unmarried woman and all his life they had lived in just a room, and Mary, his mother, used to go round and clean people's houses and things like that. She gave him a good education, and he had to join up so he joined the navy. And he said to me, "After this war, I'm going to make it up to Mary for all she's done. I'll look

32:00 after her." But he never came back. He hadn't been in the navy that long. I went to see her a few times, but she cried so much, I was mean, I didn't go back again. I got upset. But he was a nice boy. I mean he wasn't really my boyfriend. I didn't want a boyfriend then.

Did you actually get news that he had been killed, or was it an assumption when you hadn't heard from him?

He was missing.

32:30 But Mary got that, I suppose. I don't know how I knew he was missing, but he was missing. I'd just knitted him a nice silk scarf, I don't think he would have got it. He used to write to me, he went down to Cerberus which is down in Victoria, and did his training down there.

Was that heartbreaking when you heard about him?

Oh yes, I was upset. Well, when you hear of anybody being killed

33:00 it wasn't nice. But I think the navy, I think we had about forty-odd coupons as civvies, [civilians] but in the navy we got about twelve, that's coupons to buy your clothes, a bit of food. If you were outside, which I was in Townsville, they gave me tea coupons and butter coupons to give to my landlady. I was there six weeks and then I moved into the depot.

33:30 **At the time when you joined up, had Japan entered the war?**

Yes. I got there just after the bombs had been dropped in Townsville. There were heaps more troops in Townsville than civilians.

Do you recall actually hearing about Pearl Harbour and about Japan entering the war?

Oh Pearl Harbour, yes I remember that, and Japan, yeah.

What was the buzz around Japan entering the war?

34:00 Well, a couple of the girls at work went and learnt Japanese. They must have thought that the Japs wanted to take us, anyway, they would have taken us over. But Townsville was bombed, but that was just before I got there.

Where did the girls go and learn Japanese?

I don't know. Greeny was one of the typists and she used to go around saying, "Su su may," and doing something or other,

34:30 I wouldn't have a clue what she was doing.

How was that regarded, those girls going to learn Japanese?

Oh I don't know, we'd just take them for granted.

Before you went to Townsville were you scared of the Japanese?

No, I was quite confident that we'd win the war. I don't know, I was young. I was twenty, I think, two days after I joined up.

What sort of

35:00 **news were you getting of the war?**

Nothing much. Not even in the navy. It was all hush-hush.

How did you hear the news?

Just by word of mouth. A sailor would come back and he'd been somewhere. Because every letter you wrote was censored: from the troops to me, and from me to the troops, we were all censored, and bits cut out of your letters.

35:30 But when I wrote I never wrote about anything like that. But it was good when I knew when the ships were coming in, because I knew an odd sailor on a ship and I'd think, "Oh, So-and-so is coming up."

At the time when you went to HMAS Moreton, what was actually there? What was actually going on at HMAS Moreton?

Well, there were writers, a lot of writers. And supply girls I think, I

36:00 don't know. But mostly writers, that's what they wanted for that.

What did the writers do?

Writers were clerks, just typing, shorthand. I did more or less writers' work. You know, I was supposed to know bookkeeping but I didn't. When they knew, even when I went down to Cerberus the boss there knew that I was a shorthand typist, and I was put in stationery store for about a week and I was in his office then.

36:30 **So when you joined they didn't send you somewhere for training, you just went straight there?**

No, no training. We didn't have any training at all. The other services did, the women. But we didn't, we were straight into our job. We didn't know anything about naval talk. We didn't know, as I said, I didn't know who to salute. We didn't know a thing, we were just pushed into the, I went straight into this job.

How did you learn about the navy?

You just picked it up here and there. You got to know it.

37:00 But I, well, I didn't know that much until I got to Townsville.

Was there a whole other navy language that you had to learn?

Oh yes, I've written down a few things there. You know, like the deck was the floor, and scran was food, the galley was the kitchen. There was "hands to scran" meant "come to lunch, to dinner," "Wakey, wakey," for morning.

37:30 They'd come through and when, we finished up in nice barracks but after a bit of drama, and they'd come with a whistle at six o'clock. But I was always up early. Me and this other girl, we used to get up early so we could get to the showers before the other girls were banging on the door to get you out. So we got up about half past five and had our shower. But Townsville was very good, and I was there for nearly two years.

38:00 **How long had you actually spent at HMAS Moreton?**

About five months, I think, I've got it there.

Were you much younger than everyone else?

No, a lot of the girls were eighteen. See, you could join up at eighteen, but one girl she joined up, and she came from out west, but she was only sixteen, and she put her age [up] on the thing, and she was tipped out eventually.

38:30 **Having come from a house where it was essentially you and your younger brother, what was it like then coming to a place with lots of girls?**

There weren't that many girls, it was mostly boys, see. Oh no, but they did swear. I can remember I went out to the store to find out something and heard a very nice boy use the "F" word and I thought, "I'll sneak around," so I snuck around and he couldn't see me. But then somebody come around the corner and said, "Oh, Donny, Margaret's around there."

39:00 But the boys stopped swearing eventually.

Was that a shock to you, to hear the boys swearing?

Oh, sort of. But I ignored it. Then because the boys all call the girls "Sheila" and of course I worked with a girl called Sheila down in Victoria, she used to cop it a bit.

39:30 No, they soon learnt to behave themselves.

Once you had joined up, you said your father was initially reluctant, but did you know what your Mum and Dad thought of you joining up?

Mum was happy. But Dad, I don't know whether he liked it or not but it was too bad. I was gone.

Did your brother join up?

No he was still at school. Five years' difference.

40:00 **When you got to HMAS Moreton, who were your officers there?**

Well, I only had this Lieutenant Commander Beedham, and there was one WRAN officer, the one I went to and told her I wanted to go if I could. But most of the girls in Brisbane, in Moreton stayed there, they never got drafts, never got out. So I was glad I did.

How many WRANS would you say were there?

Altogether? I don't know,

40:30 when I was there, there was probably about twenty or so. Not that many. But then it got pretty full up, but then I never went back to Moreton again, I don't know.

Tape 3

00:31 He wouldn't do anything for me.

So it wouldn't have mattered what he came home with? And why was it that you thought you might like to join the WAAAF?

Because there was no navy then, but then when I heard there was navy I was more than interested.

Were there many recruiting posters around?

No. I only knew from this girl I met in the street. No, there were none. Oh, in the bathroom.

01:00 Go and look in the bathroom at that poster, have you seen it?

It's all right, I saw it before. I'll have to get a photo of that.

That was the English one someone gave me.

Oh, you got that afterwards.

That's the First World War. Yeah, somebody brought me that.

Did you ever see any ladies in uniform in the city?

Oh, yeah. The place was full of uniforms. Townsville, I mean it was just as I said, there was more,

01:30 there was less civilians. Civilians did without lots of things. I stole a leg of bacon once. My poor friends who looked after me, you know, they couldn't get anything. Old Pop used to go and get some petrol from the Yanks and things like that. But Mrs Jones used to say, "I wish I could get some bacon." So, because [of that] I said to one of the boys in victualling, "Could you get me a leg of bacon?" and he said, "Yeah, I'll

02:00 get it for you." So anyway he gave it to me. So, I'm going out, you know, on the Liberty boat with this thing under my arm. So the next day the Chief called me and he said, "Don't you ever do that again. I can still send him away for this." I said, "What did I do, Chief?" and he said, "You stole a leg of bacon." It sounds like "Tom, Tom the Piper's Son" [nursery rhyme] . And anyway - you're not doing this are you, taping this? Oh.

02:30 Anyway, he said, "It was so obvious, you even brought it out in the navy wrapper and everything." But he didn't do anything about it. The other thing I had was my uncle who was in the First World War, he was in the Second. He was just on a patrol ship, and he came in to Magnetic, which was Townsville, and I had a message from sick bay to come and see him. And I said, "Is there anything you want, Uncle Arthur?" and he said, "Yeah, I want a bottle of beer."

03:00 Of course you couldn't get it for love nor money. There was always a session, the boys would queue up, and we didn't drink anyway. I wasn't going to keep standing in that. So Old Pop Jones got me this bottle of beer, and I snuck it into sick bay. That's the only two things that I did wrong, really.

And did you take the Chief's tip and disguise it better?

I don't know what I did. I just went in to see him. I probably had it in my briefcase or something. Yeah, I could have got into trouble for taking the bacon.

03:30 But I was so dumb.

I was going to ask you a bit more about when the American, the first fleet of Americans arrived in Brisbane, and the big parade they had. Did people line up to see the ships come in?

No. Oh, I don't know, because it was at New Farm. I wasn't there, I went into the city. And you know, they looked so marvellous because everyone, it was a public holiday,

04:00 and I know one was the Arizona, as I said, but I can't remember the others. And they paraded right up and then they were all let loose, see, and you couldn't get into a restaurant or anything, and the Yanks trying to pick you up. But they were quite, I was talking to them, you know. But there were certainly flags out everywhere, people everywhere.

When you said they looked marvellous, how did they look different to the Aussie chaps?

04:30 Oh well, they were all in white with their gob caps and so immaculate. Because our sailors didn't wear white, only the front.

What sort of pick-up lines were they using on you?

Well, I don't know. I think we were as anxious to talk to them as, because I think I felt more or less, well, if the troops were coming over here we might be all right. I don't know. But I know I finished up at Webster's Café up the top with this

05:00 Curly - not Curly, I forget his name anyway. That's the only Yank I ever went out with, as I said.

What was it that intrigued Aussie girls about the American lads?

Well, no, I think they think they were a novelty and I mean they had plenty of money, and they could give you silk stockings and things like that; because they had a wonderful canteen. They were fed very well. Well, I mean we were fed well too, but they had all these luxuries,

05:30 sticks of chewing gum, etcetera. But all the girls, quite a few WRANS I knew married Yanks and most of them were duds, but the one I did, she died over there, she lived very happily with a Yank. I don't know, they were just a novelty. Out at Charleville too, there were heaps out there, because I went on a holiday and I remember this Yank called

06:00 Lindel Lionel Link. And I went out with a sailor, that's right, a fellow there. No, he was air force. His name was "Pluto", his name was Selby Polito, so they called him "Pluto". No, I didn't bother about Yanks. I mean in Townsville especially, if you were home when it was your night off it was your own fault, because there was just things on the noticeboard, you know, "If you want to go to this dance or that dance,

06:30 you'll be picked up at so-and-so." I mean you just went. I went to the air force dance with a lot, I liked those boys. But, you know, it was your own fault if you stayed in.

With the ladies that you knew that married Americans, did they go back to America, most of them?

Yes. One did especially that I know, and she, it was just - she came from Hong Kong, and her mother evacuated her out, her mother and she were evacuated out

07:00 to Melbourne from Hong Kong. And her mother, Maureen's mother, sent this beautiful lingerie and wedding dress and everything, but she went back and it was pretty rough. And then she finished up, she had an English accent and she finished up as a radio announcer over there because she had this voice. And she had about three kids.

07:30 Then she made arrangements, her father sent her the money to come back to Australia, and she - ah, I've lost it again. She went back and she rang this fellow, and just said - I forget his name now. Milo. Milo his name was - and she rang him and said, "I'm leaving, I'm going home," and he said, "Come and have dinner with me."

08:00 And so she went and had dinner with him. Next thing she knows she's in bed and she'd been doped and she was pregnant again so she had to stay over there. But none of her kids came out when she came out. She was a beautiful girl, she's got dementia at the moment.

Why do you think, when the girls went over and it didn't work out, why do you think it didn't work out?

I don't know.

08:30 I mean just a lot of them were engaged before they went overseas, and then came over. I don't know, I didn't really, as I said I didn't have anything to do with Yanks.

The air force dances that you went to in Townsville, were they Royal Australian Air Force, or was that the United States?

Royal Australian. Oh no, I didn't go to the American ones. That was out at Garbutt, if you know where Garbutt is, every Wednesday night. And that was good.

09:00 **Just backtracking to when you joined the navy, did you have to get references or anything like that?**

Yes. I had to get a reference from the church, a reference from the local police, a reference from work, a reference from another public servant. A friend of mine's father was Director of Labour so that was all right. And then, what was the other one?

09:30 Oh, I don't know. There was another one, I know there were five. They were very particular and they didn't always accept people. Somebody said to me the other day we were hand picked, and we were. Yeah.

What sort of hassle was that, running around trying to get all of those references?

Oh, no bother. I mean, work gave me one, and this girlfriend of mine, her father gave me one. And the church was all right,

10:00 because I used to go to church sometimes. And the police, you know, they made sure you were of good character.

And what would these referees say when you told them what you were doing?

Oh, they just took it for granted I think. I had no hassles with that.

When you first got your uniform, how did that make you feel?

Oh, real good. But as I said I didn't have it for quite a while until I was going away. No, I felt good and I looked good in it.

10:30 Most people were impressed.

Did you get your uniform just before you went to Magnetic?

Yes, well, see we didn't have any uniforms. And, as I said, this tailor Wolf had some of this navy material, diagonal serge, diagonal anyway. They made it tailor-made for us, ready to go away. We went away with it.

How much luggage did you take with you up to Magnetic?

11:00 I don't know, we were issued with a medium-sized suitcase, and we had our coat, we were given a Burberry, and we were given a gas mask, tin hat, and we had all that. It was a bit. But we were in, we left from Roman Street and the troop train was full of fellows and girls, and I know one girl –

11:30 she lives in Bundaberg now – she just had her inoculation, you know, needles, and she was sick. So we had to put her on the floor, and we didn't have any sleepers, no nothing. And people were up sleeping in the racks and on the floor, these fellows. I don't think we even, there was no toilet there, so we must have had to wait until we stopped. And on the way up, you know, you got stew or something.

12:00 Some volunteer women make stew mostly in kerosene tins, and ladle you out some of those.

And that would be at the station, when you'd stop at the station?

Oh yes, at each station.

Did the fellows behave themselves?

Yes, I think so. We did, we were all together, we five. We didn't go far, because it was all new to us anyway. But I know there were a lot of soldiers. But they let, you know the troop train wasn't sort of hush-hush, because I know all these boys and girls

12:30 from New Farm used to, they all came to the station to wave me off, and then they went over to the city hall to see Artie Shaw play, the band.

Did you see your mum just before you left?

I must have, of course I did, I think. That's all I had, but coming back I didn't, when I was going to Cerberus I'd brought so many damn books

13:00 I had to get one of the boys to make me a case like that, and then we got it onto the transport and went to Brisbane to the armament store, where a girlfriend of mine got the fellows to drop it out at Mum's place. I had a lot of junk. But after two years you get a lot.

Do you remember how long that train trip was to Townsville?

A long time. It wasn't so bad.

13:30 We went through, but we stopped here and there. But sometimes when the Burdekin [River] was up in the rainy season they'd go out through, sort of back onto the Mount Isa line and then come in that way. It used to take them ten days sometimes. You couldn't have a shower, you couldn't have anything.

And were you excited by the prospect of travelling?

I think I was, yes, but I think I was relieved that I was getting out of Brisbane. I know it was a relief

14:00 more than anything, and I knew Mrs Jones and I knew she was a lovely lady. And they were very good to me.

Where had you met Mrs Jones previously?

Mrs Jones worked in the Carlton with Mum. And she married a fellow with five children and then she had three more of her own. But she was a real lady, an (old pot pea and a bus run UNCLEAR). And I can remember the day I arrived and Mrs Jones was waiting at the station, so she must have been notified or something, and she's waiting at the station, and we went and I'm sitting on a

14:30 great big bread crock she had. I met this little girl, thirteen, I'm still friendly with her. It was only seven years' difference. It was a lot then. She'd been to, I don't know, church I think. And Old Pop comes in, he'd been to the races, and he said, "What the bloody hell did you get it into your head to join the navy

for?" and I was terrified, but he was wonderful to me.

15:00 Even later on after the war, he'd come down to Brisbane, he'd get a bus and he'd take me out for the day. But, you know, he had a few WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and he used to sit and talk to the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. He was saying, you know - Mrs Jones always had an immaculate table, a starched tablecloth, everything, and it was just beautiful, the silver was polished, everything - and he said, "Now, are you enjoying that meal, Margaret?" I said, "Yes."

15:30 "This poor WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK I had. It had watery eyes and warts all over it, so I thought I'd put it out of its misery." But that didn't put me off the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK . The boys too, they were churchy, and one joined up later. They were home on holidays, and the boys used to always try, after the meal was over, run for the toilet, you see. And Mr Jones always washed up and he'd say, "Come on, you bloody boys, come out of there."

16:00 "Took an after dinner pill, Dad," and they wouldn't come back till it was all over. But his bark was worse than his bite, he was very nice.

When did you first have to report to HMAS Magnetic, once you got up there?

Well, I don't know what day I got up, but it was the next day. They must have picked me up. I don't know what happened, how we got there. But we just went to HMAS Magnetic, well see, I wasn't in Magnetic at all, I was on the wharf but working. And then I think we were just allotted our jobs.

16:30 **So it was only once you got there you were told what you'd be doing?**

Mm.

And what was that, exactly?

Well, I worked on the wharf and, as I said, the ships coming in and unloading them and things like that. And I did typing and things like that.

Which building were you in?

In an old wool dumping shed. The Cleveland Bay wool dumping shed.

Is that still in existence?

No, it's been pulled down. Yeah, I thought I'd take a picture the last time but it's gone

17:00 completely. The whole wharf's gone now. And we'd have to march, you saw as much in there. We had to march up to the depot when we finished up getting a Wrannery [WRANS accommodation] , because in the meantime we were put in a some lieutenant's huts and then we were put into another little hut with one officer looking after us, day girls and watch keepers. Then we went into the big Wrannery and

17:30 we used to have to walk up, march up and there'd be air force trucks and things that would go past yahoing us and whistling. I'll just go off a bit: one of the girls, we had these dreadful pants, you see, and they had two buttons here. Bonds made them but there was no elastic. This girl is marching along, you see, we had to go along the Strand to get to the depot, and

18:00 then from the depot then I went by truck over to the wharf. And anyway, this poor girl, her pants fell down. "Passion killers", the boys used to call them, and I always put a pin in mine. So we all marked time around her, you know, just marked time, and she picked them up and put them in the bag. But just as we were doing that, a truck of air force boys came along, so by the time we got back to the depot

18:30 the sailors were saying, "Who's the WRAN who's lost her pants?" But, I don't know what else about that. But anyway that's what we did.

Why were they called "passion killers"?

I don't know, I suppose they couldn't undo the buttons, I don't know.

So they could strip a .303 [army rifle] blindfolded but they [couldn't] fix these buttons?

Well, they came to about there, you know, they were like little boy pants, you know. But they were Bonds. That's all we got.

19:00 **Did she get a nickname out of that little episode?**

No. I can't remember. No. Well, she had to go up the hill, I think. No, she didn't, she had to go to one of the other officers, she was a coder I think.

And speaking of that, you went to the wharf; some of the ladies went up Castle Hill, you were saying?

Yeah, but not with us. We five, central stores got three, and it must have been six of us. No,

19:30 central stores got two, transit store got me, and victualling stores got the other two. And victualling was the bedding and food and so forth.

So how often would you see the other ladies?

Oh well, we slept in the same part of the building and we all got in the same truck, the "cattle truck", as we used to call it. And as we'd go through Flinders Street all the civilians would wave to us, they waved every morning we came along. Then we'd go to victualling and

20:00 let the girls out there, those two. And then central stores wasn't far from me so we'd all get out there, and I'd go to my job and they went to theirs.

So you'd ride in the back of the "cattle truck"?

Yes. We didn't have any ladder or anything and our skirts were pretty tight, and you'd have to get on the step and then get your leg up onto the tyre and then just the edge of the truck,

20:30 you know, that had big rails. And then you'd have to get yourself right round and into the truck. I met a fellow later and I said, "Gee, you boys were awful, none of you ever helped." I got cranky a bit, but I never said anything to them, but I thought they could help you up. And we had to jump out of course after that. I said to this fellow, I said, "You boys were

21:00 awful, why didn't you give us a hand?" and they were always at the back of the truck. And he said, "Oh, the view was good where we were sitting, where we were standing." But then we had that little fifteen truck, while I used to go out to the airport and pick up penicillin or anything like that that had to go in a hurry to wherever it was going. That's how I got to know a lot of those air force boys. One of those boys used to say, "I hate going out to the drome, they all say, "Where's WRAN Marshall?'" They all used to rush out to see me.

21:30 But, you know, I'd have to go to the railway to pick stuff up. But I didn't have to lift anything, I always had some sailors with me.

And the barracks that they finally put you in, the temporary barracks.

Quarters, not barracks.

Quarters. Which was the one that had no toilet in it?

That was over at the store. See, it was a wharf, so no women were ever on the wharf, and there

22:00 was only a men's toilet and we used to have to wait. We would take them back at lunchtime to the depot to eat. No, we didn't, we had to march down. But at the depot there was only two WRANS toilets there and there were three of us, and we'd sort of race each other. And in that thing it says, "Make sure you don't trip again," or something. You know, whoever had to wait had to trip. It was terrible.

22:30 And the quarters, what were they like? How did they keep them private?

Well, they weren't. You mean where we lived?

Yeah.

Well, I've got a thing there. We'd come in for regulating, and then we had big wide fences all around so no-one could get in. And then we'd just get,

23:00 actually we were the first ones in there, so we had the top of one part of it, and it looked right over the ocean over to Magnetic Island, it was lovely. But we just slept, bed there and bed there and then a wardrobe, bed there, bed there. You didn't have any privacy. But mostly supply assistants. There were a lot of supply assistants come up later from different ones, for clothing and what not.

23:30 And writers also. They did that.

How did they keep the fellows from annoying you ladies?

Well, I'll tell you a story. Oh, the fellows didn't. When we first went in the first morning, this poor little sailor, he was only a kid, he had to run through the dormitories to wake us up, "Wakey, wakey," and the whistle would go, see. And because all the girls sat up in amazement,

24:00 they chiacked him, they whistled, and he never came back again. But I was going to say, too, once outside the Wrannery they had the big - do you know Townsville? The big fig trees there? Well, and our quarters were where the pool is now. And anyway, we had this bug gate so no-one could get in, and anyway one night - and we had to be in by twelve, so you wouldn't go down the beach with a fellow if you

24:30 were any way decent. Some of the girls used to go down with a rug on the beach, but not us; we were all under the fig tree saying goodnight to our fellows, see. I'd be here with my fellow and you'd be there with your girl, and no-one would take any notice. But anyway, this particular night, the naval officer in charge went past in his big car, so we didn't know. So next morning, "All WRANS on deck," so we had to go and parade.

25:00 I think his name was Patterson, I'm not sure. Anyway he stood up there and he raved and he ranted

about the passionate farewells at the gate, "The place looks like a house of ill fame." Of course I giggled, because I knew, I worked in the Health Department, I knew all about the VD [venereal disease, i.e. sexually-transmitted infection] clinic and everything else. And a little girl next to me, I don't know who she was, she said, "Margaret, what's a house of ill fame?" And I said, "I'll tell you later."

- 25:30 Which I did. But anyway, you know we were a bit disgusted, but we giggled, I giggled, except for a friend of mine and another one. They, I didn't know until after the war, that they went and saw madam, the first officer, and said how they were absolutely disgusted, and so was the officer. She said, "Do you want this to go further, WRANS?" and they said, "Yes, we do." So within a month he was drafted out.
- 26:00 But that was a big thing, to be called that. You know there was another girl, she was a cook, she was always on the beach with this fellow and she used to go and sit there and whatever they did, and anyway, he always used to help her up this barbed wire thing and she'd go over. So this particular night she goes over, and she comes in. The next morning she realised she had no shoes, so she'd left
- 26:30 her shoes out in the beach. But when she came out she said, "What am I going to do?" So Joan her friend lent her a pair of shoes. Next thing, the regulating officers, which you used to have to go and be checked in and out, notice these pair of shoes: "These shoes have been found. The owner can have them on identification," or something, and Edna knew damn well what it was all about. So they said, I had a friend in PO [?] and she said, "We knew whose they were."

- 27:00 But Edna wore Joan's shoes for about ten months and then one day Edna came back from wherever she was going, and anyway she looked at her shoes under the bed. They knew damn well that we wouldn't own up, so she got her shoes back.

She probably had her name on the shoes, did she?

I don't know. Possibly. Oh no, I think, I mean I didn't write my name in the shoes. But then with this bug wire,

- 27:30 there was an air force depot, I think it was a transit depot, and we'd hang our clothes on the line, the boys would come and talk to us through this wire fence.

Were there any rules about fraternisation?

Oh, well, not really, we weren't told anything. But, you know, we knew we shouldn't go down the beach at night and things like that. But no, not really. That was a long time ago, we were all

- 28:00 pretty decent, I think. And then another time, too, opposite us was the WAAAF. Yeah, the WAAAF were in the convent, they'd taken that over and the WAAAF were in there. And these petty officers, they were always big and fat, and they drank a lot. They were permanent navy. And they'd come along in their truck, big truck.
- 28:30 It was on the weekend and they had a piano on the top of the truck, one of them had a big white cockatoo and it used to drink beer like they did and we'd hear all this squawking, and his cocky trying to fly around and falling. But anyway, they're playing the piano and singing to the WAAAF. We were looking through the shutters.
- 29:00 The piano fell off the truck, and here's these drunk fellows, there might have been about half a dozen of them, trying to get this piano up on the thing. It was probably donated by some poor person who, you know.... But they got it on. But cocky was just full as they were. It was going "plumpf". But you know, funny things like that happened. And then I had a fellow from the Joneses. He used to come and collect me every
- 29:30 Sunday morning, always off and used to take me round to lunch. We got famous going right round the hill there to West End, and I'd sit on Doug's bar of his bike, and people would come out, "Here they come, here they come," we'd hear them say. But, you know, they were good days. I was very happy in Townsville. It was sad, but.

I've heard lots of stories, in particular with the Wranneries, that the fellows would always try to sneak a

- 30:00 **look at the ladies and that sort of thing.**

Well, they couldn't do - oh well, they did do actually. When we were in this long hut with the day girls and the watch keepers, we had the bowls club next door and these old fellows would come, and there'd be shutters, and they'd come and look in. And one of the girls, she slept next to me, she said, "I'm sick of this." She was a tall girl and she wore beautiful underwear and so forth, and she'd say, "I'm sick of this." So she goes there down to her bra and her pants and she stands there

- 30:30 at the big window, and she says, "Righto, have a look and then you wont go and sneaking and looking and looking at us." And they didn't come out for a long time. But, no the boys were all decent, well, that I met. They were all, because they were the same as me, away from home. Some were so young.

You said earlier that in Townsville there were more service people than civilians, it seemed.

- 31:00 **Can you tell us about, like how many different things were going on there?**

Well, there were camps everywhere for the army. I don't know where because they didn't ever, you know. But we'd go to dances, God knows where we went, but we went in a truck and they'd bring us back. There were people coming in and out, going off on the ships and coming back. And also the hospital trains used to come past our wool dumping

- 31:30 shed, and the boys would be loaded off. And I was a bit shy, and everybody would whistle you on that wharf because you were the only girl, you know. You had to be careful if you went to board a ship, because some silly sailor would be standing underneath the ladder, you had to watch that, and things like that. But these poor boys I always remember, and then they used to come past my door if I was there, and I would always go out and give them a wave.

Was it daunting, being the only woman

- 32:00 **amongst so many men?**

No, it wasn't, because they were all nice. The boss was good - oh, he was a drunkard, and he used to take his girlfriends to the store at night and so forth. He used to drink, he used to go up to Ingham and collect his beer. He had some alleyway up there to get the beer. But then I never ever picked on him, and he, what was I talking about?

- 32:30 **Just about being the only woman amongst so many men.**

Yeah. Well then, see, I had Ralph come in, and he was the Baptist minister. He used to go to the local church sometime and we'd all go down to hear him preach. And then we got a little boy called Neville McNeal, and Neville was so young, he didn't even shave. I used to look at him and think, you know, "You should be home with you mother." That's what I thought even down in Cerberus, these little midshipmen. It was so

- 33:00 sad, they were just young kids. Then we got a fellow came in, a leading hand, and he was a fellow called Ray Birdiston . He was a champion lifesaver, he lived at Lismore. But then we all got on well. No hassles except, you know, my driver Con Stollery. I'd go in fifteen truck, that was this little utility, he'd be changing gear and his hand would come up my leg all the time. I used to go crook. He only did it for me to go crook, I know that.

- 33:30 **So you must have had a pretty good sense of humour to put up with all those little...?**

Oh, yes. We were a happy lot actually in my office. But I'm glad I wasn't in Naval Stores. Oh, that's right, then the time came that I should have got a promotion, and the boss comes in and says, "Do you want your hook?" and I said - that was a hook to make you a leading hand - and I said, "Oh, I suppose so."

- 34:00 And he said, "Well, you'll have to leave me, and you'll have to learn about naval stores." So I said, "No thanks, I'm not going to." Because I was quite happy where I was. And I mean a lot of those boys, like the boss, as I said, offered me the job after the war, and they kept in touch. The boss, John Harry, and this Neville McNeal, when I went down to Cerberus they gave me the addresses of their parents, and they were always good to me down there.

- 34:30 **It must have been flattering, in a way, to be the centre of attention to so many, being the only woman amongst so many men?**

It didn't even worry me, I don't know, I just took it for granted. You know, the boss was good. Sometimes if we weren't very busy he'd say, "Get in number fifteen truck," and I'd go out and I'd be dropped at the Joneses for the afternoon and then they'd come back and get me.

So what sort of portion of work was purely paperwork

- 35:00 **and how much was actually doing physical stuff?**

Well, it was half and half. See, I had to keep, I had to do a bit of typing and a bit of shorthand for letters, I suppose, or something. But the boss and I made this big book about this wide, and he got cardboard and he put it all together. Then he got stockings, we used to get these rags and things, and out of stockings

- 35:30 he'd bound it all around and stuck it down. And then he got the papers and the thing put it in, you know: that just kept my record of all the cases and all the things that came in, and when they went out. And it was never ever the name of the ship, it was just "number so-and-so". That was about the only work I did.

Was there an aspect of your job that you didn't like?

No. Except the

- 36:00 armour officer one day, the armoured store was behind us somewhere, and I was washing my hand because I'd been in the thing, and this fellow Thompson, he said to me, "WRAN, get me that soap. I want to wash my hands." And I said, "I'll give it to you when I'm finished." He got cranky and stomped around, and eventually I did get cranky and threw the soap at him and hit him. And my boss he said, "He'll run you in."

36:30 You'll be in trouble." But he never ever did, unless the boss talked him out of it. I think I never really went crook about anything.

Were you still getting into trouble because you weren't sure about the rank structure and all that sort of thing?

Oh no. I learnt petty officers had gold badges but you didn't, I think somebody told me that I'd didn't have to do that. I just had to learn.

But in general how did you find the officers, the naval officers that you dealt with?

37:00 Oh, some were snobby. You know, their attitude was "I'm an officer, also a gentleman," and things like that. But one took me, he bought a big war bond and when he bought this, I think it was ten pounds, and he could go and look at a Spitfire and he could take someone, and he asked if I would like to go. So I went through a Spitfire with him. But

37:30 no, I got on with everybody just about. And when I was drafted down in Cerberus - all the girls got drafts; they went, and I applied and I thought, "I want to go somewhere else eventually, after two years." So the boss and the paymaster came down and said, "You've got a draft." And I said, "Oh that's good." I was dying to get to Sydney. And I said, "Oh, that's all right, that'll be good." I said, "I hope it's not Moreton," and he said, "No, it's Cerberus."

38:00 You know, it was very strict down there, and I said, "Oh." They said, "We can stop it if you give your permission." And I said, "No, I've been waiting for a draft for ages." And they said, "Yes, we stopped them all before, we can't do it again." And when I got down to Cerberus I had a draft to Darwin, but I didn't go because I had done too much tropical service.

38:30 **Would you have liked to have gone to Darwin?**

Oh, I'd have gone, yeah. I would have gone anywhere.

What did you think of the cold down in Cerberus?

Well, this boss of mine, because he came from Melbourne, he said to me, "You'll bloody well freeze." And I did. I went to work at seven o'clock in the morning in the dark. I'd never seen frost before, and it was so cold. And I'd go - I was talking to a lass from Victoria the other day - and we used to go and have our shower after we had our dinner.

39:00 We'd have supper and we used to go and have a shower, and I had flannelette pyjamas and a felt dressing gown. But then at seven o'clock the officers used to do the rounds, you see, to make sure the hut was tidy, etcetera, etcetera. So I'd be in bed for ages and when seven o'clock came I put my gown on and I'd go and hide under the hut. We would have got into awful trouble if they found out this lass and I used to go down there.

39:30 And as soon as the officer had been through we'd get back into bed. And then we'd cook mushrooms, or I wouldn't cook mushrooms because we used to go mushrooming and I didn't know a good one from a bad one. But oh, they were beautiful and they'd bring them to me in bed. Then at night-time, the mail didn't come in till quarter to ten; well, ten o'clock was lights-out, so I never ever went for the mail but the others used to, and this girlfriend of mine I was talking to the other day, she used to bring the mail back.

40:00 And because I wrote to a lot of fellows that I knew, boys from the office and so forth, she'd hide Brian's letter until about three minutes to ten, then she'd give it to me and I couldn't read it. I read it only for a minute, you know. But she was good.

That's cruel.

Yeah, I know she was.

Tape 4

00:32 **You had a storey for us about a young man with wandering hands?**

Yes. Well, I used to go to the pictures with him and so forth. He was a very handsome fellow, and he was air force. He must have worked outside because his hair was all bleached, and he was good-looking. So anyway, we're going back to the Wrannery after where we were going, and we were in the Strand. So we sat in the Strand, we were a bit early and his hand comes up my leg, you see. And I said, "Don't do that." I forget his name.

01:00 I said, "Don't do that." And he started again, so I just put my nose in the air and walked off and left him. And he said, "I'm sorry." Anyway, I just went in, but then when I'd go to the Garbutt dances, I'd meet him in the progressive barn dance. I put my nose up and danced with him and I never spoke to him again. That's how pure we all were.

You were a heartbreaker.

Oh, I don't know. You know,

01:30 all these funny things that happened.

When you were in Townsville were you seeing anything of wounded men coming back from overseas?

Yes, I did. I said that before, they used to come in to the wharf, and the trains would be there to take them.

Would you help load them?

No, I was too shy. I was the only girl. They'd only whistle me, the ones that could, and I'd wave to them but that was all.

So you never spoke to any of the wounded men?

No, I didn't. Well, I had a job to do, see.

02:00 And then they'd go past the store and I'd give them a wave.

How did you find the climate and the bugs and mosquitoes and things in North Queensland?

Well, the climate was all right because we lived on the beach, more or less. I didn't notice it hot. And then I worked over on the wharf and you get the sea breeze there. The climate didn't worry me at all.

02:30 But the civilians, I can remember Mrs Jones bending down once in a cyclone, you know, with perspiration, her dress collapsed. But no, I didn't mind the thing, and I was always out a bit, outside.

What about bugs and mosquitoes?

Didn't get any, I suppose with the sea breeze, we didn't get any mosquitoes. The only bugs I ever saw was one of the girls worked in victualling, and she was

03:00 on bedding, and when we were in some lieutenants' huts when we first went in, before they'd worked out what they wanted to do with us, this particular night it must have been, the light was on so it must have been before ten o'clock, and all of a sudden Hazel gets up and, "All the bedding, all the mosquito netting, everything out," and there was a bug going over her mosquito net. She wouldn't sleep there, anyway. But, see,

03:30 she was working on bedding. But we didn't, everything was clean with us.

When they finally moved you to the Wrannery on the Strand, what sort of facilities were there in terms of, you know, you had the room where you slept, where were the showers?

Well, the room was long, they were like long dormitories. We were in the middle. There was like the watch keepers there and we were there. And the toilets and ablutions, we called them, were in the middle there.

And was there hot water for showers?

Yes.

04:00 But the boys used to have to chop the wood to keep it going. Even when we were doing our washing, our dhobi-ing [Indian term for laundry] , the boys used to - we only had coppers, and the boys used to, stokers I suppose, chop the wood for us and we'd have the fire going.

Did you say earlier that you used to get up early and race for the showers?

Yeah, well Jean and I would, so we could have a decent shower without girls banging on the door saying, "Hurry up!" And then

04:30 I would wash my uniform, I did and some of the others, because you couldn't get starch. If you had starch by any chance you left it for the next person. But you used to boil the khakis and everything. But in that starch I put butter, kerosene, grated candle and then the uniform would be stiff and then you'd iron them, you see. But you never

05:00 ever sat down in your uniform. You couldn't put it on, either, you had to pull it over your head, had to get the girls to pull it over your head, it was so stiff. And especially if we were going out, we'd never sit down. But one of the sailors wrote to me - he's dead now - but he wrote a couple of years ago and he said, "Margaret, I always remember you in your immaculate uniform. You looked like a yacht going on its maiden trip." I've got it in there.

05:30 **Who came up for that recipe for the starch substitute?**

I don't know. Mrs Jones used to put a bit because she couldn't get it much either. But I don't know. But

hers was stiff because I helped her do, well, she'd do the washing Monday and then I'd say I would do all the ironing for her. And she said, "Well, just iron all the cottons," which I did. And Doug was one of the boys, and he comes out this particular night in

06:00 his pyjamas, and I'd starched them and he came out in his starched.... No, I never forgot that. They sort of always reminded me of that.

What about when you were at the Wrannery, what other facilities were there for things like going to the hairdresser?

No hairdresser. There was a hairdresser in watch keepers. But no, the girls with curly hair always cut their own.

06:30 And I used to find a barber or something, there was nothing. And you couldn't even buy any makeup much. We used to have that green stuff for powder base, and you know, you couldn't buy anything much. Films, makeup, anything.

What about things like feminine hygiene supplies?

Yes, well, I'll tell you a story about that. On the wharf this particular day we were unloading and the boys were putting things down, and I saw a packet on, "WRANS Townsville."

07:00 So I didn't take any notice of it but I thought, "Someone's been going through that, I wonder what's in that?" So when they brought it back to the store, and putting it in, it had been raining and as the boys lifted that out it fell apart. And there were just packets and packets of sanitary pads. And the boys laughed at me. I was angry, and when they laughed especially. And our steps were just two logs,

07:30 it was like a log there and a log higher so that the truck could come in and come straight into the store. I fell off the step and I sprained my ankle. But they used to go anything they thought was rabbits, when we got comforts, it was called. All those things. And we had a big cage we used to put all them in, because we knew the boys would go looking for chocolate or something.

08:00 So that's the story for that, but it was dreadful. When you used them, I think you just put them in the fire, I think.

So the navy supplied sanitary pads for you, though?

Yeah. They used to come up to the canteen and we'd come up through, and we'd come home and we'd find one packet on each bed.

The girls that you were saying, that some of the girls were possibly being sexually active, what would they use for contraception?

I don't think they did.

08:30 I only knew one girl who went off and got pregnant. But she came back. I didn't know she was pregnant, but I found out later that she must have had a baby or something and come back. But no, they weren't, maybe, I don't know. But I know a WAAAF one day, there was a thing and there was a girl going off and there were WAAAF in

09:00 the carriage, and it's got a big sign someone's put up: "Return when empty." It's dreadful. And I know the boys used to say, "Oh, those WAAAF's, they're the groundsheets for the" - oh, all these things I'm saying - "for the boys, for the air force."

That's very cheeky of them.

Yeah. Half the time I'd pretend I didn't hear.

09:30 **Did you have much interaction with the other services, with the WAAAF's?**

No. Only if we would go to the air force dances and the army dances, but we never did. I didn't know anybody else in any other service.

What else was around you where you were in Townsville?

What, where we lived?

Yeah.

Well, have you been to Townsville? Well, you know where the pool is? Well, that's where our quarters were built,

10:00 because the pool was built after. But we just had this big fence around. Oh, the girls did, though, they played basketball and things like that, some of them, but I didn't. But I was going to tell you, when we marched up to the depot every day, somebody brought in this dog called Brownie, and I didn't know it was a she but it must have been. And it was about this big, a scraggy-looking dog, and it would march up with us, you see. And when it would get to the depot it knew to march back,

10:30 it went back by itself. But anyway, Brownie had pups and she had them under the hut, and I can

remember seeing all these girls with their bottoms sticking out from trying to see what was underneath. And then we had this little kitten: I told you that, did I, about the kitten? Oh. Well, somebody brought a kitten in and it was only half-grown and it was having a kitten or something. So the girls, stewardesses I think, they

11:00 called the doctor, the naval doctor down. And he delivered the kitten all right and the mother, I think the little kitten was dead, but the other one, I mean she was still only a little thing, she was all right, he gave her a needle and so forth, but it died after that. So that's the only pets we had around the place. But Brownie, you know, she'd trot with us and

11:30 back she'd go. She'd spend the day in the office.

Did you ever have to go and see the doctor?

Yes, I did. With my sprained ankle I was in sickbay. And I then had this, with not having any toilet I had a problem with my bladder. This doctor used to come and we had a nice sickbay attending girl called Pat Charden, and Pat only died recently.

12:00 Pat was a ballet dancer, so she'd go through the thing doing whatever she did, and then when I had to have that catheter she said, "Come on, Margaret, I'm going to play golf." But yeah, I was in there, and I think I had the 'flu a couple of times. But in the first place when we didn't have quarters down there the sickbay was there for the boys, but they had a little tiny shed thing.

12:30 And if anybody got, a lot of girls got boils. Anyway, but this lass Anita, she's in the book there, she got boils badly; well, we had to get the day girls to take turns and go in to mind her up there, because the boys weren't allowed up there. There was a dentist you could never get into, because people passing through from the ships, you know, couldn't get to the dentist.

13:00 **Some people have told us that, with so many people passing through, there was a lot of fraternising going on, that sometimes VD was...?**

I don't know.

Do you know if there was VD clinic anywhere?

No. I only knew the one in Brisbane. I had a boil on my bottom once, and the sister from the one in Brisbane said, I was sitting on the typewriter like this, and she said, "Come down at four o'clock

13:30 and I'll fix it for you." So I go down to the VD clinic behind the curtain, and I come out and here's the lass from up the road where I lived, and she got pregnant - she was always out with the Yanks - and she's sitting there in the thing. I say, "Oh, hello, Joyce," and off I went. I never thought till years later she probably thought I had it. That's what I thought, "Gee whiz," you know.

14:00 No, there were lots of other things down in Cerberus. We used to go for mushrooms, as I said, and the boys used to take me on the handle of their bike, you know the bar. And I'm laughing so much one day, a fly went straight down, I've never forgotten that. But I wasn't allowed to pick any mushrooms. But we used to go to an air force dance, Sommer's, from there. I didn't worry about it much. We had plenty of

14:30 entertainment there, like we had dances in the rec [recreation] hut and so forth. And we used to get plenty of entertainment. Gracie Fields - have you heard of Gracie Fields? Well, she came down there and I saw her. But in Townsville we used to get these entertainment units used to come and give us.... There was plenty to do, I was never bored.

When you were in Townsville, when you say you always had sailors to do the lifting

15:00 **and things like that for you, how did they address you?**

"Chief". And I wasn't, that was a chief petty officer. No, but I'd boss them around, see, "Yes, Chief. No, Chief," they'd say.

So you had a good working relationship with them?

Oh yeah. They thought, I think they thought I was a novelty, that I shouldn't be bossing them around. But they were just once passing through, you know like, they'd be ashore or coming back from leave or something, waiting to get another ship.

15:30 But I've got a thing there too about when I went out on the Ballarat, that was a corvette. There was an exercise between the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] and the RAN [Royal Australian Navy], and we went right out past the island. Anyway, we always, it was always tradition to have pork for lunch on a Sunday. We had real butter, we had real eggs. We didn't have powdered eggs, we didn't have tinned butter or anything. And anyway we went out and it was

16:00 pretty rough, and everyone, you know, nearly everyone was sick. I was all right but I didn't eat anything. I don't think anybody ate much. But anyway, years later I was down at the Kendrawavell [?] Club down here, and years later this Charlie came along, he said to me, "Were you ever on the Ballarat, Margaret?" And I said, "Yes." And he said, "Did you come out when

16:30 it was rough and we had the RAAF there?" And I said, "Yes." And he was supply. Anyway, he said, "Oh

gee, I can always remember all the jelly. I thought I'd better put it back in the fridge or we wouldn't even have it." And they had it. Anyway, Charlie caught up with a fellow that was writing a diary, and there's a bit in the book about that.

Were there many occasions that you got to go out on a ship?

Not much. No, not much.

17:00 But that was just a treat, a few of us went.

What sort of occasion would you get to go out on a ship?

I don't know, they just asked me, I think it was stores girls, they just asked us if we wanted to go out. And I went out on a few patrol boats and things like that.

Did you have work to do while you were out there?

No. We had the day off. But the naval quarters there, you know in Townsville there's the casino?

17:30 Well, that land before that was the depot, and then they reclaimed all that land and built the casino.

Who was Ralph that you worked with?

Ralph was the Methodist minister. He used to propose to me every morning. Every morning, and then he'd say to the boss, "She won't marry me." But I, when I used to go to Sydney after, you know, he'd hold my hand all the way through the city, or take me for a drive and hold my hand.

18:00 But he married a lass and then they were divorced.

And was there a story about the two of you having a bit of a fascination with Winnie the Pooh? [AA Milne's children's story character]

Oh yes, that was Ralph and me, yes, Christopher Robin, and we used to go, in the office we'd recite it. And Willy was a girl, (Eunice a daughter's UNCLEAR) and she came from Sydney. Her father was head of Customs, and Willy and I got on well. That's when I needed more help.

18:30 And Willy never went on the wharf. Anyway, we used to recite poetry, Ralph and I, see. Everybody would shake their heads at everybody else, and when Willy went to Sydney on leave and she came back - her boyfriend was Anthony Hordern, young Anthony Hordern, but she didn't marry him - but anyway, she brought me back a poetry book, and she said, "Now Margaret, I've bought you this book. It's a book of poetry. If you dare read it in the office,

19:00 I'll take it back." I've still got it. Willy died, she went to New Zealand and died having a baby.

Did you have a favourite poem that you used to recite with Ralph?

"Has anybody seen my mouse?"

How does that one go? Can you recall it?

"Has anybody seen my mouse, I opened his box for half a minute, and when I looked," or something, "He wasn't in it. It must be somewhere, I'll ask Aunt Rose.

19:30 Have you seen a mouse with a wooffly nose?" Something, and it finishes up with, "Hasn't anybody seen my mouse?" All these nice little, I don't know whether you learnt all about that in school, did you? Or not school, your mother? Yeah. But we used to love those. Ralph and I would go, and the boss would look. But poor old Willy, she bought me this book. She used to come up, most of my friends - and I've got a lot of friends from the WRANS,

20:00 but most of them from interstate, from Perth right over to Adelaide.

And so had you and Ralph memorised Winnie the Pooh, or you used to read it?

No, I just knew it. And I'd done it for elocution as well. No, we used to just chuffle off.

Do you still remember any of Winnie the Pooh?

Yes, and I take it down to school when I go teaching. And I've got a little girl that does some reading, and she likes it. Oh yes, I wouldn't give away

20:30 my AA Milne books. I like poetry, anyway.

When you were there in Townsville, did many of the WRANS get married?

Yeah, quite a few, and we'd all rally round and give something to help make them - there was an odd one that had a wedding dress, but the others didn't much. But we dressed them up in whatever we got, she gathered it up and we put it on her. And we

21:00 used to go to the weddings at the cathedral.

So the ones that weren't in wedding dresses, what were they married in?

Uniform, or else something that somebody had. We were allowed to keep civvies but we couldn't wear them, only say if I went to the Joneses for the night I could wear my civvies, but you couldn't other than that. And you weren't allowed twenty miles radius out of Townsville, but I did go once. I went to Charters Towers with Old Pop. That was full of goats

21:30 and mullock heaps. I had a malted milk and somebody told me it was made of goats' milk, and whether it was or not I don't know, but I liked going up there.

Did you ever get out to Magnetic Island?

Oh, a lot. I've got pictures there of Magnetic Island. We used to go out on the launch, the launch hails launch. Oh yes, we'd go there a lot. And some of the girls, if they'd been sick - I never ever had recreation after being sick; my boss would say, "When are you coming back,

22:00 when are you coming back?" - but some of the girls used to go over there to the nursing home and recover. But oh, I went a lot to the island, I liked the island.

Who would you go out there with?

The boys, the girls. A group of us.

Would you just go over for a day?

Yes, we'd go for a day and we'd, I don't know what we'd get. We probably took something, maybe the victualling boys brought something, I don't know.

22:30 But we used to go, we'd have a lovely day and then we'd come back. But I had a friend, and he was a writer in Ships Office, and he had a sailing boat, his father sent him a sailing boat up, and his twin sister was a WRAN. He used to take me out in his boat and we'd go right over there. It was only a little one, it was just enough for two, and we'd go right over to the island and back, and we didn't have

23:00 lifeboat, vests or anything. And I know once we fitted Jean in, and Jean was near me and her boyfriend had bought her a new watch and she put her hand in the water, and before we got back it was all rusted. No, I used to like going over. And he'd sing all the way over: like "Pedro the fisherman" [song title], he was.

The few times that you did get out on the navy ships, on the corvettes and such, did you ever wish that women could have served on the ships?

23:30 Oh, I'd have done it, yeah. I'd have done it, I loved it. I volunteered to do anything, and if I could have I would have. But of course that didn't come in, they took women then after in peacetime. When they took the women they weren't called WRANS any more then anyway, they were called, just like the fellows, seamen and so forth.

And do you know if most of the other girls felt the same way?

I think so. We were a happy lot,

24:00 and if somebody got upset or sad we'd all cry with her. You know, we were very close, it doesn't matter what rating they were. We just, I don't know. As I said, I've got lots of lovely friends down south. I don't get down any more much, but I used to. I had a wonderful friend, the one that dobbed NOIC [?] in, because she used to come up from Melbourne a lot,

24:30 but she died not long ago and I've been upset a bit about that. They're all dying, which is a shame. But if I don't.... I mean I hear from, they ring me up, lots ring me up. Christmas time I get lots of cards, even Tasmania rings me up, and Adelaide and Perth. They ring me through [the year]. You know, it's

25:00 sad now, when they're all going.

Some people have said to us that the friendships they made after the war were never the same or as close as friendships they made during the war. Do you think that's true for you?

No. Well, the girls that I was friendly with in Townsville, we're still friendly. And anywhere, you see, they're my best friends I think. Most of them, the WRANS.

25:30 Not from Moreton that much but from the other states and right up Townsville, everywhere.

When you were in Townsville did you get any leave to come back to Brisbane at all?

Oh yes, you'd get three weeks' leave. And that's when I'd go down and Brian would come and take me out, but I wasn't his girlfriend then. But, oh yes, you'd get leave, I think about once a year.

How would you get back down to Brisbane?

Well, I used to,

26:00 no, I never ever went in the troop train back, I came back in a troop train. But seeing I got to know the air force boys, I'd go out and they'd suggest it, and they'd sneak me onto a plane. The first plane only

had eight seats and nobody knew I was on that plane, on those planes. They did later, they let the girls do it a bit. And then I'd save two days leave.

26:30 Well, then I'd be dumped at Archerfield, then I'd have to walk around and usually find a Yank who was coming up to Brisbane to give me a ride home. But not from Cerberus, I always had to come back and forth. And also too, when I was going to Cerberus each time, or coming back, the train used to stop at Albury and you went across to Wodonga.

27:00 But it would be in the middle of the night, we had sort of sleepers but it was only the wire thing. But we girls, not the WAAAF or the army, but we girls used to have to get fully dressed to cross that station. The other girls went over there in their dressing gown, but not us. Don't know why, but we had to.

That was regulation?

Yeah. You'd have to get up, you're half-asleep and you'd have to put your

27:30 uniform on, and by the time you did your tie up and your, we had those stiff collars with studs and they were a bit hard to get on at times, especially when you're half-asleep. But anyway then we....

When you flew from Townsville to Brisbane in the air force planes, was that the first time you'd ever been on a plane?

Yeah.

Was that exciting?

And then I went down in those DC-3 things that didn't have any seats, only

28:00 a little sort of seat thing round like that, you know. You'd sit there. I'd be the only girl, the rest would be troops from somewhere. It was fun.

Was it exciting being on the planes?

Yes, but the little one, you know, it was only eight seats so I don't know what it was. It was a little privately-owned one, I think. Then we used to go to Townsville -

28:30 again, I'm going.... We used to go up to Mount Speck which was Crystal Creek, have you ever been out there? Anyway, it was up in the mountains in the National Park, and we'd go up there swimming with the boys and come back, but the big truck used to take us up there. That was good.

When you came back to Brisbane on leave, would you stay with Mum and Dad? Where would you stay?

Yeah, usually I'd stay with Mum and Dad. I could put up with that much.

How was it, seeing your Dad again?

29:00 Oh, you know, later on as I said I'm the only one that looked after him, but I didn't get any money out of him, but I looked after him. My brother just disowned him and so forth. No, I stayed at home. I mean I was a lot more independent then, anyway.

Was it very different, coming home after having lived out of home up there?

No, it was home. Before I went up I would

29:30 come home, I think before I joined up, I think really before I went in, I would come in with some of my stuff. And I got dengue fever, they wouldn't do that today, and I was home because there was no sickbay at Moreton and I was in bed at home, and Mum used to have to go in to the hotel, you see. And Mum would open the lattice door and put a brick beside it. And the doctor used to come and see me every day. Now they wouldn't do that, would they? Not today. But he did.

30:00 **How did they treat you for dengue fever?**

I don't know, I had tablets and things. Not much, I don't think. But I was sick. You know, I'm so glad that I joined up. I grew up, learnt to be independent. Was probably something like being at boarding school, I should think. No,

30:30 it was well worth it. And I met some wonderful girls, and you know, a lot of the girls were, what is it, oh, politicians and things. A lot of the girls came from out west, too. A lot of them came from out west to join the WRANS, but as I said there weren't that many.

When you came back to Brisbane to see Brian, was he still in the army?

No, he was out, he was discharged unfit. He was designing

31:00 aeroplanes and things like that.

So when it was time to finally leave Townsville and go to Cerberus, was that a sad affair?

No, because I had been there two years and I reckon I should have gone somewhere else. And I did want to go to Sydney, but Cerberus was good because it was 'The' Navy, you know, it was just, everything was regulations down there. And I saw these poor little midshipmen, you know,

31:30 they used to sort of run around in the rain and everything, they had to run everywhere, they couldn't walk. You know, just all these things. And then some of the girls when I got to Cerberus I knew, because they'd been in Townsville.

Did anyone else get transferred down there at the same time as you?

No, I was the only one. But I had a girlfriend, she was the one from Adelaide, and she was in Townsville and then she went to Cerberus. And she worked, I don't know, in an office but it was

32:00 around near the men's quarters. She worked at the window on a typewriter, she was a writer. This fellow would come down the hill every morning, and she'd say, "I like the look of him." And then she said, "I'm going to marry him, I know." Because she'd wave to him and he'd go like hell down the thing and he'd avoided her, and each time he'd go that way he'd look like that for her. Anyway, there was a dance at the rec hut, so she said to the girls, "I'll get him."

32:30 So she went like this to him one day, and he came over and she said, "I'm going to the rec dance, have you been invited?" And he said, "No," and she said, "Would you like to be my partner?" And that's how, she did marry him, yeah. And then another one, Sheila, she's from Victoria. And Sheila, when the train just came up from Crib Point, they'd bring us all up you see, but

33:00 it used to stop here and then it stopped at Caulfield, and she used to get out and get a bus because she lived at Malvern or something. Anyway, and of course the bus wouldn't wait any longer and they're all racing like the dickens to go and get in the bus to get there. And in front of her is this big fellow, and he was a sailor of course in whites, and he fell over and he had his kitbag and everything and everything came out. So Sheila was always a giggler, see, so she stopped and

33:30 helped him pick it all up, and all Norman did was grunt at her. So anyway he was filthy, so she got in the bus. He got in before her, and she got in, and every time she looked over at him she'd start to giggle. So his father was the mayor of one of the local authorities there, and anyway the mother was a real lady, and she said to Norman, "Where have you been?" He said, "I fell over, it was most embarrassing. But worst of all

34:00 some silly WRAN picked me up." And she said, "Well, that was nice of her." And he said, "Humph." So anyway, Norman then, the mother said, "Norman, I think you should go and find this girl and tell her 'thank you very much'." So he did, and they got married. But he used to stand - I was there just after that, and because when I was in the station he'd stand still with Sheila,

34:30 and he'd get in the office and get in the corner, and the officer of the store there, and this was at his stand-easy, you see. He'd just look at her, never say a word, and we'd get the giggles. Anyway, she married Norman, and he died not that long ago.

So when you were in the WRANS and the other girls around you were getting married, did it ever occur to you that you wanted to get married?

I didn't want to get married until I was thirty. I wanted to live. But I didn't, I was twenty-four.

35:00 **Where did you pluck that magic number, thirty, from?**

I don't know. And nobody did much in those days, but a lot of the girls were dying to get married. Not me. If a fellow would get serious with me I'd drop him.

When you said that you wanted to live, what sort of things were you hoping to accomplish?

I don't know. I think I wanted - well, I did go back to work. But I just thought I'd like to, I don't know whether I wanted to travel or what I wanted to do. But I wanted

35:30 to be independent. Anyway, that didn't pass.

When you got to Cerberus you were saying that things were very regulated there. Was that very different for you?

Yes it was, because being over at the stores, I never worked at the depot in Townsville, and being over at the stores, you know, we all got on well. The boss would, we'd just sit and chatter and

36:00 do all these things. We did our jobs. But no, it wasn't regulated. It was an easy job, but then people said to me when I went on leave, they had to step in and take my job, one lady said to me the other week, "You were so clever, I could never do those books, I could never do this." But they didn't even go on the wharf, they just stayed in the office. But they said, "You were so clever with what you did, I couldn't work it out." And then

36:30 the lass that went after me, when I got drafted, Beryl, she was so dumb - really dumb. And she'd stand on the wharf and the boys would tell me sometimes she would go down, the boys would say she would say, "There's a ship over there." "Oh, yes?" "Is it coming or is it going?" They called her Dilly Daff. She's

still alive, she's about eighty-five. But then she used to write to me and say

37:00 how wonderful Mr Harry was, the boss, the lieutenant. And he would write to me and tell me what a nuisance she was and that she was dumb. Yeah.

So what was a typical day's work for you when you got to Cerberus?

Well, when the boss knew that I was a shorthand typist I went straight in the office. And you know, after a couple of weeks with Sheila, we'd salt part of the floor and did all those things

37:30 and got ourselves caught in the corner at one stage. But anyway, I went in with Bertie Shepherd his name was, he was a commander, and a couple of other girls, and I was just his shorthand typist. But then he had the biggest heater you ever saw, and when he'd go out somewhere we girls would tip it on its back and we'd make toast. We were cold.

38:00 **Do you think he ever knew that you were using his heater as a toaster?**

No, he never said anything. All he ever wanted to do was go to Surfers Paradise. He kept asking me about that. Well, then once I saw him there, I was driving through and I could see him standing on the footpath. So he made Surfers Paradise.

What sort of things were you typing?

Oh, letters and forms and things, just a lot of letters and things, messages and things.

38:30 **Where would those things be going to?**

Oh, Navy Office or, because Cerberus was a big place.... And then typing chits, which were little bits of paper like memos and things, and the messenger would come and get them. The boys used to come in, when Sheila was there in the stationery store, and the next store would send this poor little fellow up for supplies:

39:00 "Go to So-and-so. Go to Armament," no, "Go to such-and-such a store and ask for a tin of striped paint," and they'd go, and all these things they used to do to the young cadets.

What other sorts of tricks would they play on them?

I don't know. I used to, you know, I used to play tricks on everybody, sort of thing. It was happy, real happy. I was happy the whole time in the navy, except for Moreton.

39:30 **Was it you and Sheila they'd have to come and ask for the striped paint?**

No, we were stationery. We had Helen next to us in the electrical store, but in the electrical store they had all these typewriters. And my typewriter in Townsville was shocking, it would jump all the time, you know, and I would have to backspace. I managed it because I could hear when it jumped. Here's all these brand new typewriters there, and we couldn't get one. Couldn't get one at all.

40:00 And then when the Wrannery in Townsville was pulled down, the big refrigerator we had was just dumped out on the ground, they threw everything out. The building was taken over to Magnetic Island for the lifesavers. And then the pool was built.

Do you know if that building is still on Magnetic now?

I don't think so. I haven't seen it. Don't know. But you could only get to the first part of Magnetic Island because the army was across there,

40:30 in case they were coming in.

So when you were at Cerberus you did finally get a good typewriter?

Yes, oh yes. The commander [said] we would need a good typewriter. Yeah, that's about all I can think of.

Tape 5

00:31 **The lack of a toilet for the ladies at the wharf, and they finally put one in, and this is a telegram that you received?**

Well, it was a letter, yes. I'd just left at this stage, but I got this letter back from one of the girls: "Dear Comrade, You will be pleased to learn that the 'convenience deluxe', situated at the beautiful head of Cleveland Bay, was officially opened on

01:00 Friday, 19th May at two-thirty p.m. The assembly was very small but select as they gathered for the momentous occasion of the opening. The honour of officiating was bestowed on Miss Nancy Dann", a WRAN she was, "because of her courage and gallantry in approaching Supply Assistant Sullivan on such a delicate matter. We were considering the presentation of the VC [Victoria Cross] ;

01:30 however, we thought the WC would be more appropriate, thus this honour. Owing to wartime conditions, no champagne could be procured, nor could the local reporters be present at this ceremony. However, this event will still go down in history. From today onwards we will enjoy a straight march back to our quarters, negative stops at lampposts or the worry of troops. Until you get back and share our privilege, cheerio and lots of love, the main supply assistant,

02:00 Central Stores."

What did you think when you received that?

I was amazed.

You never got to use those facilities?

I never got to use it, no, but they let me know that they got one. But Nancy was a little fat WRAN. She came from Tasmania, I think. But she went and approached the, anyway. That was when they got the toilet, the great ceremony.

Now, you've also got

02:30 **a copy of something that was written in a sailor's diary?**

Yes, this was in a sailor's diary. His name was Tom McLean, he was an SBA [?] . And when I went over to the, oh, I'll read all this? The whole lot?

Oh, yeah.

Wait a minute. The 2nd of June, this is, "In again at sixteen-thirty

03:00 and our visitors," oh no that's the wrong bit. Wait a minute.

It starts there.

It starts here. OK. "Friday 2nd June. Ten hundred. Put to sea for gunnery exercise. RAAF planes to attack us. Party of WRANS from depot and half a dozen RAAF personnel came aboard for the show. We got a peach of a battering. She kangarooed, corkscrewed, buckled and piledrove in a

03:30 tumultuous sea. Seasick WRANS and Penguins", which are the air force, "were a penny a dozen inside sixty minutes. Only about four of the visitors kept their feet completely. They included two female sailors." Well, I was one of them. Where's the other bit? "Friday 2nd June," again, "In again at sixteen thirty. Our visitors reeled off the

04:00 J184 Ballarat onto terra firma, quite satisfied that most who praised travel by sea have never been on it in a corvette, in a forty-mile-per-hour gale." And then this friend of mine put in the bottom, "I recollect a RAAF man stooping and kissing the wharf on disembarking."

So you were one of only two?

Yeah, I wasn't sick. I don't know who the other one was.

Do you know why it was that you didn't get sick?

Oh, it was rough.

04:30 It rolled. I mustn't get seasick much.

Had you been on a ship before?

No.

You were just built for a life at sea?

But it gets rough out there, because when we were going over to Magnetic Island, I mean you went straight over and you turned left and at that turn everyone used to get sick, but I didn't. They've got, they had little buckets around.

I came up with a few things I wanted to ask you, that

05:00 **go right back to the start. When you were at HMAS Moreton, Lieutenant Commander Marshall, what was he like?**

No, that was Beedham.

Was it Beedham there?

Yeah. B-E-E-D-H-A-M.

What was he like?

He, well, he was strict. He used to yell across the deck to me, "Marshall!", and the boys hated him. But

he was efficiency-plus, and as I said I worked for him later. Even after I got married I used to bring my baby in to show him.

05:30 **So was he a career man in the navy, or did he just serve in the war?**

I think he was Reserve, because he was made a lieutenant commander straight away.

And when you were up in Townsville did the boys ever complain that the WRANS were treated differently to them?

No. We weren't very welcome for a while, but they got used to us, and as I passed the huts

06:00 the boys would sing, "Beautiful, beautiful Queensland." And that was making fun of me, of course, as I passed by. But no, we all got on well.

Did you all eat in the same mess?

What, the WRANS? Yeah, we always ate in the same mess.

In the same mess as the fellows?

No.

So you had your own separate mess?

No. Well, see, the Wrannery was right down the way, down the Strand.

Did you get the same food as the males?

06:30 I don't know. But as I said, we had real eggs, real butter, real pork on Sunday if possible. And we were fed very well, because the other services weren't. No, sometimes one of the cooks would say, "You're only a little thing, Margaret, take two eggs," so I took two eggs, and they were slimy. And then you had to wash up your plates after that, you see. You had to go through, it was like an old washing trough,

07:00 and you had to wash and then rinse and dry it, and then put it in a pile.

Did you ever get any extra duties like that? Working in the mess?

No, I didn't. No, we had cooks and stewardesses and that was their job.

And when you spoke much earlier on in the day about you and your brother having to share an egg, how would you share one egg?

Yeah. Well, Mum used to just fry it and cut it in halves.

07:30 **But he wanted the half with the yolk did he?**

"I want an egg with a yolk in it," yeah. But he only got half an 'olk. "Olk", he called it, yeah. But that was all. I mean we didn't, through the Depression we didn't do without anything. The only thing, we kids had the stale bread and Dad had the fresh bread.

Can you remember the sorts of thing Mum used to cook for meals?

Oh, she could cook good roast meals. Her cakes, little cakes were all right until they went cold, and then Dad used

08:00 to call them, what did he call them? Rocks. And they did. Mum never measured anything, she just whacked it in, because by the time they were cooked she had probably too much flour in it or something. Yeah.

Did you have any WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s or a veggie garden or anything like that at home?

No, we didn't. My grandfather did and we used to get them from there, but no, we didn't have anything like that.

Did you have to do chores at home?

08:30 Yeah, I used to have to, a bit of wiping up and so forth. But Jack did nothing. But then if I scrubbed down the back steps and into the toilet, which was the old (linen UNCLEAR), I got sixpence to go to the pictures.

How often would you get to go to the pictures?

Oh, nearly every week if I wanted to go.

On a Saturday?

Yeah, Saturday afternoon, the matinee.

And which cinema did you go to?

Prospect Terrace, it was a Kelvin Grove. It's gone now.

09:00 **Can you remember any of the films that you saw there?**

Oh, you know, all the black and white ones.

Talkies?

Oh yes, yes. All the black and white ones. Some of the boys from school were around, but we wouldn't sit with them.

What sort of seats did they have in the cinema there?

They were canvas ones. And Townsville had an open-air one and it had canvas seats. And I remember going to see

09:30 Bambi [movie] with a sailor and it rained, so we got down underneath the canvas and peeked out at the film.

It didn't scare you off?

No, it didn't worry us.

Would you have enough money to buy yourself an ice cream or something like that when you went to see a movie?

No, not really. That's why Mum used to give me sixpence.

When you went to the movies, did you ever see any of the newsreels as well,

10:00 **before the feature?**

Yes. There was always the news beforehand.

Did you see things that were going on in the war?

No. When I went there I was only a little girl, war wasn't on. But we used to, at the Carlton, my uncle's hotel, he had a cabaret underneath and he changed that to a newsreel film, and that had a lot in there.

Can you remember going to watch any of those?

Yeah. I used to get in for nothing.

10:30 **Was that the main way you got news of what was happening in the war?**

Oh, and the radio. We used to listen to overseas.

What about when you were in Townsville, how did you know about what was happening?

We didn't know much because I mean no-one gave much news out, because you couldn't do that.

Did you feel like the tide had turned when we were starting to win the war? While you were still up there?

11:00 I didn't realise until, yes, just before I was coming down to Cerberus I realised that Europe was quietening down a bit. And then the night that peace was declared with the Japs and so forth I was down at Cerberus, and the petty officer there, she was a tough old girl and she locked us in because all the sailors went berserk.

11:30 And she said, "If I don't lock you in, you'll come out with a lot more than you went in with." And we sat inside and we couldn't get out.

What did you think about that?

We just giggled.

You didn't want to go out and celebrate as well?

No, we were all together. There was about twelve in a hut. No, we enjoyed it all.

What sort of hours were you working?

I was working from, it must have been about half past seven, or seven, or half past, this was down in Cerberus, until four o'clock.

12:00 **What about in Townsville?**

Oh, Townsville was, I think we had to be ready at eight o'clock and then just march up to the depot.

What time would you finish?

Oh, about half past four.

Would you play any sports?

No, I didn't. I used to walk a bit. But the girls did, they played, especially down in Cerberus, I think they had lots of ball games and things.

12:30 I think there might have even been golf, I don't know. I didn't do that, it was too cold.

How many days would you have to work?

Oh, just through the week.

Just Monday to Friday?

Yes. And then I think it was about every third weekend we could go up the line, that was up to Melbourne. And then my girlfriend and I we used to go, I used to go to the Hotel Australia and have my first Pimm's [type of drink] .

13:00 And with the other one, we used to go up to Belgrave up in the Dandenongs because they had real cream. That was the lure. And I know that once I didn't bring my bankbook up to get some money. I know I used to draw out five dollars, five pounds, and I had to go in the bank and I told them that I'd left my book, and they let me have five pounds. We used to go up in the Puffing Billy [vintage steam train] thing.

13:30 It was good.

Was there ever any drinking amongst the ladies?

Not in the depot, in the Wrannery, no. There was no drink, we weren't allowed. But some of the girls used to go off and, you know, I had one friend that came home once and I woke up in bed and she's patting me on the cheek: "Margie, Margie." "Yes?" "Can you put me to bed? I can't find where I'm going." And she was tall. I had to get her down the steps and she was

14:00 down the bottom part of the thing. Yeah, but she was the one that was very well-off. She knew a lot of people. She'd go to the Queen's Hotel with them.

Can you remember when you had your first drink?

Oh, when I was a little girl and Dad was having a beer I could have the froth sometimes. No, I didn't drink anything really. I think when I had my first sherry I was probably in about, it

14:30 would have been my twenties, early twenties. And I thought I was real game.

What about smoking?

No, most of the girls smoked but I didn't. I didn't at all, I'm glad.

Did they get an issue of cigarettes?

No, but I think the boys could. But they must have because I know I got my tobacco thing and I sent it to my father because he couldn't get tobacco.

15:00 He used to roll his own. I was good. I should have thought, "Blow him," but I didn't. And then I got that after the war for a certain period.

Did you often write home when you were up in Townsville?

Oh yeah, I used to write to Mum, and Mum would occasionally ring me up. It was hard to ring because you couldn't ring much up north. But no, I used to write to Mum often, I used to let Mum know, and because I wrote to Brian,

15:30 my husband. But at one stage, talking about he letters, the officers had to censor the letters. And my boss said to me one day, "Who's WRAN So-and-so?" and I said, "Oh she's So-and-so," and I thought, "I wonder why he wants to know about that?" And I said, "Are you censoring letters?" and he said, "Yes." And evidently all these officers used to hang around and then read what they were censoring to the other officers. So I said, "I think

16:00 that's disgusting." So anyway he came to me about a week later and he said, "Look, give me your letters and I'll post them. I know you're all right." But one girl, she used to write to all the fellows, and she was engaged to about three of them at the same time. Olive used to get these letters; well, she'd be sitting down where we used to write our letters and she'd read these letters out loud, and that made me sad because these boys wrote so sincerely

16:30 and she was laughing at them. But she did write to them. But she married a pilot, and she got divorced from him. She had twins and that was enough for her. I think she's still around.

Was the writing of letters to fellows in the services, was that a big ritual in the Wrannery?

Oh, yes. Yes, I even wrote to a fellow I never even met. My cousin wrote, I used to write to him in New Guinea and he said his mate never got any letters, so I wrote to him, and I never ever met him.

17:00 That was all right.

In situations like that, how were addresses and names of fellows gathered so that you could write them?

Well, for instance, like if you're writing to a ship you write the name, his title whatever he was, and his number, and then you put HMAS and that's all. And then the Post Office would know where that ship was.

17:30 And the army, I don't know the army ones. I think I probably wrote to New Guinea, I don't know.

In any of your jobs did you ever have to deal with the navy mail as well?

No. No, we didn't at all. But those officers used to censor the letters, I was disgusted, I think that was awful, but never mind. Oh and then either if you wanted to be funny you'd kiss the back of the envelope, or else you'd put

18:00 "Hurry, Postie, Hurry," or else you'd put, "S.W.A.L.K.", "Sealed with a loving kiss."

Did you ever spray perfume onto the paper or anything like that?

No, I didn't, but some of the girls did, yeah. I didn't used perfume.

I imagine it would have been pretty hard to get, was it?

Yeah, in Townsville you couldn't get anything. Not even films. You were lucky to get film.

Did anybody have a camera?

I had a camera, a few

18:30 of those I took. But they had to be censored, most of those have got, "Passed by the censor," on them.

Where did you get the camera from?

I think it was a little box brownie that might have been my mother's or something. You know, you had to wind it on.

And film was hard to get?

Oh, yes. My boss let me off in Flinders Street, which he shouldn't have done, through the day, and then I'd walk back to the Wrannery. But every time I passed the chemist shop

19:00 or the Kodak shop I'd go in, and I'd be lucky.

How would they censor it? Would you give them the role of film and they would process it?

Yeah, and they would look at them and then they'd bung it on, "Passed by the censor".

And if there was anything that was not passed it would just disappear, you would never see it again?

If you took photos of the ships or anything like that then they wouldn't pass it. But I don't know whether everybody did that, but I did. We were asked to.

The job you did when you had to drive around

19:30 **picking up penicillin, what exactly did that involve?**

Well, that involved a sailor who was sick, because they were up in the islands, in Milne Bay or somewhere, and he was sick. And at that stage we'd never heard of penicillin, because the boss and I used to call it "pen-ic-illin" but I would have to go out, and any medical things I'd have to go to the airport and get the stuff and make sure it got on the next plane going to where it was.

20:00 **So that's when you'd go out to Garbutt?**

Yes, but I used to go out to Garbutt a lot, for that but also too, anything that had to be on a ship and had to be posted in a hurry. The railway, too. But I used to be out there nearly every day.

When you were invited out to have a look at the Spitfire, what did you think when you went to have a look at that?

It was little, that's all I can remember.

20:30 I can remember we went in, I forget his name, he was a nice fellow, but he was an officer, he was a mate of my boss. He said, "Would you like to come along? I'm allowed to bring somebody."

Did they let you sit in the cockpit?

I don't think so, I think we, I don't know what we did. It was a long time ago. Whether we went in one way and out the other, I think we must have gone in and then got out. But I can remember

21:00 going in and going out, and how little it was.

Did those sorts of things interest you?

Oh yes, I was interested in most things that happened. Yeah.

How busy...? I mean like the Strand now is incredible.

Isn't it?

What was it like back then?

Oh, it was just the dirt thing, but it is lovely now.

Was it still, like even though it was different...?

Kissing Point was there, and the

21:30 army were on top of there. We used to go down to Kissing Point. I used to go with Sandy, one of my air force fellows, and we'd go up the back of the hill on the side of the sea, of Castle Hill - up the "goat track", they called it. But by the time we walked up there and walked back it was twelve o'clock. And we'd just go for a walk up there and talk.

Was the Strand still a magnet to people? Would people still go there to sit by the sea and things like that?

22:00 What, now?

No back then.

Oh yes, there used to be, because there's that rotunda there and that's always been popular, yeah.

Did people swim there?

No. Well, you can, unless you've got a pool the sharks will get you. Some of the girls used to go swimming, but I promised Mrs Jones that I wouldn't go in. They did have enclosed areas but seeing as it was wartime it was all broken. But there were sharks there for sure.

22:30 **Yeah, a few people have told us about the timber enclosure they had there, the shark pool.**

Yeah, that's right.

How often, when you were there, were there air raids or air raid warnings?

Only a couple of times because the Japs came over and I believe that was pretty traumatic for the people, but we had sort of a blackout thing, and there was only one plane, it was a Japanese one but no-one shot it down or anything. It must have been just out having a look. But that's the only time I think,

23:00 but I think Broome got bombed and Darwin, of course.

Did you see many anti-aircraft guns around the place?

Oh yes, they were everywhere. They were on Magnetic Island there and they were on up above Kissing Point. Oh yeah, there were a lot.

Did you feel safe in Townsville?

Yeah. When you're young you don't see much danger, do you? Yeah, I felt safe enough. We were looked after well and,

23:30 as I said, my family were good there. So no, I was never frightened.

How much contact did you keep up with the Joneses?

Well, I still do their children and grandchildren; they were a lovely family.

It must have been quite a shock going down to Cerberus, like you were warned about the weather.

Yeah. "You'll bloody well freeze," my boss said to me. And I did.

Did you get any sort of issue to help out with that?

24:00 I got a greatcoat, which was, they were only midshipmen's coats. We had a Burberry, well, we always had that. But we had a greatcoat, which was a thick woollen one. Oh, you needed it.

Could you mix any civilian dress with the military dress, like gloves or scarves or anything?

No. We had brown gloves for the thing. It tells you the issue in one of those things there.

24:30 Yeah, we had brown gloves, navy uniform, white shirts with studs for the collars. We had lisle stockings, those awful thick stockings. The first thing I did when I came home was give them to Grandma. And the

hat, it was the navy one, you know, I think I gave that to Grandma, too. But the other one, the big one I had, I kept. And then a WRAN came down to Brisbane from

25:00 Ipswich and she was going to a football match, and she said, "Can you lend me a hat?" and she left it under the seat, I lost it. Could have killed her.

I know that the sailors' hats have got the name of the ship they were on.

Yeah. Well, ours did, yes. But when I first got it I only had the red thing, but on the khaki one I had and later on I had Cerberus and Magnetic on it. I haven't kept any of those, "tallies", they're called.

25:30 And you'd have to put a note, a thing when you do it, a threepenny bit in the thing, the sailors would do it for me, and it would look nice and neat.

How did you end up looking on the male sailors that you had to work with?

They were like my brothers. That's how I regarded sailors, they were like my brothers. They were just part of you, you know,

26:00 they were there always. No, I didn't really get serious about any - oh, a couple, you know. One was called "Speedy" because he was so slow, and when he got serious I dropped him.

And how would these guys break the news that they were serious about you?

Well, you'd know. You'd get your hands held and squeezed, and they'd put their arm around you and give you a kiss and things.

26:30 Oh, I knew, I knew. I think we all knew. But that Bonnie Wallace that you interviewed, she married a fellow at the gate, he was a guard at the gate. But a few girls married sailors, a lot of them.

Actually I meant to ask you before when you were telling us about getting your boil treated, did you ever see the local prostitutes hanging around the VD clinic?

27:00 Oh yes. I would look out the window and I didn't know what they were, because what, I was only about sixteen when I went to work. And I'd say, "What are all those ladies down there for?" And they all wore leopard skin coats, and leopard skin to this day I will not wear. My mother sent me down a black market pair of leopard skin pyjamas, you know, the flannelette. I wouldn't wear them, no.

27:30 And they all had coloured shoes and high heels and hair done up and so forth, but they used to be there nearly every day I think from all the brothels.

This is in Brisbane, isn't it?

Yes.

And the leopard skin to you was like the uniform?

Yes. And they were all tarted up with heavy makeup and so forth. But they all used to come, and there was a VD clinic over on the south side if they were really crook.

Surely up in Townsville with the amount of servicemen,

28:00 **there must have been there as well?**

There was, I think.

Did you see any up there?

No, I didn't. But I think some of the girls might have got it, I don't know.

And also earlier you were talking about Maroochydore for the holidays. What was it like back then? It must be quite different.

Well, where it is now, my cousin got the house in the end and he's pulled it down and he's built a flat up top and a flat down bottom, which he

28:30 looks after. But that's down at Picnic Point we were and it's hardly changed, except a lot of the old houses have gone and there's high-rise there. But there's not too much high-rise, only over on the surf side. No, it's just the same. But there used to be a big log there where I used to learn how to clean fish and things like that, but that's gone. I don't know whether anyone has even seen it. I go and stay up there sometimes, and I've never seen anyone swimming in the river, but

29:00 we used to.

Did you ever do any fishing when you were up in Townsville?

Townsville, no. No, I didn't. No, I only went out in that boat with Ray Laylor, that was his name. And I was game to go with him, wasn't I, over there? And he'd sing and sing over. We'd just go to Magnetic and back, that was all right. I was very impressed.

29:30 **You were also telling us when you were in Cerberus the concert you went to.**

Yeah.

What was that like?

Oh, that one with Gracie Fields? That was good. Her husband at that stage was Monty Bloom, I think, and he sat on the stage there with her. But oh, it was a thrill. And she came out here, I don't know if it was the same time, but she came out here, because I mother came out from England and she was singing at the City Hall for charity,

30:00 the comforts funds or something. Mum went, and she liked it so much. It was ten pounds a ticket and that was a lot of money then, and Mum went and she went again the next night. But he spent a lot of money in Brisbane, I think it was to do with the library or something, I don't know. But it was Monty Bloom, and then he died and she married somebody else after that.

That concert that she put on, was that just for service personnel?

Yeah, but she, I think she went to the islands, I think they went everywhere.

30:30 But there was one that used to come to Townsville often, and that was called the "Tasmaniacs". Oh, they were good.

Can you remember any other touring entertainers?

No. There were other ones but they're the only ones I can remember. It was just a happy place, and there was always something to do. Oh, and people used to leave buckets of mangoes outside their gates for you to pick up.

31:00 That was good, but no-one would eat them much then, they were too mucky, said the southerners. But I used to eat them.

And now they would be paying twenty dollars a bucket.

Yes, that's right. The people were good in Townsville, I mean they always stopped and talked to you. And even going to reunions up there, which I've been to nearly every one up there that they've had, and we always had to parade through, and when the WRANS come along

31:30 people clap like crazy.

Can you remember there were any wartime restrictions on things that you needed?

Oh yes, lots of things. Well, I mean you had your ration cards, but there was no.... You got your little bit of tea, and you got this and that. There were lots of things that you couldn't buy, I don't know what, but

32:00 rubber things, rubber gloves or anything that could sort of be used in the war.

To a large degree I suppose the navy looked after all your essentials.

Yes, but if you got more than you were entitled to you had to pay for them. We had a big clothing store there.

The concert that Gracie put on, whereabouts was that?

Down at Cerberus in the rec hut. It was very good. We used to have dances there, as I said.

32:30 That was good, because it was isolated from everything. But we always amused ourselves with something.

I don't know whether you told us before about when you got down there, seeing all the perfectly good typewriters that were there.

Yes, well, I was just cranky. I thought, "Gee whiz, we were dying for a typewriter for those two years." This one was an old Underwood, you wouldn't remember those. And, as I said it used to jump, but we applied for another typewriter: "none available".

33:00 **Were there other things besides typewriters that you saw plenty of down south?**

Not really because I didn't go looking; see, I wasn't in the stores much. But I know the electrical store was very big. A WRAN ran that, Helen, and she knew all about electricity, so she must have had some tutoring. I don't know about the other stores.

Did you notice when you went from

33:30 **Townsville down to Victoria, did you notice there was a different sort of mentality of the people, as far as the war was concerned?**

No. Well, I don't, no, not really. When I first went down I was put in a hut with all these girls who'd been socialites and they were really snobby. But they were so nice to me. But then when the lass that I knew from the stores, Sheila, when there was a bed vacant there I applied

34:00 for it, and I got it. But these girls were always nice to me, but they were, didn't talk to anybody else much because in Victoria you've got to be introduced before you.... But no.

I just wondered, because Townsville is really Australia's, everything was going out of there.

Oh, yes. That's right.

So I wondered whether there was just a different approach to people because they felt closer to the war?

34:30 No. People in Townsville were marvellous. I mean you couldn't get milk much and you couldn't give your babies the milk from the Bureba [?] . I don't know, and the water, you couldn't drink the water. Mrs Jones used to give me a bottle of water every time, and one day the officers saw the bottle under my bed and I was in trouble, but it was only water. And she'd say, "Don't drink that water," and I used to drink it out of the bottle. Well, you know,

35:00 the troops got most of the food. People had vegetable gardens and WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and so forth.

What were the main differences between your posting at Cerberus as opposed to your posting in Townsville?

Well, they were different. I mean the one up in Townsville was very relaxed, you know, and down there you had to tow the line. But nothing much. But

35:30 Townsville you knew . Down in Cerberus the watch keepers, the coders, the WT [telegraph] people and things like that, you never saw them. But up there they slept in the same building on the other side, but you knew them all, see. A lot of my friends are watch keepers.

So when you think back on your time in the service during the war, you tend to think more about Townsville?

Townsville, yes. Townsville was the best place, although I did enjoy Cerberus and I'm glad I got out of Moreton. But, oh yes,

36:00 Townsville was just the top of the cherry, you know.

Can you remember where you were when you heard about Victory in Europe?

Yeah I was in Cerberus. No, yeah - the Japs were first, weren't they? No, I was going down, I was in Brisbane but I was on my way to Cerberus . And they gave me three days' leave, I think. And I know I was out with my husband and everyone was excited in the streets.

36:30 **What sort of celebrations were on for that?**

Well, just everyone went berserk. People were tearing up telephone boxes and dropping them down from the buildings, and it was all crowded, you know, just a crowd. Everybody just went to town, I think. No, that was good.

What did your husband think? He must have been pretty happy.

Yeah, everybody was. But the picture you see of the fellow, you know,

37:00 that was, it was like that. [famous press photo of man dancing along street]

That was actually in Brisbane wasn't it, where that fellow was dancing in the street?

I don't know. But everybody was happy. I mean a lot of the boys had been killed and people were waiting for their husbands and fellows to come home.

Did you start to think at that stage what you would do when the war finished?

Yes, I thought I wouldn't go back to my old job,

37:30 I would do something different. But I did go back to my old job.

Did you have any thoughts about things you thought you might like to have a go at?

No, but my attitude was, and which it still is, if you're not happy at your job you leave it. I don't know whether you can or not today, but after the war there was plenty of jobs. I had jobs offered to me. But I didn't, I went back to the office. Back, till I got married.

And how much did you

38:00 **sense the war was coming to an end, just before Japan was bombed?**

Well, I think once the Europe thing, it was just a rumour going round, you know, nobody really knew before peace was declared, but we knew that the Japanese had these big bombs dropped on them.

You heard about the big atom bombs?

Yeah.

38:30 **Did that mean anything at the time, about the atom bombs, when you heard about that?**

No. Well, we didn't really understand it. I know it was cruel, but I think in my opinion, I mean I know a lot of people lost their lives, but I still think if it had gone on the same amount of people would have lost their lives. But I think it was a bit rough on the Japs. You know, it was just one of those things,

39:00 anything to get the war over with. And then I was asked to stay in the navy, to go on. But I said, "No, the war's over, I'm going home."

How was the announcement made, that the war was over?

I don't know. Just some people came and said, "The war's over," and it went by word of mouth, I think, around Cerberus.

Can you remember what you did when you hear that?

Well, we got locked up because little stewardesses were running down the hill and the

39:30 sailors chasing them, so they decided to lock us all in and that was it. But then we were happy, happy the war was over. We just sat there, some of the girls smoked. I think somebody fished out a drink from somewhere. But I can remember sitting around and we were so excited. Because we didn't have little radios or anything in those days.

40:00 **Because I know not everybody was, I mean they were happy the war was over but there was so much that they were unsure about, the future, now that the war had finished.**

Yeah, they were. But then I think everyone's desire was to go home. That was the idea, I don't think they thought beyond that. "I'll be going home."

Did you want to go home?

Yeah, I decided I'd had enough and I'd go home. The war was over, I'd done my job. So I didn't stay on, but I could have.

What would you have stayed in as if you had stayed?

40:30 I suppose the same, I don't know. They just asked me would I like to extend. I said, "No," and then I was sent back to Moreton and off from there.

Tape 6

00:32 **When you were in Townsville you had the surrogate family with the Joneses; did you have anything similar in Melbourne?**

Yes. Two of the sailors gave me their parents' addresses. One was my boss and one was another supply assistant. They were very good to me, very good.

Would you go and visit them often?

Yes. One lived I don't know where, but a real posh part near Toorak, and they had the most beautiful

01:00 house. But you walked in and you walked down to a circular lounge, and that impressed me. And they had fruit trees, and the mother used to pickle eggs and things like that because, you know, they couldn't get much either. And I think the people - that's right, the people down south didn't get as much sugar or tea as the people up here.

01:30 But I know the sugar they got, if they got raw sugar they got the quota that we got but they wanted white. But no, they took me to Luna Park, they took me everywhere. They were very good. And then John Harry, the lieutenant, his family, his father was a tailor, he said to me,

02:00 "I'll give you my Mum and Dad's address," but he said, "Don't tell them I drink. Tell them I go to church every Sunday." So of course when I went there - I think they were Presbyterian, I used to go to church with them. But the tailor's shop was down below and they lived up top. They were very nice and she was an absolute lady, you know, his mother. He came back with this woman he met, an American up there, and I think he married her but I don't know. But he used to drink a fair bit.

Once the war ended, how long

02:30 **were you still in Melbourne before they brought you up to be demobbed?**

I came back in March.

So what did you do for those couple of months?

I still worked the same.

The work didn't change much?

No, it was still the depot. It never really closed down anyway, it's still going.

Were you involved in a victory parade?

Yes. I've got a photo of the girls after the parade there.

03:00 **Tell us about that.**

Oh, that was exciting. I mean people were just clapping the crowds of people along St Kilda Road there in the city.

Did all of the WRANS march or did you have to be selected?

I think most of us did, yes. There were a lot of us.

And it was a mixture of all services?

Yes, I think so, but I was just in the WRANS group. And there was another

03:30 depot there at, oh, in Melbourne, Port Something; and there was another secret one in Victoria that just, with the secret, no-one knew they were there, and they were getting messages when Coral Sea was on and things like that. But I didn't know. Well, I met a girl called Nancy, and she was there. I forget the name of that, but that was real hush-hush.

04:00 **When the time finally came to be packed up and to come back to Brisbane, was that a sad event?**

Losing my friends, yes. But, as I said, we've all kept in touch and I've been down to a couple of things, I've been down to the reunions. But then, I mean, they still keep in touch with me.

What happened on the day that you were demobbed?

That was in Brisbane.

04:30 I just signed the papers, they looked at my teeth - I hadn't seen the dentist - and they said, "Oh well, we'll pay for your teeth." And I thought, "Oh, forget about it," because I'd waited so long, and I found a dentist, which was hard to find. I just went off.

Where did you go to? Back to Mum and Dad's?

Yeah, I think I did. I must have.

Do you know how long it was before you went back to your other job?

They gave me some leave, and I

05:00 had about three weeks, and I took Mum for a holiday with my deferred pay. We went to Sydney and then we went through to Canberra and Tumut. Then I went back to work.

Did you have any difficulty settling down?

Yes, like the boys. I all of a sudden would think, "I can't stand this," and would go for a walk. But no-one would ever chat me. I would go for a walk and I'd be all right.

When you did go back to work, some of the men have told us that, when they went back to work,

05:30 **their bosses would say to them, "We know it might be hard for you to settle down, if you need to go for a walk."**

Yeah, well, nobody told me that, but I had to occasionally. I could get up, I knew I could do that.

When you went back to your old job had anyone else there done any kind of service?

No. I was the only one.

Was that difficult, being the only one?

No, the girls were still there. I was the first one to get married out of that bunch after all that. They were all there.

06:00 **And how did that come about?**

Well, I just came back and Brian was there, and we kept going out. Oh, at one stage, too, I must tell you this: the boys, this was before I joined up, but the boys thought this other friend of mine was getting fond of me, which he was. He was the one that came back and I wasn't available. So the boys had a meeting and they

06:30 worked out that somebody had better lure me away from him, so they had a meeting. I didn't know this; Brian didn't tell me until after we were married. And they decided Brian had better do it. So he took me out a bit and we always did, but you know, and I mean he was very popular with the girls, you can see he's good-looking, and the girls just thought he was marvellous. Once I thought, in Townsville I remember thinking, "I suppose I wouldn't mind marrying you." That's only one thought I had, but

07:00 I remember having it. Then I came back and he took me out until all the boys were coming home, and then it got serious.

How did he ask you to marry him?

He reckoned I did. But I don't know. I didn't, I don't think, we just, I think we took it for granted in the end.

Was it an issue that you were of different faiths?

Oh well, with the family. I had to leave home again.

07:30 And then I didn't get married from home, I got married from a dressmaker's. And Grandma forbade anyone to come to the wedding.

Because he was of a different religion?

Well, Dad, I don't know what he was, I never saw him go to church. He was Methodist or Presbyterian or something, and Grandma told the whole family they couldn't come to my wedding. And I had this cousin in Maroochydore, he and his wife snuck in for the wedding breakfast. And I had that at the Carlton,

08:00 and I had my twenty-first birthday at the Carlton. I got home on leave, I had leave and I said to the boss, "I'd rather wait until I'm twenty-one." So he put it off and said I couldn't be spared. So I went down for that. A lot of sailors there, because it was still the Moreton people, and Brian was there, some of the boys, the ones that weren't away.

So when you came back and you were getting married,

08:30 **how long did it take for Brisbane to settle down?**

I think it took a while, because I mean there were plenty of jobs and plenty of people looking for secretaries and things. I know some tobacco company offered me a thing, and ESCA [?] did, and somebody else, they just.... And, as I said, my boss wanted me to come down to Melbourne. But I went back

09:00 to work. I thought, "Better the devil you know than the devil you don't know," and I was fond of those girls.

When you were talking earlier about whenever any of the WRANS were getting married, often because of rationing and things like that, there wouldn't necessarily be the wedding dresses. Had that changed by the time you got married?

Yes, well, for me it was hard because I got back and decided to get married, and because there was nothing available in Brisbane.

09:30 And I got, my two mates down in Melbourne got me two swimsuits, because we went to Point Lookout for our honeymoon, and they sent me up swimsuits. But I still didn't have a wedding dress. Anyway, somebody said to me, I think it might have been one of the boys at work who was a naval officer, he said, "Why don't you go into Gardham's " He said, "A fellow in there was in the navy." So I boldly go up into Gardham's,

10:00 and the fellow said, "I've only got one sort of material." He said, "Nothing, not another thing." And it was cloquet [?] , it was cream, it was not really real white. And so I got that material and then the dressmaker made it, and it was a Mary Queen of Scots style, I had padded hips in those days, and it was a lovely dress. And then Brian of course couldn't get a suit. And then somebody knew a tailor somewhere,

10:30 so he only had a bit of material, so Brian didn't have any choice, but it was nice. So that's how we managed. And, as I said, the swimsuits came up from Betty and Sheila. And Players - your mother would remember Players - Players had some nice sports clothes so I went and bought some clothes there. We managed. We had a lovely wedding.

Your navy contacts managed to help you out again.

11:00 Yeah. Once you, even an ex-servicewoman, if you meet an ex-servicewoman you're friendly with her straight away. See, I belong to Kendrawavel and there's only two WRANS down there because there wasn't that many of us. But we've got a lot of peacetime girls, from the army mostly, but you know they're in their sixties and seventies - I still call them "the young ones". No, they,

11:30 you know, just everybody. And the wedding was good. The chef I knew of course from the Carlton, and he made this great big Bombe Alaska, well, I'd never seen one before, this great big Bombe Alaska, but

I didn't eat it; I had a little bit of this and a little bit of fish, and I didn't eat anything else because it was sort of smorgasbord and I was determined to talk to everybody. Oh, and another WRAN lent me her veil.

- 12:00 So it was good. Of course the night we were married we didn't book into the Carlton. We knew the housemaids would shortsheet the beds or something, so we went to Leonard's. And then I can remember when Brian got in the bath there was confetti flying all over the place because he had a lot - hair, it got stuck in his hair.

Did many WRANS come to the wedding?

Yes, Brisbane ones, the few that I knew. And all the

- 12:30 girls from work, some of Brian's mates.

So at any time after that, once you were married, had you ever wished that you'd extended and stayed in for longer?

No. I felt when I got out, I must have felt I wanted to settle. And then Brian and I started a bank account a few months before we [married] ; we saved up. And then Brian bought a house, this poor little house in New Farm.

- 13:00 And it was filthy. Anyway, we did the best we could, and then Brian got a cousin to come in and paint the walls, and Brian polished the floor sort of, in a way. But it was so dirty. We slept on the veranda in a single bed - and I got pregnant, you see - because we ordered our bedroom suite in the August, and it took

- 13:30 twelve months to get it because things were so scarce. So evidently he went, he did, he went to the fellow who was making it and said, "Look, I'm desperate, she's getting big, we can't fit in the bed." So he lent us a three-quarter one which we put in the lounge, and then we bought.... Oh no, that's right. I was pregnant and we'd just been in the bed, just in the big bed for a couple of weeks, and when I was

- 14:00 going to have the baby the water broke all over the mattress, so that was.... The mattress had had it before. But no, I had a good life with my husband. Twenty years I had. Better than nothing. And I dream about him a lot, so that's nice. All the fuss and bother with my father. I'll never forget him. I never dream about him.

- 14:30 I dream about Mum sometimes.

When you look back on it all, how do you think Australia would have coped without women joining the services?

I don't think they could have. See, there was an article, there was a lady in Sydney, do you know about Mrs Mack? There was a lady in Sydney, Mrs Mack, and she was teaching a lot of the girls telegraphy and Morse code, etcetera, etcetera.

- 15:00 And of course there were no WRANS. And she was teaching some of the boys, too. Anyway, she went down to Melbourne, because that's where the Navy Office was at that stage, and she said, "I've got all these wonderful girls and I don't know why you don't have women in the navy," because there were plenty in the WAAAF and air force and army. And she went down and they said, "We're not interested." But then all of a sudden, after I think quite

- 15:30 a while, the air force decided the WAAAFs could do this type of work. So she sent a telegram to them and they said they'd think about it. And she sent a telegram down, I must find that piece of paper, and she said, "Take your pick. Do you want my girls or will I give them to the air force?" And that's when they took the first twelve in, and they went down to Canberra and they were out there, but then

- 16:00 eventually the different groups came in.

Once you were married did you work for long?

I didn't, no. If you got married you were dumped. Yeah.

Even if you wanted to stay on, you couldn't?

No. The public service, you had to get out if you got married. But I mean I haven't done any - oh well, I did work with Judith, but up till then I did a lot of school work like, you know,

- 16:30 when the kids went to school the boss would ring up and say, "Miss So-and-so is away, will you take her class?", or something. I did. And I used to, you know they didn't have any teachers' aides then and I'd go up and work the Gestetner and the duplicator. And then another lass and I started the tuck shop up there. I was always pretty active.

- 17:00 Just volunteering I did.

How do you think your time in the services has affected or influenced the rest of your life?

Oh, it made me more confident, it made me more independent. And I think it made me understand people, because if you're stuck in a building like that, you know with all these girls, I mean I never had

any trouble, I don't think any of us did. We just all fitted in.

17:30 So that was, no, it did me good. Made me grow up and realise I was me.

And how do you think that's gone on to influence your children and grandchildren?

Yeah, they're all right. Well, after my husband died, I didn't know what to do. And I thought, "After twenty years I won't get a job." And Wildlife in Australia was one of my husband's favourite magazines.

18:00 And anyway, I'd been home about six weeks and not going out, wouldn't go anywhere, then I looked in the paper. A few of my friends, one WRAN especially, she said to me this particular day, she said to me, "Have you been looking in the ads?" And I said, "Yes, but I didn't today." She said, "Well, look in the paper, there's a job for you." And I did it reluctantly, and I didn't tell my daughter or anyone that I had done it,

18:30 and I just wrote and said that I had been in the WRANS and what education I'd had, etcetera, etcetera. And on the Sunday night a man called, and he asked me just the same questions I put in the letter, and he told me later it was just to see what my telephone manners were like. Anyway, then he said, "You might hear from us." So there were seventy-four applicants, and I had to go for an interview, and Judith

19:00 wasn't there, she left it to the Vice-President and one of the magazine volunteers.

This is Judith Wright? [author]

Yes. Judith was up at Tamborine, and I didn't realise it was the same woman. I knew there was a Judith Wright. Anyway, I found out it was Judith, of course. And then out of seventy-four applicants I got the job. I was amazed, because I thought no-one would want to employ me after twenty years. And then in the meantime, the day of Brian's funeral,

19:30 the headmaster from the school took a heart attack and he was trying to get, he knew teachers were coming in and he was going to put in a word for me. But I didn't need it, I got the job and I stayed there until I was sixty.

What did that job entail?

Well, the magazine, I didn't write it but I used to collect, I was office secretary and magazine secretary. So I had nothing to do with the committee. I could have been on it, but I

20:00 didn't want to because I had kids at home. What was I saying?

Just about what the job entailed.

Oh, and then actually we were in an office up near opposite the Treasury, and he didn't even have a phone then. You know I had to go over to the Casino, to the Treasury Building, to use to 'phone if I wanted to. But anyway

20:30 that was all right and I managed it, except after a fortnight I thought, and there were these great big bag sheets to do and I thought, "I could never do these," and I was ready to go in and say, "I'm sorry I can't cope," when one of the volunteers came in. And she said, "Judith is so pleased with you." And that was all I needed. And I managed the office, nobody interfered with me - until the very end; that's why I left. But I ran the office as I wanted.

21:00 And this material would come in to the magazine, well then I'd send it down to Vince Serventy , [naturalist,broadcaster] if you've heard of him, who's in Sydney, and send it down to Vin, and Vin would go over it and write something for me. Then it would have to come back and go to the printers, then I'd have to proofread it, and he did too. And I had to get it out on time. And I did it, I was never late with getting them out at all.

What was Judith Wright like?

She was deaf. She'd had an accident when she was a child

21:30 and banged her head off a horse. But she was nice, she was really nice. I mean, when she was leaving - she went down to Braidwood eventually, and when she was leaving she took me out to lunch. It was a little restaurant with two people and she knew them: one was Miss Australia and someone else. The one came over to me and she said, "You're going to miss your boss." And I said, "Yes, I am." Because I travelled with her a lot, too.

22:00 And Judith said, "Margaret, don't be ridiculous, I did everything you told me to." I mean I would ring her up, it was an office that you never knew what was going to happen. The press would walk in, and the government would, you know. So I'd ring Judith and say, you know, "This has happened," and she'd say, "Do you think I ought to come down?" And I'd say, "No, let it go a bit longer," or else, "Yes," you know, and she'd come down. But we were just wonderful friends.

22:30 And I saw her just a couple of months before she died. And I got a letter from her the week before she died to say that her ticker was playing up. I was so upset, she was a nice lady. We were marvellous friends. It was nice, it was a privilege to know Judith. Everyone said, "Never work for a woman boss," but I did and she was marvellous. I could do what I liked.

23:00 **What about, can we talk about your son? He was the first heart-lung transplant recipient?**

Yeah. Well, he went to Aspley school, and I moved out to Aspley because I had this great big beautiful house but it was all timber and verandahed all the way around and high up, and I thought, "I could never afford the maintenance on this."

23:30 So I sold it and I bought a house at Aspley. Had a job getting a loan, because in those days women couldn't have a loan, but I found a nice bank manager eventually. And so I bought this house down here, so I thought it would be a good chance for John, he was only nine. And my daughter had just gone through training college, so she was going up to Bundaberg eventually.

24:00 And anyway he went to Aspley High School, and he just got interested in, he played up a bit because I suppose having no father, and he was really interested in the botany and so forth. Well, then after - that's right, a fellow offered him a job up here at the hardware shop. I said, "You can go." I didn't particularly think he was going to do senior,

24:30 so said, "You can go," but then this bloke, he used to say, "This is John, I'm going to marry his mother." And of course, John hated that. Eventually John went, well, he couldn't get a job but he bought a mower and a truck, I had to go guarantor for the truck, and he used to go around mowing grass. He kept going, but then he got this awful cough sort of thing and he was

25:00 on the dole then, he couldn't work. In the meantime he'd been to Adelaide and he'd met this lovely girl who stayed with him, and they came up to Brisbane. The dole man went out and said, "You've got someone living with you," and so forth, and John got really upset. Well, then he went, he came back to me and he sort of got this cough. But anyway,

25:30 he eventually then went down to Melbourne and he got a job at this, what'll I say, it was a hospital for people with brain problems and so forth. And he got on well with the gardeners, there were a few gardeners and they all had their bit to do and he loved it. But then he'd ring me up and he'd be coughing and I'd say, "You've got the cough." "I've got bronchitis, Mum," he said. And I said,

26:00 "What's the doctor doing?" And he said, "Not much." And I said, "Well, you should find yourself another doctor," which he did. And the lady doctor, she said, "I'm sick of you blokes wanting to get on the dole and off doing work," and she took no notice of him. Well, then he finished up in the Austin Hospital. They realised then that he had this heart problem, so the hospital rang me and said that there

26:30 was not much hope for him, bring him home and look after him. And the doctor down there told him to go to some doctor in Royal Brisbane who turned out to be not much good. But anyway, John came home then, and he was going to hospital, the poor thing, he could hardly stand up. And I know once we got in a taxi and I opened the door and let him in, and the taxi man abused him and said,

27:00 "Why don't you open the door for your mother and let her in?" And of course John said, "I'm getting out of this taxi," so we had to get out of the taxi. Anyway, then one day he was at the hospital and a lady doctor came up to me and she said, "Look," - oh, the fellow said, that's right, the doctor said, "You want a heart and lung transplant, but you'll have to go to America for that," and he said, "I think he would die in the meantime." So anyway, this lady said to him,

27:30 "I hear Dr Chang [leading heart surgeon] is going to do heart and lung." This was not long after Fiona was done, with the heart. So John comes in to me and he says, "Can I ring up?" And so he rings this Dr Baron at St Vincent's. And he said, "Well, is it true?" and he said, "Yes, we're going to do it." And John said, "I've got this, that and the other," and he said, "Well, get the doctor here to send you down the papers." Nothing happened

28:00 and John rang Dr Baron again and he said, "I haven't got the papers." This bloke didn't even bother to send them down. So then he said to John, "Well, leave it, we'll get you down. We're going to assess five people," and he said, "I'll get the papers." So they came down and of course John was the one that was picked, and he said he was the first to be done. Well, in the meantime John moved to Sydney, and he got friendly with Dr Chang

28:30 and the rest of them, and they were like a big family there, he knew everybody. And he was in and out of hospital. Well, then his girlfriend came into some money and the bit that John had they bought a place Wollombi, because he couldn't breathe in the Sydney air. And so he was up and down for that. And then when he had the op I was down there, because he said to Donna at first, "Don't tell Mum," and then he said something about, "If you want any

29:00 money Mum will lend you some, Mum will give you some. I know she'll come down, she'll find out." So I went down and I was put in a little flat at the hospital. Glen came down, my son, Margaret came down for a while. And John was just getting, he was going back and forth to Wollombi for a while. And they got this drug from London and it went into his chest there, and had to go, but it had to be changed,

29:30 and poor old Donna used to do that. And she, I can remember once I was there and it bled everywhere, and he said, "God, I'm going to die this time." And course I never said much. And, you know, something or other I was talking about one day, "What will happen to you, Mum, when you're on your own, when you can't work?" And I said, "Oh, I don't think I'll go to Glen, he'll boss me too much. Margaret I don't think either. I'll

- 30:00 come and live with you." And he said, "Mum, do you know I might die?" So anyway he was up there, and this thing made such a difference. It was a risk, they said that. Oh no, in the meantime, he took a stroke, and Marg told me because he wouldn't tell me himself. Marg went down from Bundaberg. And anyway, all of a sudden one day the 'phone rang
- 30:30 and it was John. I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm in the hospital." I said, "Yeah, I've heard that," because I didn't [want to] upset him, because I didn't want him to get upset if he thought I knew more than he thought I should know. Anyway, he said, "And I'll tell you, I walked to the telephone." He was paralysed and he walked to the telephone; of course it was with the help of three other people,
- 31:00 I found out later. Anyway, so they went back to the little flat they had at Paddington, and the physio came out trying to look after him, because it was one of those detached little houses so all he could do was walk up and walk to the gate anyway. He said to physio one day, "Look, forget about it, I can do this myself." And he did, and of course he was wiped off the list. But he recovered
- 31:30 so much that he was on the list again. Anyway, but he kept going back to Wollombi, because they had to wait for heart and lungs, you see, that was the trouble, because they've got to match. Anyway some girl had had - they wouldn't tell me the name, I couldn't do anything about it - she'd had a motor accident, so he got a girl's lung and evidently he did have a rather small heart.
- 32:00 Anyway, I went down of course, and after the operation he was just put in this big glass cage thing. I wasn't allowed inside but I could talk to him through a telephone thing. He said to Dr Chang, "I feel fine, can I get up?" And Dr Chang said, "No, not yet." Anyway he deteriorated and they let flowers in, and then they let me in, because he got flowers from everywhere. I got letters from all over Australia, from
- 32:30 people I didn't know. I got a big bag full. About the thirteenth day Dr Chang, he sort of died, and Dr Chang brought him back, and he said, "It's hopeless." So we pulled the plug out, and that was it. Well, then a WRAN friend in Sydney, she came out and got me, and Margaret had to go back because she had little kids.
- 33:00 And she didn't want to be there when he died, anyway. But Glen was with me. And Betty came out and got me, and she took me to the.... I said to Donna, "What do you want to do about the funeral?" And she said, "If he's cremated I'd like to throw his ashes on Wollombi." So anyway, I didn't wait for the funeral, I'd had enough. But we arranged all that, and Betty took Donna home and so forth.
- 33:30 He had a couple of mates there, that was all. But we asked could they use anything of John's and they said no.

Margaret, having survived your husband, gone back to work for someone as remarkable as Judith Wright, surviving a son who was the first recipient of a heart-lung transplant, obviously you're an extremely....

I've had a hard life, but I mean, you know, you've got to do these things.

- 34:00 But I was sorry John. His photo's over there, I'll show you later.

How much of that sort of getting on with things successfully, how much do you put that down to having served as a WRAN and getting that confidence way back then?

Well, I just coped. I knew I had to. I think I went home, and then I.... Oh, that's right, I was living at Hamilton then, and my daughter was in Bundaberg. She'd got married.

- 34:30 And so I went to Bargara and I lived there for a while, but I hated it there. It was full of gossip and everything else. I eventually left it and come back to Brisbane. But no, I just had to. I knew I had to.

You stayed in touch with a lot of your WRAN friends?

Oh yes, mostly southern girls. You know, sometimes I'd I go to a reunion. There's no more now, we're too old, but I'll go with the Victorians or sometimes I'll go with the New South Wales girls.

- 35:00 Oh yes, we're all in touch. I got two calls last week from two of the girls.

Do you march on Anzac Day?

No. I used to. Yes, I can't march. I used to march, always.

What do you think about on Anzac Day?

Sailors mostly. I think of the girls that have died, because you know we had WRANS that have died early. One died with breast cancer when she was thirty, and one died earlier than that,

- 35:30 she shot herself because her boyfriend left her. And there was another one. But I think of all those people, you know, and Anne was a beautiful girl, she had - the one that shot herself, she had beautiful red hair and just ravishing to look at. That's what she did.

How would you like to see the Anzac Day tradition preserved or continued?

It should be continued, I think. Maybe I don't think my daughter does,

36:00 but I just think it should be. It's respected and it's getting bigger, isn't it, all the people that come to see it. It's a good day of remembrance, we all remember. Even the other day, I put Macka [radio program] on last Sunday week, and he had "The Last Post"; well I stopped and I couldn't walk around with it on. I'm

36:30 pretty loyal, I think, as far as remembrance, and I go to anything I can go to. Graham takes me. There's a big one in Sydney but I won't go to that because there's marching and there's going on the ships and things. Well, I couldn't cope.

If you were to think of this archive as being like a time capsule that your grandkids and great-grandkids might get to see, what is it that you would like them to know about the WRANS?

37:00 Well, I'd just like them to know. Because I might say something happened in the WRANS and they start to giggle, the kids, but then they tell me to write down what I did. Which I'm doing now, because I've never done it. But also, too, my - oh, in the meantime too my daughter went bankrupt. Oh, I've had a lot of drama. But my son-in-law's mother was a WRAN but we didn't get on at all. She's dead.

37:30 **Do you think the younger generations have an appropriate understanding of WW2 [World War II] ?**

A bit, I think, because they have it in schools now. And a lot of young ones go to it, they have it at schools. I can remember my daughter was in Gladstone at one stage, and my little Luke, who's twenty-seven now, he was at school, babies, and they had a lesson on Anzac Day, and

38:00 he put his hand up and said, "Please Miss, my Nanna was an ANZAC [Australia, New Zealand World War I veteran] ," you know, the teacher said to Margaret, and Margaret said, "No, it was the Second World War." But I don't regret anything I've done, and I've been proud of myself that I've had to keep going. I mean I could have, even after Brian died, the Legacy [association for war widows, orphans] lady came out

38:30 the day after somebody called her, and she came. When she knew that Brian hadn't left Australia, she was so rude: she just said to me, "I'm sorry, your husband didn't go overseas, I can't help you." I mean, I just wanted a bit of help with what I should do. That's what I kept thinking when Brian died, "What'll I do?" But so I've never given a penny to Legacy, I'm afraid. I'll give it to the RSL [Returned and Services League] but I won't give it to Legacy.

39:00 They finished me, but she shouldn't have done that.

When you look back on your service, what is it that makes you most proud?

I'm proud that I was in the WRANS and I'm proud that I was in the navy. I'm glad I didn't get into the WAAAF. And I'm proud, just even Anzac Day, to go to Anzac Day. I mean I sit and watch the march here now.

39:30 But I'm proud of being a WRAN.

Do you have any final thoughts or messages for the archive?

No, only the fact that I think that it made me grow up and it made me independent, and it made me learn how to mix with people, because they were from all places, you know, the WRANS. No, I'm thankful. I mean

40:00 I'm sorry there was a war, but for me myself I'm very thankful. I made some wonderful friends. That's about all, I think.

INTERVIEW ENDS