

Australians at War Film Archive

Gwenneth Strachan (Gwen) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:42 **Well, we'll just begin at the beginning and I'd love to ask you where you were born?**

I was born at Koroit, Victoria, a little potato growing area in the Western District.

Can you tell me about your first home?

Home was a little weatherboard home.

01:00 I think my father probably bought it when he came back from the First [World] War. He and my mother were married in 1921 and I was born in '24. I don't think it was a new home by any means, but it was a little weatherboard home with a great big kitchen with an old wooden stove. A very happy home.

Did you have a lot of land?

01:30 No, it had a little garden at the front and a back garden to play in. Then it had a paddock because my father kept a cow. He didn't keep it there, but it used to be milked there and then at the end of the day...I think it was in the night, it was kept there. And then it was taken down to a railway siding and left there for the day and brought back.

02:00 So we had the paddock at the back which had a crop in it, and that was a good place to play too.

Can you sort of walk me through the home, through the house?

Yes, I'll try to. It had a passage-way...a verandah with a passage-way down the centre which led to this big kitchen. On the left hand side was the front bedroom which was

02:30 only used for when you had visitors. On the right hand side was my parents' room and behind that was the girls' room. There were three of us. And opposite that on the passage was the dining room, which again was only used on Sunday night, and it had a piano in it. That was something, to have a piano. That led to a little room off the kitchen where, once when we had a baby, he grew up, that's where

03:00 he slept. Then the big kitchen. Outside the back door there was like a cement porch-way and the bathroom was across the porch-way. In there also was an underground tank which had an old pump; it was a cast iron thing that you could pump up and down and get water from this underground tank.

03:30 The wash-house was outside, and the toilet down the yard, as they were in those days. The nightman as he was called would take the [sewage] cans out on his shoulder. We had rude names for the nightman. It was very primitive because that was back in the 1920s. But it was good.

And you ate in the kitchen near the fire?

Yes. We had a big table

04:00 and I remember the old wooden stove. It had double doors on the oven and it had like fists to open which was cast into the shape of the iron. Yes we ate there, and as I say, with visitors we went to the dining room. And Sunday night, we had our Sunday night tea as it was called in those days, in the dining room. I think

04:30 it was the way it was done then. I remember thinking it was all very great, wonderful. Very posh I thought it was.

Were your family musical, having the piano?

My mother was, and I was taught too but I could hear my friends playing outside, and I used to like playing marbles so I didn't practise, so I was banished from learning

05:00 to play. But both my sisters learned to play the piano and they used to be in concerts. I was allowed to be in concerts too because I could sing a bit, you see. And really, it used to be a little bit of a thorn in

their side that I would often have the starring role, and I hadn't practised and I seemed to be getting rewarded for being a bit of a naughty girl. Not practising. But they both played the piano, and my mother was a singer too.

- 05:30 Yes, we were musical. Sunday night we'd all gather around the piano. They were very strict. We were only allowed to sing hymns on Sunday. We weren't allowed to sing songs on Sunday. But music played a big part in our life, which was great.

Did many families have a wireless set or gramophone back in those days?

No, we certainly didn't. No we didn't.

- 06:00 My father used to go down and march on Anzac Day and we'd go to the neighbours. I can remember having my ear up against the neighbour's radio thinking I could hear his boots squeaking as he marched in Melbourne, because Melbourne seemed like another country away to us. A long way from Koroit. No, we didn't have a radio until even after the war had broken out and we had moved.

- 06:30 We didn't have a radio until probably the 1940s, early 40s. But our neighbours had a radio, which was good.

So your dad was a First World War veteran. Can you tell me about his service a bit?

Yes. He was in the 13th Australian Light Horse and he was in Egypt for a start, I think.

- 07:00 He was on Gallipoli. The horses didn't go to Gallipoli, but he was in an infantry battalion. He was in Gallipoli and France. I have quite a few photos of him in an Anzac book with his horse. He didn't talk about it...as they don't...he didn't talk about it. He did say the trenches were terrible and that the Turks were pretty good fellows.

- 07:30 He had quite a lot of respect for the Turkish soldiers and I've found out since that a lot of the soldiers did. But I grew up wishing I could be a soldier like my Daddy. I was very proud of him.

Did he say much about his relationship with his horse?

Yes, yes. Because when they were coming home their horses had to be shot, and I think that was pretty heartbreaking after being

- 08:00 such a faithful friend, and they had a special love for their horses. Yes that happened, but he talked about his mates, but he never talked about any of the...I don't suppose you would with your daughters. But he never talked about any of the horrible, horrible stuff. The only horrible thing I remember him telling me, and I've got a horror of spiders, was of one of his mates eating a big

- 08:30 piece of bread. As he bit it there was a big spider on it and he had a great big swollen face from the spider biting him. And that's about the most horrible thing that I heard, but there would have been lots of things in his mind. On Anzac Day we used to say that Daddy's eyes went extra blue. Of course we were only silly kids and we probably didn't realise that Daddy's eyes would be

- 09:00 full of tears I guess, thinking about his mates. Yes, we grew up with the Anzac tradition really entrenched in our lives I felt.

So he told you a bit about his lifestyle during the war, but not about the deaths and the difficult things?

Yes, yes. He told us funny stories rather than gory ones.

- 09:30 It was better than...I was thinking of one but I won't say it because it's not very nice. One that he used to tell us about...

I'd love to hear it.

Well apparently they got dysentery a lot and they were on this train. It must have been coming through Egypt somewhere and they were on this train. And with so many soldiers...I don't know whether they would have had toilets in the train. They wouldn't I guess. So he got

- 10:00 out on a little platform thing at the back and he was emptying his bowels when he said they went through a station, and he said the Gypo [slang term for Egyptian] station master got it all as he was ringing his bell. So it's not a very nice story. He used to talk about what he did to the Gypo station master. That's not a very nice story to have told his young daughters, is it? But he did, he talked

- 10:30 about the different things and the mateship that they had, and I think this is what stuck with them all their lives. Anzac Day was a very important day to him. I mean now, I don't march for Land Army, I march for my Dad and the first ANZACs. I think that's what it's about.

- 11:00 **What did you absorb about the Anzac legend? What did it mean to you?**

Of course we had it a lot at school in those days, which I don't think they do nowadays. I can remember playing...you know, enacting it as a child. My father was a produce inspector so we had big bags, you know. I can remember, the cement was the land

- 11:30 ...was Gallipoli and the stony part of the yard that was the sea, and we used to put bags down and this was the...I used to enact it, that this was the landing at Gallipoli, so what he told me must have really stuck in my mind; that Anzac Day was something to be really proud about. I mean, I think they did believe it was the beginning of our Australian
- 12:00 nation. They were tested and they were tried, and they came out on top.
- What were the qualities of an Anzac in your mind? What did you learn about it and what did you understand about the qualities of an Anzac soldier?**
- It was their bravery and how they could put up with all this...like on Gallipoli it must have been really terrible, the trenches
- 12:30 and not a lot to eat. And where would they sleep, and I think they were just such fine young men and a lot of them were only...my Dad was probably thirty when he went, so he wasn't a boy. But a lot of them were only kids and they went for the adventure of it. But to me they were heroes. That was my understanding of it. I still think the
- 13:00 same.
- Why do you think it is that the men remembered more of the funny stories than the gory stories?**
- I suppose because it's easier to talk about. But they must have had bad memories and dreams of what they went through and to have to kill another human being. I know my father
- 13:30 did say that to bayonet somebody else's son would be terrible. I think probably it was easier to talk about the naughty things which he did. There were bits of larrikinism, and he used to talk about some of the tricks they used to play on the Pommy officers. He didn't speak of them with much respect. I think that was probably because
- 14:00 they could think about it but it was too hard to talk about it, I would imagine.
- What was your mum like?**
- Mum was a lady. Yes, Mum was nine years younger than my Dad. They went to the same school in the Colac area, a little place called Beeac.
- 14:30 But Dad said she was only a little bit of a squirt when he was at school. Well she was probably not even...nine years, she was probably not even at school when he was at school. Mum was from a family of nine and she was sort of on a pedestal with her own family and with Dad. We always had to respect Mum and
- 15:00 always did. He always helped her with the children and do the washing. But Mum was always beautifully dressed. She was always a very beautiful lady and I think all her life, she felt she was a bit of a lady, you know. My sister and I were tomboys and she thought we were hobbledehoyas as she used to say, and she would never have been a tomboy herself.
- 15:30 So Mum was always very ladylike and it was a big thing to live up to Mum's standards that she set for you. But we fell by the wayside a bit.
- What did the term hobbledehoy mean?**
- I suppose it's a tomboy. A girl who used to play marbles and get out with the boys and kick the football and do all the
- 16:00 things that ladies just didn't do. I mean even Land Army, Mum didn't think it was very good for us to 'work like navvies', was one of her expressions. But I didn't altogether agree. I don't think it was rebellious but it was just a lovely free and easy life.
- 16:30 You did do those things.
- Was your mother more or less ladylike than the other mothers that you saw around the town?**
- I don't think so. I think at Koroit she had her ladies who used to visit and she would have her afternoon teas and we weren't suppose to come in and show our faces if we had been out scuffling
- 17:00 around. She had her circle of friends who were just as ladylike as she was. Her 'at-homes' she used to have. She set a pretty high standard for us.
- What did she and her friends do during the 'at homes'?**
- Oh, they used to sit around and have cucumber sandwiches
- 17:30 and cakes and talk, gossip probably. But just talk. I used to think on school days when the mothers would come to school that, 'My mother's the most beautiful one of the lot', and she probably was. She always looked so lovely. But I think they just generally talked. She was in the Ladies Guild with the

church and

18:00 I was a Guide; a Brownie first and then a Guide, and she was with the Mothers' Club at the school. So she joined in. Koroit's only a tiny little town. You had to be in all the social things that went on. No, she had her circle of friends, but looked down her nose at some of the others who she thought didn't come up to her standard. That was the way she was.

18:30 **What was her daily clothing like?**

Well probably not extraordinarily well dressed when she was at home. She used to cook. Saturday afternoon she would cook, but when she went out...she had a lady who lived over the road who used to do some dressmaking for her. She had Mrs Mills who used to make

19:00 beautiful outfits and so forth. So she really was well dressed. They were suits, nice suits, and I can remember one particularly beautiful shiny navy blue hat she had. And she really did look like what I'd see in the papers...what the ladies looked like. She used to wear this fox fur thing around her neck, and I used to wear that. You know

19:30 the head came here, or was it the tail. It was a real fox I think. All these fox furs worn by the ladies of Koroit. But then again, there were very poor families there because it was the Depression years, and you know a lot of them didn't even have a lot to eat, and I know my father brought us boots, Jean and I boots, and

20:00 I would have given anything to have had some patent leather shoes. My mother brought some from the lady across the road that she was throwing out, and they had a hole in the sole and my father was disgusted because he was trying to make us wear the proper things for our feet, and I had these patent leather shoes with little cord ribbon bows. We wanted to have nice clothes.

20:30 Nobody had a lot of money and I guess we didn't either. They were very hard times. The people used to come round wanting to chop wood if you'd give them a sandwich or old clothes. The people would come around...you would... I can remember once Mum

21:00 played a trick...she did have a sense of humour. I'm painting her as being very starchy, but she had a sense of humour. I can remember once she got dressed up and I had just had my hair cut. My hair used to be cut at home, and I had very straight black hair, and my Mum stuck it on as a 'mo' and put on one of my father's old suits and a hat and came to the door and made out she was an old tramp wanting

21:30 a crust. And my older sister went and tried to cut some...bread wasn't sliced in those days, and she was trying to cut a slice of bread for this old tramp. It was my mother. Just silly things.

So how do you think in other ways that the Depression may have affected your family?

Well really I suppose we ...

22:00 my father was a potato and produce inspector. So we had plenty to eat, so it did make us realise that we at least had...some of the children came to school without...cold, cold winters, with bare feet. We at least had boots on our feet. My mother wasn't a sewer and I can remember she made us clothes out of my father's uniform, or tried to make

22:30 some clothes. And they were terrible scratchy things. It was serge I think, in the uniforms. At least we were well fed because we had plenty of potatoes. We had our own cow and hens and we were well fed, whereas some of them weren't. And it made you realise...well it made you think

23:00 that really, maybe we were rich. We thought we were compared to some of the others, which we weren't of course. Looking back, we didn't have toys. My mother used to...I can remember wanting a doll and Mum making me a doll out of some black material and she filled it with oatmeal. I left it out in the rain and it was all soggy and I used to call it my porridge doll.

23:30 It was no use because I had forgotten to bring the doll in and it was all soggy. But we didn't have toys but we made do with things. The Depression...it was to see the poor people who had big families, some of them, and they didn't have anything. They didn't have food some of them. It was pretty hard.

24:00 Of course, we lived in Koroit until 1936 and we were coming out of the Depression years by then, but it must have been...because being children, you're happy and you don't have anything to compare it to... but no, we felt we had a pretty good childhood.

What was it your father did as a produce inspector?

24:30 He used to...well he had an old car, it was a Citroen of course, because he loved the French. Well, he loved the French ladies I think. But he bought this old Citroen with a soft hood and of course we had a car, which was something. Not everybody had a car. He used to go to the railway stations and the potato growers would bring their bags in, and he would

25:00 inspect them. And if he cut open too many bags and the potatoes were rotten or not to the true standard, he would, say, pick them over. So that was one of our nicknames. We were the daughters of old pick-em-over. Spud McLennan was another one because he was the spud inspector. He used to go to

the different stations around about Koroit, and mainly to the close ones

- 25:30 he'd ride his bike. Petrol I suppose cost money, and money was in short supply. But when he had to go distances he would drive the Citroen. This Citroen was really something. You'd think it was a Rolls Royce the way we thought of it, but the Citroen was just great.

Do you remember some of your rides in it?

Yes I can remember going out to

- 26:00 Illowa was one of the stations. There was another one nearby, Kirkstall I think it was called, and I can remember Dad would take me with him. Mum would want to...I was a bit of a fighter, I used to fight with my young sister and she would get rid of me and send me off with Dad. I would sit in the back of the Citroen and it had little flaps you could pull up and I would make tables and
- 26:30 pretend I was having...probably at-homes. I would just play in the car because I wasn't allowed to go to where he was with the growers. I suppose there would have been a bit of rough talk that he didn't want his little daughter to hear. So I would just have to stay in the car. Then we'd go from Koroit to Colac to see Grannie McLennan, and that was a real day time thing.
- 27:00 We'd have to be up by five o'clock in the morning, and I don't think he travelled any more than twenty five miles an hour in the Citroen, and we'd go up to Grannie's place for Sunday lunch. In those days as you came through Camperdown there was a clock tower...it's still there, I notice it when I go down. But in those days the hill must have been steeper because he would say, 'We're
- 27:30 coming to the disappearing clock tower', and it would go...it wouldn't really go down, but as we climbed the hill it would disappear. Then he'd tease us and say, 'We're too late. I can see Grannie out shaking the table cloth'. That was really a wonderful thing to...and it was a day trip from Koroit to Colac. I don't know the actual miles, but it's not that far. But it used to take us all day.
- 28:00 Early morning and then having a roast dinner it would be at Grannie's place, then back to Koroit again. Quite a thing.

Can you tell me more about the food in the time period that you ate, most often roasts?

Yes we...as I say we ate very well and I can remember the four of us would be coming

- 28:30 home from school, and we'd be wishing what we would hope would be for pudding that night. Mine was very ordinary. Mine was boiled rice. I loved rice, with cream and sugar on it of course. My young brother loved plum duff as he called it. And I think Podge's was apple pie, and Jean loved - and I hated it - Tapioca Pudding. I hated it because it looked like eyes.
- 29:00 Like eyes looking at you. I can remember the first time we tasted junket. Junket was on the menu of course, but then in latter years you could get little tablets and coloured junket. We didn't really like it for a start so Mum would call it Angel's Food. So we ate it when it was called Angel's Food.
- 29:30 It was flavoured junket. That was a real luxury for us to have it. And jelly. We didn't often have jelly. I don't particularly like green jelly but whenever I have it I always think of hot days and cool green jelly. Jelly was something really exotic.
- 30:00 But the other food. We used to have roasts and stews, and I think most of them would have cooked much the same except the people who couldn't afford to eat like that. But we did have a lot of potatoes because we got those for nothing, didn't we. And then my father had a vegetable garden so
- 30:30 we did, we ate much the same as the ordinary foods today. And I suppose I've kept up just liking the ordinary foods rather than some of the exotic things. But not altogether. I like something a bit different now and again. But that's what the food was like back then. It's half a lifetime away, isn't it.

31:00 What was junket exactly?

It was made with...it was like the old nursery rhyme, curds and whey. Little Miss Muffet sat on her tuffet. It was rennet. It was a tablet and it was crushed and you used warm milk and it set into a type of a custard, only it wasn't a custard. But it was really something, especially the coloured junket.

- 31:30 The Angel's Food.

You mentioned that you didn't have a lot of toys when you were young. What sorts of games did you play?

Old wheels. Old tyres. Bowling along old tyres. There was another game we used to play called Jacks. Now they were the knuckles out of the lamb. Part of the poor lamb, the little bones. And we used to play a game called Jacks with those.

- 32:00 Marbles. We used to play marbles. My father, who was a terrible carpenter - he couldn't hammer a nail straight if he tried - he built us like a rocking thing. I don't know how he got the wheel cut in half but it was a big wagon wheel cut in half with boards put across. We could sit in it. It was like a see-saw. I can't

see him knowing...I mean

- 32:30 what he was like with a nail and hammer! He used to sole our boots for us and he would always bend the nail over and I can remember being a little girl watching him put the soles on our boots. And of course...I never heard my father swear and I suppose he was wishing I wasn't there because he'd put in the tack and it would bend over and he'd say - 'dog'! He'd bend it over and he'd say, 'dog'.
- 33:00 I'd say, 'Another dog Daddy'? But he made us this lovely rocking thing. I mean, we had imagination because Kingsford Smith came to Koroit in early days and I can remember Tower Hill, which is a place of interest now. It didn't have any water in the lake in
- 33:30 those days. It was a big flat area and that's where Kingsford Smith's plane landed. Mum and Dad had paid for it I suppose, big money, for a ride. Mum was so nervous. I heard the story that she was so nervous she punched my father's hat into a round ball because she was so nervous with the plane ride. But we were very imaginative. We got Grandfather McLennan's
- 34:00 umbrella which was really...we had to respect it because it had come from Scotland. And we put my young brother up on the washhouse roof with the umbrella tied to him to see if he could parachute down. And of course he did, and luckily he fell in a bush. But we had imagination. We used to play some really good games. I suppose...we had a pet sheep we used to tease.
- 34:30 None of us had a bike except when Ken was a little boy they got him a little three-wheel trike, and I can remember the family had gone out and left me home. I must have been misbehaving and they had gone for a drive somewhere. I got Ken's little trike out and I was much too big for it and I broke it. I broke the wheel off it so I fixed it up with a nail and put it
- 35:00 back and I never confessed. I've never confessed to this day that I broke his trike. I hope he doesn't see this or he will realise it was me. He got the blame for it. Yes, so we had lots of fun.

It sounds like you were a bit cheeky.

Yes I was a bit of a hobbledehoy. We had an old pram.

- 35:30 It had been Ken's pram, and I suppose by the time that Ken came along, he was the baby, so they could afford something a bit more upmarket. We used to play circuses with the old pram. Podge (poor old Podge), we always made Podge the elephant because Podge was a little plump. Jean was the horse. We used to put the peg in Jean's
- 36:00 mouth and Ken used to sit in the pram with the garbage bin to the side and drive the horse. And I always wanted to be the pretty girl up the trapeze. The trapeze was up the tree and it served me right. The pretty girl was up swinging on a tyre and I fell and got concussion at one stage because I wouldn't let either...well Podge didn't want the starring role. Podge wasn't like that. But Jean and I used to fight
- 36:30 for the role, who wanted to be the girl on the trapeze. I came to grief by falling down on the cement and I got concussion from being the pretty girl. We didn't seem to need toys. I think children nowadays have too many. But we didn't have any but we were quite happy with what we did have.

We're just nearing the end of the first tape. You mentioned Jacks with the

- 37:00 **little knuckle bone from the sheep acting as the Jack. Did you have a little rubber ball? How did you play Jacks?**

You put so many on your fist and you had to throw them up and catch them and see how many you had left on your fist. It was really a counting game, playing Jacks. Actually I found one the other day when I was tidying up. I found a Jack.

- 37:30 I must have got it from some meat I've been cooking recently, but my grandchildren weren't at all interested in playing Jacks. It was much too mundane to what they can play nowadays.

So you didn't need a little rubber ball?

No, we didn't have a rubber ball.

A different version I guess.

Yes. But marbles. I liked marbles better than Jacks. I love marbles. We had our little bags of marbles and

- 38:00 we used to take them to school with us. But that went down to even our grandchildren. They went through a stage that they were playing marbles too. That was good. It brought back a few memories for me. Playing marbles. And some of the big boys at school would like to play with the little ones who didn't have much prowess at the game. They'd like to win our special marbles from us.

00:32 **I thought I'd ask you how your sister Podge got her name, or nickname?**

She was always a little roly-poly plump girl, Podge. I've got some photographs of Podge. But it didn't make any difference, she was always the good girl of our family. Jean and I were always ratbags. But Podge was always very good.

01:00 I've just recently read her diary which was very sad. My brother's got her diaries and she said words to the effect that life was pretty good having been born fat and ugly, the ugly one of the family. It made me cry because I mean, she was plump and even now that she's been kept alive on this life support.

01:30 But the most beautiful nature and forgiving nature and she did so much for other people. She was my idol. I always thought Podge was a saint, so Podge isn't said in any derogatory way whatsoever. All through her nursing career, if you say to people that, 'My sister was in charge of the Intensive Care in Warrnambool, and she was here', and they would say, 'What was her name'? and I'd say, 'Sister McLennan', and they'd say,

02:00 'We didn't know her'. And I'd go on and they'd say, 'You don't mean Podge? She was marvellous'. So everywhere you'd say 'Podge', she was known as Podge, so it wasn't meant in any derogatory way.

What was her Christian name?

Audrey Moira. But she hated Audrey because when we were young there were jokes that would go around about Little Audrey and they were little rude jokes, and it finished up, 'and little Audrey laughed and laughed'.

02:30 So she always hated being Audrey. My mother never called her Podge. She was always Audrey, but she's always been Podge to us. Even my children called her Auntie Podge, and my grandchildren call her Podge. So she's always been Podge.

And what was your early schooling like?

I can

03:00 remember Podge going to school. As I said, Podge was nineteen months...no, I mightn't have said... Podge was only nineteen months older than me, and I remember Podge going to school at Koroit state school, No. 618. A wonderful little school and it's still there. I hated Podge going to school and leaving me. I sat out in waited in the rain. Auntie Jean, who lived in Colac, had given her a

03:30 Chinese, or Japanese umbrella with the bamboo and the paper. And I sat out in the rain waiting for Podge, and it was a real treasure because we didn't get presents. Well, we got presents but we didn't get a lot of toys. So I took Podge's out and sat on the post where the gate closes and waited for her to come home from school.

04:00 I was so happy to see her, but she wasn't a bit happy to see me because when I went to put the umbrella down it was all soggy and fell to pieces. But she started school when she was five I guess. I was run over the day I started school. Podge saw a boy who used to come round the corner and he...and I think Podge was in love with this Joe Sheen and Podge saw Joe Sheen

04:30 and she had to take this kid sister to school. And she saw Joe Sheen across the corner and she didn't want to stay with me, so she was going across and I went to chase after her, and a car came around the corner going to a funeral would you believe, and the only thing I can remember is...it went right over the top of me. I didn't know whether I had wet my pants or whether I had been in a puddle because I sort of

05:00 came to on the way to the doctor in this beautiful car which was much better than the Citroen because it had red seats, and it was all wet. I was all wet. I was thinking, 'Have I wet my pants or what'? I thought I had wet my pants. The next thing I knew the man had taken me...I must have passed out, so he took me up to the doctor and back home and

05:30 took me home to Mum and I can remember Mum coming to the door screaming. So no wonder I'm a nut case now isn't it, with concussion twice? I hadn't had the one from the tree at that stage, but I'd forgotten about that, being run over. So I didn't start school in February, I had to have a little bit of time at home. I don't know what terms were like then, but I was a bit later starting school, which meant that when Jean started school,

06:00 she was two years younger but she was always only one grade behind me. And that really kept me going because if I failed, Jean was going to catch up to me and that would have been a real thorn in my side to have my young sister, and I was always pretty much of a dud at arithmetic at school. I loved English and writing compositions and that sort of thing, but she was brilliant at her sums and I used to have to

06:30 cheat to get through my exams with my sums. I got caught later on in grade six. My friend and I got caught. I had the answers to the English and she had the answers to the long division but I had left out a row of figures. I had the answers all right. And the English question was a simile, and

07:00 one was, 'she sings like a thrush', or 'she is as cunning as a fox'. And of course, I wrote it down wrongly. I said, 'she sings like a fox'. I put it on my shoe and put in under my seat to write it down, and we got

caught because she had, 'she sings like a fox', and we both had the same answer for the long division which was right, but I couldn't explain how I got the answer.

- 07:30 But schooling was...the first grades I think were one two and three, and they would be in the same room. I've even got an old photo of Koroit School with Jean and I in the same room. And Podge being older, she wasn't with us. But Podge was always rather ashamed of her two sisters at school because Jean used to wet her pants. Podge
- 08:00 would be called to take her sister home and get some dry pants on her. And Jean has said since that Podge was always kind and I was always...I would get a stick around her to make her go because I was missing out on play time, and having to take this kid sister home to get dry pants. But schooling was...I think I loved most of our school teachers. Mr Leach was the Head Master and he had come from a place called St Arnaud
- 08:30 which I had never heard of, and he used to talk about the beautiful bush and the birds. I loved Mr Leach, he was a lovely man. He knew my father and I think just on the quiet, I think he said to my father, 'She's a bit of a cheek but she's alright'. He never made me feel like I was a naughty girl. No, they were great days,
- 09:00 and Podge had gone to high school before we left Koroit. Jean and Ken and I were still at state school when we left in 1936 to move to Warrnambool. I can remember getting the strap at school. The girls used to get the strap as well as the boys. Miss Tom was her name. And Miss Tom was a bit of an old tartar.
- 09:30 And there was another one too...Miss Stoddard, because as I say I couldn't do...I could do my sums alright if I had enough toes and fingers to count on in the early days. It was when I got up to long division. That was when I met my Waterloo. I couldn't do long division sums. But this Miss Stoddard, she knew I couldn't do...I used to go just exactly blank for mental arithmetic. She would say, 'Gwen McLennan, what's (so and so and so and so)'?
- 10:00 And I just wouldn't know. And she would just crack me across the fingers with the side of the ruler. My hands would be freezing cold. And I met up with that awful woman when I went to technical school. Of course I'm jumping the gun a bit, aren't I? When I went to Warrnambool school I still couldn't do sums very well, and my Dad was friendly with the...he wasn't the Head Master but
- 10:30 he was teaching Grade Eight which was...yes, I was doing Grade Eight and that was the only year I went to the state school in Warrnambool which was just across the road from where we lived. Mr Waterson said to my Dad, 'If she would like to come to school at eight o'clock I will take her back right through what she should have known in arithmetic'. So he did and look, he was a lovely man. He always used to say to me,
- 11:00 'This above all, to thine own self be true'. He used to say these lovely things to me. Anyhow Mr Waterson coached me up and I got my Merit, and of course steamed through. I could do all my arithmetic and so forth. And at technical school the next year, who should be there but Miss Stoddard, the one from Koroit, and she said to them, 'Gwen McLennan would not have got her Merit Certificate, she would have cheated'.
- 11:30 So I had to sit it again. And it was demoralising to have to sit it again but thankfully I got through again. But wasn't she a tartar? She really frightened me, and I think now if anyone gave me a whole heap of figures I'd have to sit down. If I had to do mental arithmetic I would have to write it down. She was a bit of a...nowadays they wouldn't get away with that would they? But Mr Leach was just so
- 12:00 beautiful. I just loved his stories and I think he liked some of my compositions I used to write too. A bit on the imaginative side. So that was until 1936 we went to school in Koroit. I was twelve when we left Koroit. I think school days then...
- 12:30 on Monday morning when we had to say, 'I love God and my country. I honour the flag. I serve the King'. I've forgotten it. I'm getting it messed up with my Guides one. But we used to have to say...what was it called? The Affirmation? Would that have been right? I'm not sure. But we used to salute the flag. The girls just put their hands over their hearts and the boys saluted the flag
- 13:00 and we said this at school. But I can remember even early days starting school...I've been through Koroit and I've looked to see if the shelter shed is still there, but there was this octagonal shaped shelter shed, and because Mum used to make our underclothes, and they were terrible...
- 13:30 and this boy, I can remember him getting me and putting me up on top of the rafters in the shelter shed so he could see my funny knickers. I can remember I wet myself. I got such a fright being...I mean, for a little kid to be right up there. I can remember hanging on and this other boy, this big tall boy came in and he could just stand up and get me down. I think I loved him to the day I left school, this boy.
- 14:00 Horrible things like that happened, but most of it was pretty great. I did play the wag once...yes I played the wag once, but not often.

What did you do on the day you wagged?

I shouldn't tell. We had a nudist colony. It wasn't meant to be,

- 14:30 it was just that we didn't have bikes with...my friend from across the road, Valma Johnston and Mary (UNCLEAR), they've both since passed away, we were a threesome. Mary lived down a little lane called Lumston's Lane. Her father worked on this farm near Lumston's Lane and the farm had a barn with hay, and of course it was a great thing to go to. So there was three of us, three girls and
- 15:00 three boys who decided we'd play the wag. One of the boys must have had a pushbike and I wanted to be dinked...you know double-dinked on the bike, and we fell off. We fell off in the mud. It must have been the two of us who fell off into the mud. I said, 'I can't go home with my clothes all muddy. Mum will know I haven't been at school'. So we decided to go a bit further down to the creek that ran
- 15:30 down through and we'd wash our clothes. So we took our clothes off and we washed our clothes, and there we were, running around...see the boys decided they'd take their clothes off. We suddenly realised that the train from Kirkstall...Kirkstall isn't the right name of the little station where my father used to do the inspecting...I thought, 'The train comes right through here! If Dad comes through on the train and sees me running around'
- 16:00 ...I mean it was all innocent. I don't think I took any notice that the boys looked different to me. We probably weren't very old. We used to talk about it...our nudist colony, that we had our nudist colony. So we dried our clothes and went home, and Mum never knew that I had played the wag from school and got wet and then dried. Well, actually we had a bit of fun. While the clothes were drying we did the Lady of Shallot with an old
- 16:30 horse trough. I wanted to be...we might have had our clothes dry by then. So I laid in the horse trough and the Lady of Shallot, you know, floating down the river to Camelot and so forth? We used to have some wild imaginings. But I think that's probably the only time I played the wag from school. But school was alright. Except for Miss Stoddard.
- 17:00 **Now when did you move to a new house and start going to the technical school?**
- We moved into Warrnambool. My father got promotion, so we moved into Warrnambool. They had built a new home in Warrnambool which was really something, and Mum was really with her ladies then, her at-homes got very much up-market then. But before the home was being built
- 17:30 we rented an old place, which was beautiful. We didn't have our beds, we slept on mattresses on the floor. That was just out of Warrnambool. Dad used to drive us into school. We were out for probably three months before the home was finished. Then we moved in and of course it was great. I think about the only thing they kept was piano. Most of the old furniture stayed at Koroit and
- 18:00 we got all new furniture. It was still a four-bedroom home. I've got a photo of that somewhere out there. It was really something to...we thought we were really posh then to have this lovely home. As I say, Jean and Ken and I were still going to state school, which was just across the road for the
- 18:30 first year, and then I went to tech school the next year. I had two years at tech school which is now the TAFE college in Warrnambool. I did my Junior Tech the first year. I had to sit my Merit again to prove to Miss Stoddard that I could do it but that was before I was allowed to go into first year. Then I did Junior Tech,
- 19:00 then the next year was Intermediate. I wanted to go on and do something with dressmaking, because I did the art course at school. I didn't do the...I've forgotten what the other was called, that my sister did. She learned to type and do shorthand and that sort of thing. I've forgotten what that course was called. I was still at school when war broke out in the September, and I left
- 19:30 at fifteen, in the November, and went to work supposedly sewing at a big department store with another girl, Ruth Williamson...and we went together at Stevens Store, armed with our thimbles and our...she was on the art course too. She was put in the haberdashery department and I was put in the babyware department and the only sewing I got to do was to hem
- 20:00 napkins, to make up napkins for the baby wear department until I said I wanted to sew. So I was then in the area where they made the curtains. It still wasn't dressmaking, which I wanted to do, so I later left that job and went to another one where I was doing dressmaking. I was there two years at Stevens, and that's where I met my first boyfriend. He was the parcel boy
- 20:30 and he was in the militia, and I saw his photo in the photographer's window, and he was a soldier and of course with the way I had grown up, my Dad was a hero because he was a soldier. I thought, 'Oh he's a soldier', and I used to look at his photo and when I started work, there he was, the parcel boy. I mean, I was sixteen. I had had my birthday in the February
- 21:00 and he had to get permission for me to go to the pictures with him. So he was my boyfriend. I did eventually get engaged to him but I only stayed engaged for three months. I gave him the flick. No...I had better be careful because he's still alive, and he's quite a big deal in the...he's a Legatee [part of Legacy, an organisation set up to support war widows and children], so I won't say too much about George, although he did
- 21:30 question recently why did I give him the flick. 'Who had I fallen in love with?' and I wasn't game to tell him, but I had grown up. He went away and I had grown up and he really hadn't. He was boasting when

he came back that he had stemmed the 'yellow horde' and he had saved Australia, but he was the parcel boy, and later became just working

22:00 in the store in the manchester department where they made all the curtains and the blinds and all that sort of thing. So that stood me in good stead because I've made all my own curtains through my married life. So that was two lovely years I had there, and lots of lovely friends made.

22:30 **Now what was the reason behind why you needed to leave school and go to work?**

I think the outlook of the parents in those days. You didn't educate girls. You know, I would have liked to have gone on a bit longer, and perhaps my father with his bit of Scottish blood would have thought, 'Well, you educate your daughters and they go on get married and you've wasted all your money'. So both Jean and I were only allowed to go to Intermediate,

23:00 then we had to leave and get a job. So I think that was the outlook in those days. Women's lib wasn't in, in those days. Girls were only going to be housewives and bear the children and they didn't need a lot of education. I sat for my Leaving English just because the English master said to me, 'You could do this exam. Just sit

23:30 it', so I passed it but not officially. But I passed the English exam set for Leaving English because Mr Burke wanted me to. So I've got my certificates for the others but nothing for Leaving English. No, I just liked the arts side of the course, not the commercial was the other name I was trying to think of. The commercial course.

24:00 No, you were expected to leave. I mean Podge left at a much earlier age. The wonderful nurse that she turned out to be, and all the certificates that she had, she couldn't pass her exams at school. It was not until she went nursing that she did all her courses and she became brilliant, which I never did.

24:30 I don't think many girls went on and did university in those days. I think it was almost unheard of. My young brother did. He joined the PMG [Post Master General] and he went on and did a course ...it wasn't exactly university, but he did a course with PMG. He's quite brainy.

What does PMG stand for?

It's our Telecom now. Post Master General's Department.

25:00 And he came to Melbourne. He left Tech School at fourteen, I think. Probably the same age as me and he came down to Melbourne to do a course down here. That was quite a thing, our baby brother going away from home at that age. And of course it was war time. No, it was...

25:30 education, I suppose it played a big part. See, my father would have left school probably at thirteen. And I suppose it didn't seem all that important. He was a brilliant mathematician and read. I mean he could quote the bible. He wasn't religious. No, I shouldn't say he wasn't religious. Mum was the one who seemed more pious than he. But he could quote the bible and he

26:00 was well read. And he had opinions about everything. Whereas I suppose really too, we weren't allowed to have...we weren't allowed to speak at the table and have opinions. We had to listen to our parents and I suppose education came under that category too. So you didn't really need to go any higher. And really I suppose a lot of it... I don't know if I ever understood algebra. I used to do it and get

26:30 it and get marked on it, but I don't know if I ever understood $x =$ the unknown and all that garbage.

I don't know if anyone's found a use for that yet. Now when you got your first job, you were still living at home?

Yes.

And did some of your money go into the family?

Yes. Twelve and six was the wage, and I had six and six for myself I think, and six shillings board.

27:00 I was always broke. I mean it took me a long time to work out that my father wasn't as tough as he made out. I used to keep a budget and he used to say I was spending more money on the thundering and ledgers I used to write up because I would go and buy three pairs of bathers you know, have [them] booked up at the shop. And he would say, 'Have you got anything on tick'? I'd say, 'Yes', and he would go and pay it.

27:30 He didn't agree with you booking anything up. If you couldn't pay cash you couldn't have it. But I wasn't of the same...if I saw it and I wanted it, I had it. So he would go and pay it off and I would have to write it on my budget. I think when I joined the Land Army I still owed him thirty pound. My budget never balanced. I never paid off my debt to him. I think it was wiped off when I joined the

28:00 Land Army. So six and six was all I had, and then I think later on it went up to about a pound a week which sounds terrible these days, but probably it was relevant to what the living allowance would be.

What would you do with your extra money?

Put it on my back. Clothes.

28:30 I used to buy clothes with it. I loved clothes. I think that's mainly what I did with it because I was being well fed for my six shillings a week. The six and six used to buy frivolous I suppose, and we'd go and have a milk shake, and a milk bar was really somewhere where you could go and meet your friends. You could

29:00 go and have a milk shake and banana splits were really something in those days. You could meet your friends there. And to go to the pictures. I suppose it didn't all go on my back. I suppose going to the pictures and doing things like that. We managed.

Dancing? Was that popular?

I wasn't allowed to dance, no. This is when we were young. We weren't allowed to

29:30 play cards. We weren't allowed to dance. Sunday - we weren't allowed to sing songs on Sunday. We really did have a very strict upbringing, and I think dancing was one of the things that really, when I joined the Land Army, I couldn't dance. It was really embarrassing for me and I've never...oh no, later when my husband became a Mason we had to go to a ball and we had dancing lessons.

30:00 But I would have loved to have been able to go to dances. So I was lucky I married someone who wasn't really keen on dancing. Still, I loved music and I always wanted to dance when I heard the music. And I think you miss out on something not being able to go to dances. We used to go to community singing and things like that, but not dances. Socials

30:30 where you'd play games and you'd do the barn dance and things like that. But not to go to a ball and have a ball gown which I would have loved to have done. We weren't allowed to do that, and by the time Jean wanted to go she was allowed, but Podge and I weren't allowed. But Jean learned to dance and she was OK.

Were you Presbyterian?

Yes.

31:00 Father was Presbyterian and Mum was a Methodist, so it was a wowserish mix. I think the Methodists are a bit more strict than the Presbyterians. At Koroit there weren't too many Presbyterians there. They were nearly all Irish Catholics because it's an Irish area, Koroit, and we were ...the friends across the road, there were six kids in that family and four

31:30 of us, and they were Presbyterians, and we used to go off together to Sunday School. But Warrnambool...when we moved to Warrnambool Podge and I went to ...what was it called? The PFA I think. The Presbyterian Fellowship Association, and I read it in Podge's recent diary how we hated it. They weren't friendly and we refused to go, so we didn't. We just used to...we had to go to church.

32:00 Where we lived in Warrnambool the church was opposite, too. The state school was this way and the church was that way. So we had to go to church of a Sunday morning and sometimes we'd go at night, but we weren't forced to go at night. And yet, you know, Podge, up until she had her brain haemorrhage, still went to her church every Sunday, but the rest of us have fallen by the wayside a bit.

32:30 **Now in terms of chronology, just let me get this straight. You spent two years at Stevens, and is that then the point when your mother signed you up for a job?**

No, I left there to go and work in a frock shop where I could sew, and while I was at Allen Janes, at Christmas time I got scarlet fever, and George and

33:00 I (he was my boyfriend), we were ...I was seventeen and we were going to run away from home and we were going to get married, and then I was going to join one of the other services. Well, he knew he was going to New Guinea. He was an anti-aircraft gunner and he was going away, and before he went we were going to run away, and I think someone was up there watching over me because I got scarlet fever and I was locked up in isolation for six weeks, wasn't I? I had my eighteenth birthday in isolation.

33:30 So my mother didn't want me to go to any of the services, so she signed me up...because Mr Rust had been on Gallipoli with my Dad, he was the manager of the Gas Works...shall I say it? he was a Mason. They were both Masons and they sort of stick together a bit. And when I got out of isolation Mum said, 'I've got a war time job for you', and I said 'Good good, which one'? I thought

34:00 it would be either the...well, I didn't think it would be the navy. I thought it might be the air force or the army, and she said, 'You're going to be a meter repairer, and releasing (I've forgotten the man's name... he wanted to join the air force)'. So I was taking over his job so he could join the air force. So that was my war time job. For a start it was OK, for the first year, and then when

34:30 I was nineteen, my sister and another friend joined the Land Army and I was stuck. He wouldn't release me. He said 'No, you can't go because you're in a protected industry and you're doing a better job here'. So when I was going to turn twenty he found out he was going to have to pay me a man's wage, so he said, 'You can go now if you like.

- 35:00 You can join up now if you like'. The men at the Gas Works, the tough boys...they weren't really tough boys, the stokers, you know, who work stoking to make the gas. They had black faces but they were a lovely lot of men and they were always really nice to me. I was a very green girl for my years. I should have been a bit more with it than I was, but I think Mum
- 35:30 must have kept me under a fair bit. And they were going to go out on strike, and I said, 'No, that's terrible. Fancy the housewives of Warrnambool being without because of Gwen McLennan'. They thought I had been given the sack because he told me I could go. So I say, 'No, I want to go'. So that was OK. They had a presentation and they gave me a beautiful dish and they all signed their name
- 36:00 to it. It was Mum who got me doing that, and really it wasn't a hard job except that the gas meters would come in from the district...what were they called? The fitters...they would bring them in and I learnt to solder, that's what I learned to do. Not an electric soldering iron. Like a little stove thing and you put the
- 36:30 soldering iron in, and then you had to take the gas meter to pieces and it had a diaphragm thing in it, and sometimes it would be torn and that's why they would be faulty, and you had to cut out...like chamois material and soak it in graphite. You had to make new diaphragms
- 37:00 to go in them and you learnt to use a screwdriver and do all this. Then you would put the outside in again and solder it around. Then you had to test it so that none of the gas was...but see you were breathing in...when you took it to pieces you were breathing in all this gas, and I got as skinny...I went down to about eight stone. It just made me feel sick in the stomach a lot of the time, and plus your hair smelt of it, you know.
- 37:30 You were continually...you had to wash your hair just about every night because it just smelt of gas. Mum got the idea that I had TB [tuberculosis], that I had something very bad the matter with me because I was just this little white faced skinny thing. So by the time I joined the Land Army I was only eight and a half stone. Not a very big girl until my second assignment,
- 38:00 and some of the dear old ladies in head office said, 'Come and have a look at dear little Miss McLennan, she's blossomed'. The next time I went in I think I was about ten and a half stone. I hadn't just blossomed, I had gone into full bloom. So they weren't so proud of me. Of course we all got very fat. So the Gas Works job was what you'd probably say an interesting job, not that it stood me in any stead to be able to solder,
- 38:30 because I haven't done it since. But it was something different I could do, and I was really rather feted because I think...I don't know if I was the only girl in Victoria or the only girl in Australia who was a gas meter repairer, and Mr Rust got permission from Mum and Dad to take me to Geelong one day to show off his girl, his gas meter repairer.
- 39:00 I mean, he was a friend of the family. I didn't feel very shy about going with Mr Rust. No, that was an interesting two years but not half as good as Land Army.

Tape 3

- 00:32 **Now what made you decide to go into the Land Army?**
- Well actually I would have liked to have gone in when I was nineteen, but I couldn't because I was tied up with the protected industry, and my sister Jean and her friend and my friend Bernice Kirby joined with Nance, who is now our president of the ex-members group. Their
- 01:00 numbers were consecutive and they met up over at Mont Park where they did their training. So really I wanted to go into one of the services, and to me, in my mind, Land Army was a service. Jean had given a fairly glowing account of the Land Army and what she had been doing, so it was just natural that I should join Land Army. I put my name down, probably early 1944,
- 01:30 but it took about three months before I was called to go, so I didn't get in until about May probably, May 1944 before I got called up. So that would be my reason for joining Land Army.
- What were your feelings about joining? Some people thought they were helping out for Australia or helping out for the war effort with Mother England. Some said they were protecting Australia. What were your feelings about**
- 02:00 **why it was important to join a service?**
- Well, it was patriotic of course, because you were helping out with the war effort, and the boys were over fighting and therefore we had to carry on to keep the...and really with Land Army it was food lines, to keep the food lines open. I suppose at that age we weren't as sensible as that. We were patriotic in the uniform and we thought we were doing our job

02:30 towards the war effort. And I suppose it was only later on that when we were a bit more sensible and we realised what we were doing to keep the food lines going. The girls were growing the food part of it. Yes it was patriotic. I don't know if Mother England came into it so much with us. We were Aussies doing our bit for our men.

03:00 We really thought we were doing a good job.

Absolutely. So it took about three months for you to get the opportunity to go to training?

Yes. And I thought they were never going to call me. I have spoken to some of the other girls and they said yes, it did take a while before they put their name down. It would have been about three months, maybe only two, but it seemed a long time before I was actually called to go, because

03:30 I knew I wasn't going to be stopping at the Gas Works. I stopped there until I actually got my date to go, and didn't stir anything up by staying there. But I knew I couldn't stay there once I had my twentieth birthday, which I had had in the February. But I probably joined up before the February, and didn't get my call up. And of course we weren't like the other services,

04:00 we had to have our medical...I had my medical in Warrnambool, and I had to have another one in Melbourne. But I passed fit enough to...it wasn't a strict medical I don't think, like the other services probably would have been. I don't know what the hold up was but I was delighted to know that my sister, who by that time was a regular at the State's Research Farm, Werribee. The training at

04:30 Mont Park had been closed by that time. The State's Research Farm was the only training depot, and Jean met the train at Werribee so I went to the big smoke. Coming to Melbourne, the big city was a big thing for me because Warrnambool is virtually only a big country town rather than a big city. But she met me and we came and had a day

05:00 in the city, yes.

Was that your first trip to Melbourne?

Oh no. When we were younger, when we got our certificates, my father would shout us a trip to Melbourne. It was never very exciting because he would have to go to headquarters for the Agriculture Department, and I think we would sit in Treasury Gardens or somewhere while he did that. But it was a trip to Melbourne, and I think

05:30 later on you got a watch. For the highest certificate you got a watch. So Jean and I both got a watch. No, I had been to Melbourne, but it was very...to find your way around Melbourne was really something for me, for a country girl like I was. No, it was good. It was very exciting. It was like in a movie.

06:00 To do something altogether different to what I had ever done before. The only thing is, the old boyfriend who I had broken off the engagement to was hanging his head over the barrier when I got to Spencer Street, and I said, 'Oh no, look who's here. He's going to spoil my fun'. And I wasn't a bit sorry for him when I should have been, because he had malaria. But he was hanging around and I didn't want him because that part of my life was over. I wasn't going to marry him and

06:30 I was starting off a new life as far as I was concerned. But it was...you know, you go into head office and they give you a funny little pair of orange boots and an overall and that's all you got for a start. A shirt and overalls and boots. You really didn't get your uniform, which in early days was a dress and a hat,

07:00 probably gloves and a coat. But you didn't get your dress uniform, like your skirt and tunic. That came later. I don't think any of them had those in early days. Just the dress. You had to prove that you were going to be capable of being a Land Army girl before you got your uniform. So that came later.

A funny little rule.

Yes, it was a funny rule. Some of the

07:30 girls that had been on farms and who were capable, they might have got them straight away, but someone like me who didn't have the faintest clue what it was all about, just that Jean had done it and had enjoyed it. So if it was good enough for Jean it was good enough for me. That was the reason.

What was training like?

08:00 Training was...there again, I didn't find it particularly hard. We learned how to harness horses and we learned how to drive this poor old horse at Werribee called Dancer who...all the Land Army girls practiced on Dancer. I can remember Helena Wheeler and I driving Dancer back from Werribee. We had to drive Dancer with a

08:30 cart into Werribee to get the mail. That was one of our duties for the trainees. Thinking we were great you know, using the reins. The poor old horse. We'd forgotten to put the bit in his mouth and we still had the chain on the wheel. But he was still going home. He knew where to go. But the cow that we learned to milk on was a papier mache cow...

09:00 I've got a photo of it somewhere I think. You poured a bucket of water in the top and underneath the teats...you could freewheel. If you took your hands away the water would still run out, so it really didn't

teach you how to milk a cow. So I never was very good on the dairy duty. You had to do duty at the dairy, but it wasn't hand milking, it was putting

- 09:30 the teats on the cows, the milking machine. Feeding the poddy calves, I liked that, and then we used to go in the...I think it was called the chaff cutter where we'd put the sheaves through and it would come out. We'd cut the bands and it would come out and it would be cut into chaff. That was all good, very dusty and dirty. I learned to plough, although
- 10:00 I think I might have done that wrong. You're supposed to not finish up in the middle of the field but I went round and round and finished up in the middle of it and that wasn't right because you have to walk over where you've ploughed then, haven't you? I don't think I was really very good at any of the stuff I had to learn. There was a big field of cabbages. We had to hoe the cabbages. I don't know if was me, but one of the trainees came up with the brilliant idea that if we pulled
- 10:30 the cabbage up and got the weeds out with the hoe and then put the cabbage back in, that was easier than to carefully hoe around it. But all those cabbages died, didn't they, the ones we pulled up and replanted. You know, we were probably more harm than good to some of the things we did. But it was all in the way of training and
- 11:00 consequently, when I went in to go to my first assignment, the man in the dairy used to say to me, 'You should be ashamed of yourself; your sister was much better than you at the dairy', and I knew she was. Jean didn't care, she was quite good. But I didn't like the cows. I didn't like it in case they did a great big heap near where I was standing. I didn't want to clean it up, and I didn't think they smelt very nice.
- 11:30 I don't know what I thought I was going to...if I had been sent to a dairy farm, I suppose I would have learnt, but I didn't particularly want to go and I suppose it's a wonder I had cheek enough to say, but when I went in to be sent on my first assignment, they said, 'There's a dairy farm in Warragul wanting a girl, and one in a place called Dareton wanting a girl'. And I said, 'What's Dareton'? and
- 12:00 they said, 'It's pruning', and Jean had been at Merbein pruning, Jean and Kirb, Bernice Kirby. We always called her Kirb. They had been in Merbein pruning and I said, 'Would I have the pruning one'? I was very cheeky to ask and that was how I escaped being sent to a dairy farm. I don't think I would have liked it very much, but if I had had to do it I would have.

12:30 **What was your accommodation like during training?**

Accommodation was good. I think we had a room to ourselves at Werribee. A room was just one bed in it at Werribee, in a great big house where the regulars had their rooms. The regulars sort of looked down their noses a bit at we trainees, but they had a section in the same building,

- 13:00 but separate to where the trainees were. And we all ate together in a big mess hut, and the food was very good. Very ordinary, very plain but good. I mean, girls who had probably been a bit picky with their eating habits then were so hungry after being outside that you were pleased to be in the queue to take your plate back and ask for more if you felt like it.

- 13:30 There were field officers there of course, in charge of the girls, and it was very good.

I wondered about the...I've lost the train of thought. I had two separate questions I was going to ask you. I wondered about how those regulars operated? Were they organisational people, women

14:00 **within the Land Army?**

No, they were just girls who were able...I think the reason my sister became a regular was that at Merbein she got appendicitis which was something that the Land Army...I really feel they fell short of doing. But they sent her home on the train, like all night on the train from Mildura to Melbourne and then another

- 14:30 train to Warrnambool, and she was operated on for appendicitis. Well of course, after having her appendix out she wasn't allowed to do any heavy lifting for some time, so she had to go on light duties. Well, she was sent to Werribee, and then she stayed there and I think she was put in the poultry, which was fairly light duties. Most of the girls had their particular thing that they were good at. She was good in the dairy

- 15:00 as well. But she wasn't allowed to go out to work for a farmer. But I don't think that was their criteria for the girls to be there. I think it was just girls who worked in a particular field. There were field officers there. They weren't officers, the girls who were there. They were just girls who stayed there all the time and worked on the farm. I don't know why they felt superior to we trainees. Perhaps they had a bit more expertise than what we did.

That's what I was going to ask.

15:30 **Did they consider themselves special?**

Yes. They had trained and they could do the things. I mean they could plough and they did all sorts of things like ploughing, and they knew how to harness the horses, which we didn't. We were just very green and learning to do it all. Whereas they could do it all and that's probably why they felt a bit

superior to us.

What was the role of the field officers?

- 16:00 Well, some of them were virtually just the cooks, you know. They were catering for them. Miss Stringer was the head lady at Werribee and I don't think she did any cooking, but she did the paper work and just the affiliation with head office in Melbourne I suppose.
- 16:30 It wasn't like in the army where they stood over you. We didn't drill or anything like that. Although some of the girls said they learned to march, but I never did. No, they were just our supervisors I suppose you would say, and they had different categories. There would be Field Officer One, Field Officer Two, and I never went into what that really meant.
- 17:00 I don't know whether One was higher than Two or Two was higher than One. But they were nice homely pleasant ladies, the field officers. I found them so.

You got on with them?

Yes. Yes. Miss Stringer, when I went to Werribee...of course we missed the train. After I had been given my little boots and overalls, Jean was showing me that she knew

- 17:30 the ropes, she said, 'We'll go and have a meal before we catch the train to Werribee'. She took me to a hotel there (I don't know if it's still there, near Spencer Street), and she ordered a martini, and I had never had a drink in my life and she ordered a martini for me, and I can remember thinking, 'How dreadful!' And I looked around and there was a wall of mirrors and I could see myself pulling this awful face because
- 18:00 I didn't like it very much. I think I drank my martini and I was as tiddly as could be. I probably had two martinis. But we missed the train to Werribee, didn't we. So Jean was...she was a bit of a flirt. And Jean had a boyfriend who was a taxi driver. So she rang the boyfriend and he came and got us.
- 18:30 When we got there Miss Stringer wondered why we were late, that we had missed the train. And then she said - she thought I was younger than Jean - and she said, 'Jean's sister is a lovely sparkly-eyed little thing', and I thought she didn't know that the young sparkly-eyed little thing was a bit tiddly after a martini. That was my experience with Miss Stringer. But she
- 19:00 was quite good and she was quite a pleasant lady. She was like a mother to all these...she was Miss Stringer, but she was like a mother to all these young girls, and probably some of us were a real worry to her. I don't think I was that much of a worry then. I was pretty green.

By being a worry, do you mean to get into trouble?

Yes.

- 19:30 Jean was quite...she said later that there was a dance and the air force boys came to the dance in the common room at the place, and I was quite taken aback. There's Jean standing at the gate and I think she kissed every airman good night, and I said, 'What would your mother think of you?' And she said 'Gwen's looking down her nose at me. Gwen's going to be a real pussy. She's not going to do well in the Land Army. She's going to be too pussy',
- 20:00 and I was quite horrified that Jean could kiss all these airmen. But then that was Jean. She was very attractive and she was having quite a good time. I think she said they did sneak out at night and Miss Stringer had to go and find where they had gone and so forth. So they probably were a bit naughty. So it was a responsibility, being a field officer.
- 20:30 It would have been with all those young girls.

The question I wanted to come back to was about the pay. How did it compare?

Well it didn't as far as I was concerned. It didn't compare to what I was getting at the Gas Works. When you're in training...and I'm a bit...I thought it was only a pound a week, but I read some of our records, Mary's Low's records,

- 21:00 and she says it was two pounds a week. But whatever it was...maybe it was less in training and maybe when you got out on your assignment ... I know it wasn't a lot of money, because I know when I went on my first assignment I had no money. I had spent all my money getting to the train. I didn't have any money for the first three weeks that I was on my first assignment.
- 21:30 I had spent it getting a taxi because I didn't know how to get to the station. That was another story.

So financially it was a bit of a sacrifice?

Yes, yes. I'm sure...I don't think any of the girls would have been getting more money than what they had been getting in civilian life. I keep 'life as a civilian' because we still think of ourselves as being a service.

- 22:00 And that's why in later years, to find out that we weren't a service ... but we thought we were one of the

services. Yes, I don't think any of the girls would have had better pay in Land Army life than they did in civilian life.

Tell me about getting to your first assignment.

Well that was quite an experience.

- 22:30 I was sent up on a Friday afternoon, and saying goodbye to your other trainee mates was a bit weepy. In head office I did my bit about not wanting to go on a dairy farm and they said, 'Would you catch the train to Mildura on Sunday night'? I don't know...I couldn't have had too much money left. I probably had about a pound I think,
- 23:00 and I thought, 'Now where am I going to stay Friday night and Saturday night'? And I think this was another failing, that they didn't check that you had somewhere to stay. There was another young...well she'd been in the Land Army a while, Doreen Cook or Doreen Diamond as she was then. She was being sent to Warragul which is quite funny, I've found out since. She went to Warragul to a dairy farm
- 23:30 and she was with Nance, who is now our president of our group and Doreen said to me, 'Have you got anywhere to stay'? and I said 'No'. I said, 'Where is this "People's Palace"'? I'd heard of it, that the Salvation Army had someplace where you could get something cheap. 'Oh' she said, 'You don't want to go there'. She said, 'Come with me. I'm stopping with my sister'. So she took me home to her sister's place in South Melbourne, I think it was.
- 24:00 I mean, I think, 'What good people'. Her sister put me up and in latter years when I met up with Doreen again I said, 'I'd love to meet your sister again and say "thank you" for what she did', and she had only just passed away so it was rather sad. But she put me up for the Friday night and the Saturday night and I can remember on Saturday, Doreen had gone, and I can remember on the Saturday, her sister
- 24:30 said we could go to the South Melbourne...I think it was a Gas Works and we picked up coke clinkers; what was left after they burnt the coal, and she could get it for next to nothing. And I joined in. I was a vision in blue. Blue hat, blue coat, blue gloves and we went to this dirty place picking up these things and I was wondering about my clothes.
- 25:00 So anyway, that was OK. We picked them up. On Sunday night she said, 'Your train goes at (such and such a time). You just go to the corner and you'll catch a tram which will get you to Spencer Street'. I look at the street directory now and I think, 'Why was I so dopey'? but I didn't know how to catch a tram, and I didn't know which direction I had to go, and I didn't let on how green I was, so finally a tram would go that way and I would think, 'Well, I should be over that side'.
- 25:30 Then one would come this way and eventually I saw a taxi and by this time I had three shillings left and I hailed a taxi and I said, could you get me to Spencer Street for three shillings. And he said, 'Yes, hop in'. So I got to Spencer Street alright. I got in the train with some soldiers and sailors, no... soldiers and airmen,
- 26:00 and I was getting an awful cold and I remember one of the soldiers gave me his army blanket and let me have the full seat to lay down on. And they got out early. I think they got out at Ballarat or somewhere, and I finished up having the carriage with just one soldier. He was telling me all the stories about how I was going to this place where the crows flew backwards because it was so dusty and they flew backwards because the dust got in their eyes,
- 26:30 and I was saying, 'Truly'? I was so green. I believed half of it. He talked about the kangaroos. He said, 'Watch out for the kangaroos. They'll bail you up. Their claws are sharp', and he was telling me these horror stories and I thought, 'What on earth am I coming to'? So I arrived at Mildura station in the early hours of a frosty morning and Mr Duncan was there to meet me, because Mr Duncan got the biggest shock of his life when he saw his Land Army girl,
- 27:00 a little lost soul dressed in pale blue who was going to be pruning vines for him, hopefully.

What was it like adjusting to such a different way of living on the farm and on the land?

Well, that part of it was quite hard because you had to go out...you had to be up very early in the morning. And we weren't equipped. I mean we should have had working gloves, and

- 27:30 the frost would be just thick on the vines. Mr Duncan and his son went ahead and the vines had already been picked in the earlier part of the year, and they had to be pruned. It was my job to get the canes and twist them back around the wire. But you had to get them with your bare hands and twist each one separately and twine them around the wire, and that's where the grapes would grow for the next crop. I can remember thinking,
- 28:00 'Oh dear, I'm going to cry'. You had no feeling in your hands and I can remember him saying, 'It will soon be'...they were ahead of me working, and him singing out 'It will soon be smoko'. His wife would bring down a billy with some tea and something nice to eat for morning tea. And he lit a fire and that was the worse thing out, when your hands got warm after being so cold.
- 28:30 And I wasn't going to cry in front of the boss, but you felt like it. Your hands were so cold. I knew better

the next day. I took my blue gloves out and I had them to prune in until I wore holes in them. But you really needed some working gloves to be doing that because it was cold. I found it an interesting job.

29:00 You know you had to carry the secateurs. You had to trim the vine and I learnt to be very clever, that if you trimmed the end of it with a little bit left on, then you could wrap that one around and hook it in to the wire, then you could plait the other and put the other one around and hook into it. I learned to be pretty good. That's rolling on, or twisting down. There were two names for it. I liked that and I learned to be pretty good at that. I enjoyed that.

29:30 **How was your accommodation at the farm?**

I was in a little room. It was a home with a verandah around it and the side. And I was in a little room on the front verandah which didn't have...I don't think the house had electricity. No, it wouldn't have had. After coming from home with an indoor toilet - and the toilet was right down the back - I wouldn't go to the toilet at night.

30:00 To go to bed I had to take a lantern with a glass, and you lifted the glass up and you sort of twisted a little thing and you could turn it up or down and blow it out. But if I wanted the light on there was no way I could get up and light the light again at night. That was outside in a room, and

30:30 because I was nervous of getting undressed out there, I would switch the light out and then I'd get undressed in the dark and get into bed, and it would be freezing cold; it was terribly cold. And it was lonely to be on your own, to be sent to an assignment on your own. It was later that I found out that down that same road where I was, there were two Land Army girls and

31:00 one of them I had been at training with. She was in the same road, but we were so remote you didn't think to ask, 'Is there any more Land Army girls around'. Bonny Twyford was just down the road, and she was a friend...we joined up together. We weren't friends when we joined up. I was 951 and she was 950, and when we were getting our overalls and so forth, this lovely little girl

31:30 was next to me. And we stayed friends for a long time after that. So she was [not?] far away. But no, the accommodation was...it was a bit...I mean you could only have a bath on Friday night. You couldn't have a shower. There was only a bath, and Friday night was bath night which was a little bit primitive but you got used to it. You had a wash. I hope we didn't smell, but you washed, and

32:00 I can remember one Friday night going in and it was my turn to use the bath, and I thought the bathroom was empty and I went in and Mr Duncan was in the bath, and I said, 'I didn't see anything Mr Duncan, all I saw were your big eyes'. He said, 'Talk about big eyes, it couldn't have been anything bigger than your eyes when you opened the door and saw Mr Duncan sitting up in the bath'. So that was it. Saturday they would go into Mildura to shop and ...

32:30 we didn't work Saturday and Sunday on that particular job.

Did you go into Mildura as well?

Yes, but then I didn't have any money, you see. The boy next door...he wasn't next door, he was up the road a bit, who was my husband's brother. I didn't know then he was going to be my brother-in-law, he came down to visit and he lent me a pound, which was quite a bit of money. And if it hadn't been for

33:00 that pound I wouldn't have had any money. We used to go to the matinee in Mildura and then we'd come home. We never stayed out at night. We'd do some shopping and then we'd go to the matinee in the afternoon. Sometimes to a football game and then Sunday, I think we just used to...I can't remember. I don't think we did anything interesting.

33:30 There was a social club up there I used to go to, but not being able to dance again, I was a bit embarrassed about not being able to dance. But I used to try, I used to do the barn dance, so that was good. I would have only been there for probably three weeks because I was late getting there. The pruning was almost finished by the time I got there the first year.

34:00 **So you just stayed there less than a month?**

Yes, less than a month before my next assignment.

Just before we go to that assignment, how did the men in the family treat you?

In this particular family, they were good. Mr Duncan was a real leg puller, and as I say I was so naive. You could say anything to me and I realised then that he was only having a go,

34:30 and I'd say, 'Oh phooey'. So he ended up calling me 'Phooey' and I christened him 'Phooey' and that's what we used to call one another. But his son was a bit keen on me and I didn't like him. I didn't want anything to do with him. His son was a bit of a ...he was a real country boy. He'd say something and I would say, 'Beg your pardon'? and I suppose I was too

35:00 polite, and he's say, 'You heard, you ain't got cloth ears'. And I thought, 'How could I be interested in him'. He wasn't very nice. But the family...Mr Duncan and Mrs Duncan treated me very well. I've thought since, 'Really, I don't know why he applied for a Land Army girl because he had a daughter the

same age as myself'. She worked in a grocery store,

- 35:30 and another daughter a little bit younger, who worked in the Rural Bank. Then there was another one younger who was at school. He should have had one of his daughters to help him. He needn't have applied for a Land Army girl. I can't understand why...I think it was under the Manpower Directorate, why they didn't say, 'You don't really need a Land Army girl. You've got a daughter who could do it'.
- 36:00 Actually the daughters – the two older ones, the younger one was alright – they looked down their noses at me a bit. I was just the Land Army girl and I can remember thinking, 'What have you got to look down your nose at? I've come from a good home'. And I've...probably I had a bit of my mother's snobbery in me. I couldn't help thinking, 'I'm as good as you are. I'm better than you are. I've come from better than what you've got'. But I've thought since that really
- 36:30 much and all, it was lovely...especially Mr Duncan. He was a lovely man, and he had a great sense of humour and he was an old soldier too. I could sense that he was a little bit like my Dad – some of his sense of humour. He was lovely.

So the son was just a bit rude to you was he?

Well one of the things he said, but I can't say it on air.

- 37:00 I won't say what he said, but I was sitting there one night with my overalls on warming myself, and he said, 'Look at Gwen', meaning that I wouldn't sit like that if I was a boy, you know, that I didn't have the vital bits to show. And I was absolutely disgusted and I thought, 'Well, perhaps I wasn't sitting too ladylike which I would be with overalls'. I had never worn trousers until I joined the Land Army. He was a bit
- 37:30 crude, some of the things that he said. But not his dad. His dad used to pull him into line. He was a lovely man.

We're just nearing the end of this tape, but I wanted to ask was there any preparation in your training for the Land Army with how to deal with comments?

No, none whatsoever. I really think for some of the girls who really had very bad experiences, and I didn't, that there should have been.

- 38:00 There should have been some warning about what you were likely to...I mean the people were supposed to have been checked out first, but I doubt they were, so it was a risk, wasn't it, for young women to have to go and take their chances. No it was...and some of them did have bad experiences, but I didn't luckily.
- 38:30 Even later there wasn't anything very dramatic that happened to me. I was lucky. I always did say that someone up there was watching over me.

Tape 4

00:37 Well, how did you find out about your second assignment?

After Dareton was finished I came down to Melbourne to head office and they said – actually with me I was lucky. I had a choice. They said, 'Flax at Lake Bolac', and I said, 'Oh yes please', knowing Lake Bolac wasn't very far

- 01:00 from Warrnambool. So I chose flax at Lake Bolac. I think between assignments you get a little bit of home leave, so I got a trip home and then I think I might have been given my uniform, so I could go home with my uniform, so that was quite good. And then up to lake Bolac. You get your notice and
- 01:30 it said, 'You will be met by Mr Green's bus service'. Mr Green's bus service was a little old car with a soft hood, much like the old Citroen. I got off the train at Westmere which was really...to go on your own again was a bit scary. Then he drives you from Westmere to Lake Bolac, and
- 02:00 for a start it was a bit awful because they were real teasers, some of the girls who had been there. They'd say, 'Look at her, she's got a pink ribbon in her hair tonight. Look at her! Lock up your husbands'. And they really treated me like...I'm friends with them now, they're lovely. But really I was a greenie, and I was new, and I probably looked fit to be taken down a peg or two. I'd go to sit at a table
- 02:30 and they'd say, 'Who told you you could sit there'? And I'd get up and I'd stand by the door...you're put through that. And my husband said they did that in the army too. They put you through the paces to see if you can take it. That's how it was for probably two or three nights when I went to have a meal, and then another girl arrived on her own,
- 03:00 and lucky for me she was another Warrnambool girl. I didn't know her, so there were we. I was McLennan and she was McGuinness. So seeing there was two of us then we were allowed to have a hut,

so we went in to a hut together. There were two girls to a hut, and the field officers were in a little house in the centre and then the showers and mess huts and the kitchens were separate buildings again. I shared a

- 03:30 hut with Betty McGuinness, and that was wonderful because she was a bit of a quiet type like myself. But some of the girls now, and I'm still friendly with them, that were there say, 'You were such a pussy'. They really had to take me down a peg or two. Betty and I shared the hut for two or three months together and she went from
- 04:00 working out in the paddock into working in the mill part, and she needed to sleep in the day time and work at night. She was a lot of the time on night shift, and we always stayed good friends. But I had another little friend who was my friend, Pill. Marvis Carter, who I christened Pill, and she was with a girl who was also on night shift so we swapped and we moved in together. So
- 04:30 after I met Pill – who was a real city girl – she taught me everything I know, Pill did. We used to shower together and Pill used to say, 'They'll think we're tootsies', and I said, 'What's a tootsie'? I didn't know anything about lesbians. I didn't have a clue, and I said, 'What's a tootsie'? Pill taught me everything and all about that. About homosexuality
- 05:00 and what it was and so forth. See, your mother didn't talk about such things to you, and I said, 'What's wrong with us showering together'? I mean it was a lot quicker for both of us to be in together, and it really...I think probably you forget all your false pride and come down to earth. She definitely wasn't a lady-like person, Pill, but
- 05:30 she's the best friend I've ever had in my life, even counting some of my school friends from way back. We stayed friends until her death in 1989. And I mustn't start to cry but I always do when I think of Pill. No, she taught me that there's...they talk about rough diamonds, and she was a diamond. She really was. She was a wonderful friend and I don't think we ever
- 06:00 kept any secrets from one another, and we stayed like that right up until 1989 when she died. But we had lots and lots of fun and we were always together. So that was great.

What else did she say about tootsies?

You know, she used to tell me I was too green to burn.

- 06:30 Every sentence she said was, 'Oh gawd. You're too green to burn girl, you're too green to burn'. She said, 'Don't you know'? and she explained what it was. I said, 'I can't imagine such a thing'. She said, 'Well, that's what they think we are because we're together all the time', and everywhere we went we had our linked arms and we didn't...we shared a hut together but we never
- 07:00 were in bed together or anything. And she used to point out different ones. She would say, 'I think they are', and I used to look at them and think, 'Well maybe they are, I don't know'. But Pill had her ideas about which ones were and which ones weren't. She was a city girl and she didn't have the...I met her parents afterwards when I came down to Melbourne to live. Her mother
- 07:30 was a bit of a trick. She used to say the same about me, about how green I was. Pill's father was a very serious man, but after meeting Pill's parents I could see why she was such a fun person...especially her mother. She was only a couple of years older than me but I
- 08:00 think probably, being city born and bred, and she used to say to me when she met my...my mother used to say to me, 'Gwen, she's a lovely little woman but she's a bit rough'. And I used to say to Mum, 'Well, she's true blue'. It didn't matter. And she was true blue. And she used to say to me, 'Your mother's got a smell under her nose. Who does she thinks she is?
- 08:30 Yes, toffy-nosed'. But Pill's mother wasn't a bit like that. She used to call me spider legs. She was a real fun person. She probably talked to me more about things that mothers and daughters talk about than my own mother ever did. When I was getting married she gave me the lecture,
- 09:00 you know. She was like another mother to me.

The birds and the bees?

Yes. She told me about the birds and the bees and married life and all that. She was lovely. I was just going to say; she came to our wedding and I think my Mum was a bit jealous of the association I had with Amy.

- 09:30 I suppose she could tell that Amy had taken over her role, but it wasn't in Mum's nature to be able to talk about anything like that. It was Pill's mother. But it's not Land Army, is it, that I'm talking.

It's really interesting in terms of the differences between women who were thrown together, so to speak. It's very interesting. You met all kinds of people.

- 10:00 Yes, and I think what it taught me was that Mum's values were all wrong. Mum who used to...when you had a friend she would say, 'What does their father do'? And I would say, 'What does it matter'? My best friends are probably the ones who have come from probably lowly homes. That sounds a bit snobby but

I don't mean it to sound like that. I came out of it with a different

- 10:30 set of values altogether, which I'm so grateful for. As I say, I'll miss Pill to the day I die. She was like a part of me and I can thank the Land Army for that. I made other good friends too, but she was the real special one.

How did you get her nickname?

Carter's little liver pills was a pill

- 11:00 that used to be around. She was only four foot ten and I'm five foot six, so she only came up to my shoulder. She was always popping pills. She was always saying...I thought she had ulcers, but they were ulcers under her...she had false teeth. She used to have ulcers under her false teeth and she used to swear about her 'B' ulcers giving her hell and so forth. And I'd be sympathetic until I found out they were false teeth and

- 11:30 she had ulcers. Well I suppose that would be painful. She used to be a bit of a pill popper, so it suited her for a name. Everybody called her Pill then, after I christened her Pill. She christened me Butch then, after I had christened her Pill. So she used to call me Butch.

And why did she call you that?

I don't know. I suppose I used to say it to her. We had a Irishman;

- 12:00 he was the foreman when we were spreading the flax. Pill and I used to...Arthur Raski used to do some thing on the radio... 'The Proposal'. And Pill and I used to do it. It was silly. It was a comedy thing. Pill and I used to do it. This Mr Monahan, I think his name was - it was a good Irish name - and he used to come up and

- 12:30 he'd say, 'Leave the little thing alone. Leave her alone'. And he used to say to me, 'You've not improved, if anything you're worse'. I used to tease him too, because I had got to be quite cheeky by this time. Pill brought me out of my shell I must tell you. Mr Monahan used to say, 'Leave the poor wee thing alone'. He said I was pushing her around a bit. She was little but you couldn't push her around.

- 13:00 She wasn't the type to be pushed around. He used to growl at us for laughing and carrying on when we should have been spreading the flax out instead of doing 'The Proposal'. We used to like to act it out.

So you enjoyed this placement more because there were more women around?

Oh yes, because we had a common room. At night time we could go into the common room and

- 13:30 there was an old piano, or we would just sit around and talk. We used to play different games. No, it was lovely and there were forty to sixty girls there. There were a lot of girls. Even the ones who teased me unmercifully for a start, I got to be able to get on with them too, once they could see I wasn't ...well I was green but I was able to

- 14:00 work. And the work there was fairly hard for a while, because you've got to bend over to spread all that flax out. It was that part of it, but once your muscles got used to it you managed it alright. Plus it was a good place to work because for weekend leave sometimes you could go to Ararat or Ballarat which we used to do.

- 14:30 Then perhaps we got an extra day, a Monday holiday which sometimes we did, and we would even come to Melbourne, and I'd come down to stay with Pill's people in Melbourne. It was a bit of an eye-opener for me and very good, rather than just going home to Warrnambool for weekends when you had days off...which was also good.

What else did you learn about in terms of people -

- 15:00 **the way they interacted, the way they had lived and things like that?**

The local people...we got very friendly with some people who lived...not the butcher shop, but the bakery in Lake Bolac, and they used to have Pill and I go to their place for tea on a Sunday night. They were lovely people. The Sprowls I think their names were.

- 15:30 A lot of them thought the Land Army girls weren't up to much. I suppose some of them may have played up, but these people were lovely. I suppose they could see that Pill and I were alright. I think the locals accepted us alright. We didn't have a lot

- 16:00 to do with them. I think our main people we had to do with were people just attached to the mill. They were civilians - people who worked in the mill. They weren't all Land Army. There were local people, men who worked around the mill doing different jobs in the factory part. And the bosses were local people.

- 16:30 We got on alright with them.

What were some of the other things you did for recreation with the other girls?

Well, a lot of the girls...I didn't, but earlier days they had a basketball team and they'd play with other

teams. They did quite good. There was one of the girls – she would have been great for you to interview.

- 17:00 She said they had a concert when she was there and they all did their little act in Lake Bolac. There was a hall in Lake Bolac. The picture show used to come to Lake Bolac every month, I think it was. It wasn't too often, and you'd be lucky...because everyone and his dog would be at the pictures. I can remember sitting on this chap's knee, and by this time I had got to be quite a tubby Gwen McLennan
- 17:30 with all the lovely food at Lake Bolac, and McGuinness and I were always in the queue for second helpings. I can remember sitting on this poor chap's knee right through. I don't think he would have seen any of the picture because I think I would have blotted it out for him. I didn't go to church, much to my mother's disgust. Betty McGuinness was a good Catholic girl so she used to go in to church.
- 18:00 A few of them went to church but I didn't. I had got away from the home rules, hadn't I? and I didn't go to church. A lot of them would go on weekend leave to Ballarat and sometimes we'd...I can remember one time we had a big truck, and we all went to Ararat
- 18:30 and sat in the back of that and sang the old songs all the way. Yes, we used to have some lovely times there, and it didn't take much to amuse us. An air force boy I met in Werribee, he's the one who put the bit in the horse's mouth and I wrote to him after that. He got stationed at Ballarat and he used to sometimes come up to Lake Bolac to see
- 19:00 me on the weekend. The only thing is, we used to go parking as they called it, in the flax stacks, and he used to smoke. I used to think that was terrible, I could have set alight to the – you know, with this boyfriend lighting up a cigarette in the flax stacks. But I never let on about that, but now it will be out, won't it? I didn't cause the fires.
- 19:30 The flax mill did burn down at one stage. I used to meet him in...I used to take Pill with me. I used to say to Allan, 'You'll have to line up a boyfriend for Pill because I wouldn't leave her'...I wouldn't just go and leave her in the lurch. So Allan used to bring one of his mates along for Pill and we used to stop in the YWCA in Ballarat, and that was

- 20:00 something nice to do for a weekend, good to do.

You mentioned going parking, what does that mean?

Cuddling. Snoogling up. I'm just wondering if Allan's still alive. He was a lovely boy. He was younger than I was and keener on me than I was on him. I mean I used to tell he was like a brother, and really I did, I loved him like a

- 20:30 younger brother. He was twelve months younger than me, and nowadays that doesn't seem to matter but it did, you know. You wouldn't be serious with someone who was younger than you. But he was a really decent boy. A really nice boy. And he was a farmer, so probably if I had stayed serious with Allan I would finished up a dairy farmer's wife. That wouldn't have been good.

- 21:00 **So how long did you go out with him? Throughout that period at Lake Bolac?**

Yes, I was still writing to him and he was quite serious until I met my husband, and then I wrote him a Dear John letter and told him that was it, no more letters. I had met the man of my dreams, so that was it. So I went with him for quite a long time. Letter writing as it

- 21:30 was in those days. He got posted away and I've never heard...I hope he's still alive but he deserves to be because he was a very nice fellow.

What was the pay like by this point of time?

Much better. Yes, Lake Bolac – at one stage some of the girls were going to go on strike

- 22:00 so they could get the same wage as the civilian people. I keep saying civilian. We were civilian people too...non-Land Army people were getting more money than what we were, so a few of them were going to go on strike. So there were six of us. Pill and myself and four other girls and I can't remember who they were, we said, 'We're not going on strike. How would it
- 22:30 be if the boys in New Guinea, if they went on strike to get more money to fight the war'? And they called us the Dirty Herd for a while. We were really...they looked down their noses. We said we weren't going to join a union and go on strike. We didn't think it was right. Anyhow they didn't. They didn't go on strike but I think we did eventually get the same pay as what they got, and we didn't have to join a union.
- 23:00 To us it was all wrong to join a union. We weren't in it to join a union. We were there for patriotic reasons, not for making money. Yes I forgot about us being the Dirty Herd. I'm probably the only one of the Dirty Herd left, the others have all gone to God now, the other five. There were only six of us. We said, 'No', we refused.

Was Pill one of those?

Oh yes.

23:30 She was probably the ringleader. She might have been little but she had a lot of punch. She probably was the one who said, 'What about the boys in New Guinea; they can't go on strike for better pay'? And that was true really.

What, if any, interactions were you having with the Land Army head office during this time?

There used to be -

24:00 now what would you call them - they would come around like Comfort Funds, and they'd come and visit. You could buy your smokes and you could buy your cigarettes and your chocolates from them. But actually I suppose because we had field officers there doing the...we didn't see...I was there for eleven months, and we didn't see much of the

24:30 field officers...the main ones like Miss McQuen and Mrs Borthwick and the ones who were in head office, we didn't see much of them. We had Mrs Campbell, she was called a field officer but she was the one who was always in the kitchen, and she was a lovely lady. If there were any leftovers...I mean, we were constantly hungry, especially Betty McGuinness and I, we got to be big girls.

25:00 They used to call us the two Macs. They'd say when the wind was blowing and the flax was blowing away, they have to put tarpaulins over the stacks and they'd say they wanted the two big Macs. They would tie them and they'd keep the tarpaulins down on the stacks. But the other field officers were a bit aloof. As Pill used to say,

25:30 'Keep clear of Miss Dean because she thinks we're a couple of tootsies because we're always together'. And we were, you know. So we didn't have much to do with the head office there. I guess we didn't need to. I suppose the bosses were the men who ran the actual mill and they'd be the main bosses.

26:00 I was wondering if you'd take me through an average day at that placement?

Well, you would probably have to get up about six o'clock and you go to the mess hut and have your breakfast. Get on the big... it wasn't horse drawn, it was a trailer thing, and we'd all sit on that and we'd be taken out around the lake in the early morning,

26:30 and the mist would be coming in. It would be quite cold travelling around the edge of the lake. That's where the paddocks were. The flax used to be in great big sheaves and you'd have to cut the string off and take a bundle of that. I think I showed you the photo. Then we'd work in rows. We'd spread in rows and we'd stop for morning tea.

27:00 I think we stopped for morning tea, and then they'd bring out...we had a mobile - like a hut thing - that they used to move around. It was on sort of a sled and they could move it to different parts of the...and we could go in there and have our lunch, but most of us would sit on the ground. They would bring out sandwiches and tea for lunch. Then

27:30 we'd go back and spread flax again until afternoon tea time. Then we'd work until fairly late I imagine, and the same procedure. I can remember one very hot day. You worked with bib and brace overalls, and then later on we were given combination overalls which were terrible, because if you wanted to go to the toilet,

28:00 and sometimes you'd just go and find a bush and often you'd just wet on the sleeve of your thing, and then you'd have to put your overall on again. But mainly it was bib and brace overall and shirt. But this very hot day we decided we'd take our...and go in and have a swim in the lake which was just across the roadway. I can remember I was swimming along and the next minute I saw my knickers floating. I had swum right out of my knickers.

28:30 So I retrieved my knickers and we'd go back to work with our wet underclothes on. One of the girls got caught. There's a photo of her. She took her bra off and she's in the water and she had to stay under... oh the bus, the bus saw her, that's right. We said 'Come out', and she said 'I can't come out', because she didn't have any bra on. She said, 'I can't, I can't'. And he said 'Come on out', and she said 'I can't, I haven't got anything on',

29:00 and he said, 'Come out at once', and so she stood up and he soon went off when he realised she didn't have anything on. But we did this a few times and we'd just go back and put our overalls and shirt on and we'd just be nice and wet. Then we'd be taken back into the hostel and we'd have our showers and in the mess hut and then the evening was our own to

29:30 do what we wanted. So it was just a day. It was nearly always the same thing, just spreading it. When the flax was retted we had great long sticks to turn it. Just run it under the row and turn it over so it would ret on the other side. But it was all the same. It was all just working with the flax.

What does retted mean exactly?

It sort of weathers it.

30:00 When you first put it down it's bright yellow like corn and with the weathering of it, it goes a grey colour. The underneath part hadn't been done so you had to go along and turn the lot over. Go right along the row and turn it over. And that was alright. But sometimes there were snakes underneath it.

We knew that when we turned it over there could be a snake underneath there.

30:30 Or field mice. I think I hated field mice as much as snakes. Then they put in a thing called a retting pit and I worked on that for some time too, where the sheaves were put down in this tank and we had to stand them up like little wigwams; put them around the leg of your trousers and stand them up in little...and they dried that way.

31:00 We didn't have to spread them. That was pretty smelly because the retting pit had sort of, like a dirty old cellar smell about it. Pill and I worked on that for quite some months too. But it was all just working with the flax.

And what was the food like. You mentioned it fattened you up a bit?

The food was beautiful. Beautiful food.

31:30 And that much of it, and it was all the fattening things like stews and big puddings and I mean, I was forever hungry, and we both were. Pill and I used to go into Bolac, which was about four miles. We used to walk in there on a Saturday morning. We'd buy tins of fruit cake to send to the soldiers. But we used to buy them and eat them ourselves.

32:00 We'd eat a full fruit cake because we were forever hungry. I mean we got so fat. It probably didn't show so much on me because I was tall, but little Pill you know, she was so roly-poly. She used to say she was all arse and pockets, and she did. She looked so little in her uniform, this little tubby thing. I think she weighed about ten stone.

32:30 She was. She was really roly-poly. And we did, we had to slim down when we got out because none of our city clothes fitted us. Actually, my last assignment I lost quite a bit of weight because he worked me a bit harder. But at Lake Bolac I really did pile it on and when I went home my father said, 'Don't smile Gwen, your eyes disappear'. After being such a skinny looking thing I had got this round face

33:00 and no eyes.

You were not that fat. I've seen photos.

Well, it was fat to what I was. I didn't feel uncomfortably fat but a lot bigger to what I was, and most of us put on quite a bit of weight.

You had been quite skinny before, down to eight stone, so two stone wasn't too much on a skinny person.

33:30 Not it probably wasn't, and probably eight and a half stone was much to light for my height. And I think probably when I got up to ten and a half stone, that was better. And I can remember in the second year when I went up to Dareton, getting weighed on some scales in Mildura and I was eleven stone. I think about it since and you know, you had a great-coat on. The shoes had steel heels

34:00 in them. A lot of it was clothing, so probably it wasn't that bad...considering what old age does to you. Now I haven't got any excuses. But the food was wonderful at Lake Bolac and a lot of it. You used to have to take your turn on being on mess duty, washing up the

34:30 dishes. The field officers didn't do the washing up. The girls used to take it in turn and you had your turn to do mess duty, then if there was some left over then you got a bit more. You became quite greedy, you did. I remember one leave in Ballarat, they christened me egg head for a while. We had gone to a leave place and some of the other girls couldn't eat all their...

35:00 we had mixed grill I think and I think I finished up eating five fried eggs. Isn't that disgusting? But I loved fried eggs, but I wouldn't look at a fried egg now.

Did any of the girls, including yourself, get ill during your time in the Land Army?

Oh yes some of them did, and actually I was at one stage at Lake Bolac, I was fainting for no

35:30 reason. They got the district nurse from Lake Bolac. I don't know how you'd get on if you weren't in a area like that, who would attend to you. But the district nurse came and she asked me if there was any epilepsy in the family. I got a bit worried and I said, 'My father had a brother who died of epilepsy'. I had to write home and my father said, 'That's got nothing to do

36:00 with you, Gwen'. His brother had an accident on a horse and was having epileptic fits after falling from a horse and died at a young age. But they didn't know why I was having...I would just faint for no reason. I would faint. It could have just been heat exhaustion or anything. I spent my twenty-first birthday in tears because my hands broke out in all these

36:30 papillomas I think they were. The district nurse said they were papillomas. But they were over the joints of my fingers and they were so painful. I was allowed to go home and they were burnt off with a sort of caustic stick, and I think I was allowed a week at home on medical leave, which was good.

37:00 I had just the family doctor. Your parents paid for your medical. The Land Army didn't pay for any. My sister, when she had appendicitis, my father was very cross about that, that they sent her, and she was

only seventeen mind you, and they sent her all the way back to Warrnambool on the train with terrible pain with appendicitis. They

37:30 didn't quite believe that she wasn't putting it over them. They came to the hospital to check that she was really in hospital, and Dad, being a true Scot said, 'They didn't offer to pay for her operation, but they came to check that she was really there'. They didn't really believe that she had...she didn't really like the pruning so they thought she could have put it over that she had had pains and she wanted to get out of it.

38:00 She only stayed in for twelve months. She went back to her job in the solicitor's office after she got out. But I was happy to stay on, I loved it.

We're almost at the end of this tape here. We'll just have time for one more question. I was wondering whether any of the girls...this might seem strange, but if any of the girls ever got pregnant during their time in the Land Army?

I think so, yes. I think so.

38:30 Not personally I didn't know about it, but I have heard since that one of Jean's friends at Werribee did, and I thought it was lovely that she was getting married. But she had to get married because she had got pregnant with one of the local farmer fellows. I mean, she married him and she's just recently passed away. She's got a lovely family, and Jean,

39:00 my sister, I think she was the Godmother to the baby. To the girl. I mean, I think it happened and...I mean, it would have to wouldn't it because I can remember some Ararat shearers all came to our huts. Pill being Pill, she knew what to do; you put the chair

39:30 under the door. They were trying...they were coming to see the girls, but they were shearers and probably half of them were married men but they came to see the Land Army girls. But they didn't get in our hut. Pill knew the score. You put the chair underneath the door knob and that kept them from getting into the hut. But I guess it happened. Some of them did, but I can't say I knew any personally who did.

Tape 5

00:32 **I just thought I'd start out asking about that funny story when you went out double-dating with the boys, and you asked Pill how she had gone?**

It was in Ballarat and I asked Allen would he line up a partner for Pill because I couldn't leave her not having someone to go with, so Allan brought this nice young airman and his name was Keen. I asked Pill afterwards, 'Was he

01:00 keen as mustard Pill'? And she said, 'He was bloody hot stuff, he was as hot as mustard'. But you'd have to know what Keen's Mustard was. So that was Pill; she said he was hot stuff.

Well there was another interesting point that you made when we were speaking off camera. The few women you knew in the flax farm area who were probably lesbians,

01:30 **and one in particular had asked to come into your hut. Can you tell us about that?**

Yes, well when you first go there you're a bit stiff and sore from doing the spreading. This girl came in with the liniment to massage the backs of my legs, and I thought that was very nice and I said, 'Yes thank you, that's OK'. So she said, 'Take your pyjama pants off'. I mean, lucky for me I had brought pyjamas to join up.

02:00 I normally wore a night dress. But I said 'No, I can roll the legs of my pyjama pants up'. She got quite stropky, she said, 'Take your pyjama pants off'. I said 'No, no. I'm not going to', so she just threw the liniment at me and said, 'Well, you can suffer then'. And it wasn't until afterwards and I understood a little bit about lesbians that I managed to work out that she probably

02:30 had those tendencies. But I didn't know about such things but I did later on learn, and I realise now that she probably did. She probably wanted me to take my pants off for a different reason than massaging my poor old legs. I won't name names but I've discussed it with a few of the women since, and they agreed that this particular person was a bit that way inclined.

03:00 I just sensed it. I didn't want to do what she wanted me to do, so that was good.

Did you hear many other stories like that from any other of your friends?

Well, only afterwards. Only since we've broken up and we compare notes and I've found out that a little bit of that happened. But at the time, no. I didn't understand what it was all about for a start.

03:30 When my friend Pill explained all this to me, she was a bit more on the ball than I was. I didn't until afterwards when we got talking amongst ourselves that...it probably did go on. I mean things were

probably not that much different then to what they are now. I suppose nowadays we accept it more than we would have then.

- 04:00 But that was just being a bit on the naive side, and I wouldn't have known what it was all about. It was just a good sense that I didn't want to do what I was asked to do.

Now anything else that you particularly remember about the flax farm that I haven't asked about?

Well I think I've covered most of the work and how we laid the flax out and so forth.

- 04:30 Working in the mill. Some of the girls worked in the mill, and that was probably harder than working out in the field because it was very noisy and they had different shifts. They worked night shift as well as day shift. I think the girls who worked the night shift and then had to sleep during the day when they got back to the hostel and all the day workers would have been making quite a bit of noise when they were wanting to sleep. Because if it was

- 05:00 very windy we didn't work. We couldn't spread the flax so we were allowed to come back to our huts and just read or loaf if it was too windy to spread the flax. It was hard for them, the ones who supposedly had to go on and work through the night if the noisy field workers were in making a lot of noise. I mean that did happen occasionally. We used to hope it would get windy so

- 05:30 we could have a day off so we didn't have to work. I have got a book which tells you all about what the flax was used for, which is probably quite interesting. But I think it was probably common knowledge that it was used for making tarpaulins and ropes and the webbing belts for the soldiers.

- 06:00 The seed, the seeds of the flax were used for making linseed oil. Of course I didn't care about this at the time. It was just a job. I've learned that since. But it was an essential thing for the war effort, the flax. Is that what you mean?

Yes, I was also going to ask you

- 06:30 **what you felt you learnt during this time with all the other women at the flax farm?**

About the flax or about life in general?

Life in general.

Life in general. Well I learned to cope with a different outlook. The fact of being educated by some of the girls with things I hadn't come up against in my other life.

- 07:00 They were different types of girls to who I knew in civilian life. They were different altogether. I suppose some of them you might not have mixed with if you hadn't been in the Land Army, and you would have missed out on the joy of knowing the different types. It was an education in itself. It broadens your outlook on life.

- 07:30 Probably most of the other services would probably say the same. So it did. It altered your outlook. You weren't so picky. You got on with most of them.

In terms of your lifestyle you had to get used to a lot of differences as well?

Yes. Altogether different. I think that was another thing too,

- 08:00 nobody was better than the other, because we all dressed the same and there was no competition that was saying that you were better dressed than the next one because you were all the same, and I think this was good. When we had sore backs if we had had a bad time of it, we understood and you sort of pitched in together.

- 08:30 I think even now...I don't think we've got anything in our ex-members group that we lord it over one another. We a very friendly crowd and we get on wonderfully well together.

Even out in the field, the field officers? They didn't lord it over you?

Well field officers didn't actually come out into the field and work with us. We had what they

- 09:00 called a leading hand. One of the girls would be a leading hand. There were several of them and they more or less told us what we had to do. But as far as the field officers, they didn't come into the field very much. They were back in where the hostel was. I don't know what they had to do but they had things to do I guess. I don't recall any...

- 09:30 oh, maybe one. I've got a photo there of one lady helping us turn the flax over. Maybe they worked in and around the hostel where the mill was. They might have done some of that, but I doubt it. I'm not really clued up on that.

Was there any teasing or resentment towards the officers because they didn't work in the field?

No,

10:00 I think we expected that they were the field officers so they were the bosses. We expected them to tell us what to do. They had rules and regulations. I mean there were a few of them who probably snuck out when they shouldn't have. They would have been hauled over the coals. I sound like a real goody goody don't I? Not really.

10:30 But no, I don't think we expected them to work out in the field with the rest of us. We were the Indians and they were the Chiefs.

What was the reason behind your movement from the flax farm to your next location?

Well, some of the girls stayed there for the full time. I know one particular lady, she was a married lady, she was there for probably three years and

11:00 never moved from Lake Bolac. Mr Duncan had sent down for me to go back the second year. I had to leave Pill behind. She went from Lake Bolac to another flax mill at Koo Wee Rup. After I left she got a move too. Actually she did go up to somewhere near Euston

11:30 the second year I was up there, but she went back and went to Koo Wee Rup flax. Mr Duncan sent for me so I went up for the second year to prune the vines again on the same blockie they called it, when they have a sultana block. That's where I met my beloved.

How did you feel about leaving Lake Bolac?

I didn't like leaving Pill behind.

12:00 And I made other friends too, so I didn't like that because I knew I was going to be on my own again. It was wonderful ...and that was...in my twenty-two months being in the Land Army, that was the only place I was with girls, and some of the girls went right through their time and never got in a situation where they had other girls with them. They were on their own and really did it hard,

12:30 because the companionship to be with all the girls was wonderful. I felt a bit sad going back, but I wasn't so green. I knew there weren't going to be any crows flying backwards to keep the dust out and all that stuff that I believed the first time I went up. And I knew what I was in for as regards the work. It was a lot easier the second time around.

So they didn't give you any choice in going

13:00 **back to the sultana farm?**

I probably could have said 'No', yes I probably could have said 'No, I don't want to go', but how lucky was I that I didn't. I wouldn't have had fifty five years of married life, would I?

Tell me about that?

Well, his initial is W.A. with the Strachan attached to it, so he was always called Was.

13:30 He was home on final leave. The block I was on was down the end of this country road and then there were two more blocks between, and then the Strachan family home was on a block three or four along. He came down to visit, to see the Land Army girl I guess. They were going out spot-lighting.

14:00 They used to go out spot-lighting and shooting kangaroos, and they said would I like to come. And I said, 'So long as I don't have to see the dead kangaroos'. So I went out with them and stood on the back of the big truck with the spot-light. I think there were four boys and myself. Wassy was on the back of the truck

14:30 and gave me a little bit of a cuddle as he lifted me off the truck. I thought, 'He's not bad'. I was there for a bit longer, and he was home for a week during the time that I was up there. I was probably up there for maybe five or six weeks. He was there for probably a week, and he just passed me an envelope

15:00 with his address and said, 'Would you care to write to me'? So that's how our romance began, just with writing letters. We got friendlier and friendlier in our letter writing and then he was posted to Melbourne and we decided to get engaged and get married. Yes, I only knew him mainly through letter writing. I had only known him eleven months and we were married. So what a risk.

15:30 But it was a risk that paid off. But that's how I met him. As romantic as going out spot-lighting with a few of the local lads. His brother was one of them and the boy from the house where I worked and a neighbour from up the road and a boy from across the road. Of course there weren't many army aged chaps around. It was mainly the younger fellows, and

16:00 the family across the road had an airman son who was famous...Geoff Thornton. He was quite a famous Spitfire pilot and there's been a bit written up about him. I didn't fancy him. I liked my soldier boy better. So that's how we met.

So how many times

16:30 **had you seen or been out with William in that week that you met one another?**

Probably, it must have been longer than a week because probably three times. I know Mrs Duncan wanted me to like her son and we had come home from the pictures, and I didn't realise but next morning, his kisses must have been a bit too fierce because she said, what's that all around your mouth?

17:00 I had bruises around my mouth. He had been a bit...coming home on the rough old country road in the back of the car...and she told me I was a hussy...kissing this boy next door who I didn't know, and had only known for five minutes and so forth. And she did write to my mother...yes, she wrote to my mother and told her I was keen on this fellow, and he was no better than he should have been which was quite a bit of nastiness.

17:30 But that didn't make any difference to me.

What did your mother think of that letter?

She wasn't very...me getting married to someone she didn't know. 'She said, you make your bed my girl, you can lie on it'. I was still a little bit silly. She had gone away on holidays and I'd gone back to work after the Land Army and bought my own wedding dress,

18:00 which you did. And my father said, 'No. The father of the bride pays for the wedding dress'. So Mum came home from her holiday and here was this beautiful wedding gown on the outside of my wardrobe. And she said, 'What's this'? And I said, 'We've got to get married in a hurry', and of course she immediately thought the wrong thing, and she said, 'What's the hurry'? And I said, 'Well he's getting out of the army in June'. I was out of the Land Army

18:30 by then, and he was buying the vine block next door to his parents and needed me to do the pruning that I had learnt to do, and to help with the pruning. So that was the reason for getting married in a hurry, but she got very uppity about that, getting married in a hurry. But she soon fell in love with him too, after she got to know him. But for a start, no. I was marrying someone in the country.

19:00 I had my glory box with my silks and satins and things. I can remember my father saying I would be out in the bush hitting a kangaroo over the head to make kangaroo stew and so forth. He was telling me what a rough life I was going to have being a country woman, and that I wouldn't make a go of it, but I did. It was wonderful.

You may have known more about the bush after twenty two months in the Land Army than he did.

Oh no, he was a boundary rider

19:30 and I think he knew all about it. But I still think he thought I couldn't do a day's work. I think it really surprised him that this city girl could turn out to be a good worker because I put my shoulder to the wheel and I did work alongside him for all the years. See, I was lucky there that I was able to stay on the land after the war was over. Some of them would have liked to have

20:00 done. I felt a little bit sad that they couldn't, because the men were back and their jobs weren't there for them. I think there's a book...well I know there's been a book written and a movie done called Thanks Girls and Goodbye. But I've never felt that we really should have expected ...that's what we were doing. We were doing the job to hold the jobs open for

20:30 the boys when they came back. It wasn't for us to keep on doing it, even though a lot of us, most of us, loved what we did. I was one of the lucky ones - that the man I met was going to be a blockie, and he was.

How did he propose to you?

Probably in a letter. Probably. Yes, probably in a letter because I think we

21:00 decided that we were going to get married. Yes probably in a letter. I mean I've got a lovely...I only found it a while back and it made me quite sentimental. I was looking for my references and I forgot he had done it, just as a joke. It was after we'd been married for fifteen years, and he had written it like a reference. It was lovely. He had a lovely handwriting and wrote this lovely

21:30 reference about the wife and mother I'd been. It's beautiful. I won't frame it but I'll keep it. No, it was just...there again, I've been very blessed to meet someone as wonderful as that, and that was Land Army for me. I wouldn't have met him otherwise. And he loved all the girls too, and

22:00 with all our get-togethers he was always with us too. I'm talking more of him than I am of Land Army, aren't I.

Well that's part of your life. So you applied your skills that you learnt in the Land Army straight away on your own farm?

Yes, yes. Straight away. We were married first of June and it was pruning time, and the bloke we had bought was next door, but the

22:30 people that we were buying it from were still in it, but we had to work it. It used to have to be passed by

Water Commission and all sorts of things. He had to go to Sydney and have some...he could have got it through a War Service, but instead of that his parents mortgaged their place for us. We were pretty broke. We were on a four pound a week allowance until we got our first crop in.

23:00 But we pruned...we lived with his parents for a while and pruned on their block, and then they came and helped us next door. The fence adjoined. We worked together and pruned both the blocks together. And we always did that with the picking too. And when Bob later married, he married a girl called Gwen too, and we both used to work with the boys and

23:30 help on the property. So it was good, and our children all grew up there. They were country children.

Bob of course was the nice boy who met you in town?

Yes, that's right. And he and Gwen are still up there. Still up in Mildura. It was good old Land Army.

24:00 If it hadn't been for Land Army...well Mr Duncan I suppose, for insisting that if he couldn't get me he didn't want another girl. And really there again, he really didn't need me because he had his son who had been in the army for a short while, and his father claimed him to come home and work on the block. Then his daughter's fiancée, he was up there working. I think I was just got back to be the

24:30 girlfriend. But I wasn't interested the first year, and a year hence I hadn't had anything to do with him. I hadn't written a letter or anything. I hadn't had anything to do with him so why would I be interested in him. I certainly wasn't. So when I came home with my bruised mouth after my man, I was a hussy. I probably was. That was probably the reason

25:00 I was asked to go back there. And I was there when the war ended. The war ended in the August and we had just finished the pruning. I was waiting back because the daughter of the house was having her twenty- first birthday. So I waited to go to that and then I was coming back to head office. Of course when the war

25:30 finished I said I wanted to go home. I didn't want to wait for the twenty-first birthday and I didn't. I came back to Melbourne and went to my last assignment then, after the war had finished actually. September third I went onto my last assignment and war finished in the August.

Where were you when you received the news that the war was over?

I was in Dareton working on Mr Duncan's property.

26:00 Did it come on the wireless or the newspaper?

Yes. On the wireless. And I mean life was great. Great excitement, and Mr Duncan...as I said he was an ex-First World War fellow too. The property he was on was a soldier settlement property from the First World War, and Mr Duncan and his buddy had wanted to go into

26:30 Mildura to celebrate and go to the Grand Hotel I presume, and they would said they would take me to get the Melbourne train. The queue to get onto the train was right from the Mildura Station right back up the ...I couldn't get on, and then I saw a boy from Warrnambool who had been up there. The air force had a base in Mildura. I saw this Warrnambool boy in the queue and I said to him, could he get me a ticket.

27:00 I would have been right back up the street and...I met Teddy afterwards and he hadn't got on it either. He hadn't managed to get close enough to it that night and so I stayed in a leave hostel in Mildura that night. Oh, that night was wonderful walking around Mildura. It was happy and they were dancing in the street. It was wonderful! Next day I have never felt so lonely.

27:30 Well, I won't say that, I've felt lonely a few days since. I felt so lonely the next day, Mildura was like dead. The shops were all closed and I had to wait until that night to get on the train of course, to Melbourne. I was just walking around. Not a soul to speak to and I can remember going to a café to get something for lunch and a drunk sailor came up to me and he said to me,

28:00 'What's the matter with you darling, you look lonely'? And that's all I needed and I burst into tears... darling was a bit lonely. So I got on the train that night and back to Melbourne. I was allowed to go home for leave. I think I had a week at home and then back, and then I got posted to the next assignment which was at Tallyho.

Just to clarify. Where was William at this point?

He was in Queensland.

28:30 He was supposed to be going...He was on final leave when I met him. Well, he wouldn't have known where he was going. The boat got out a bit and then turned around and came back because the... apparently it had fallen. The war was nearly over of course, and he didn't go. He didn't get sent to the islands. So he was up there for quite some time and...

29:00 he was in transport and then he was sent back to the Melbourne car company in South Melbourne while I was still out at Tallyho. So that was good.

So he went out into the Pacific and then turned around and came back?

Yes. He was really lucky. He used to drive...he didn't really get out of Australia. He used to drive

- 29:30 his transports from Mt Isa across to Darwin and he was in Darwin just after the bombs had fallen. He wasn't actually there during the bombing. When he died, I didn't expect to be termed a War Widow, they really were supposed to have been out of Australia. But I had a letter from Vet Affairs to say
- 30:00 they accepted his death as due to his war service, so it didn't really matter where he was, and that his death was due to his war service. He had a disability pension and that's what got me the War Widow's Pension and the Gold Card. I'd rather have him, of course, than any of this. So he was up in Queensland, up in Mount Isa and...I'd have to look at the ...
- 30:30 where the letters went to. Then he came down and was posted to the car company at South Melbourne. He wasn't in an army barracks. He boarded with an aunt of his mother's I think, an old relative out at Brunswick or somewhere. So he more or less was free at the weekends. He just drove army buses
- 31:00 around the city. That's what he was doing for probably the last three months...he was in the army for five years...five and a half years I think he had in the army, and his last three or four months was driving this bus around the city. So that was good.

And what was his disability that he had gotten?

At one stage

- 31:30 when he was working up there they had gone to help a farmer, and this was an American hospital he was in...a branch of a tree came off and he always had a break in his spine which caused a disability. But then he got heart problems because he shouldn't have smoked, but of course they all smoked. He didn't smoke in latter years once he had his first...and he had quite a few, heart attacks.
- 32:00 I've forgotten what it's got on the thing. What it's called now? Hypoxic? Does that sound right? And he suffered a lot. But he suffered mainly with his back because this portion of his back...one of the vertebra had a little crack in it. It did affect him all his life but he was on just a small disability pension
- 32:30 for that. That was lucky and I don't think he thought when he first applied that he would even get that, because it was an American hospital he was in, but we found the records and he was covered for that. He was covered for two or three things, and that mainly was the first claim that he put in. So that was...
- 33:00 really the fact that he came to Melbourne was really...we might have just written letters and fizzled out. But it didn't. We knew we wanted to get married. We got engaged the day I got de-mobbed from the Land Army. We got engaged and we bought the ring the same day, the tenth of January. It wasn't long when you come to think of it. I had met him in July and by January the next year we were engaged,
- 33:30 and June the same year 1946, we were married. He had just got out of the army on May the tenth I think. I didn't give him much chance to get away, did I? We were married on the first of June, and I was a Land Army girl for twenty-three years, as he said at our Golden Wedding Anniversary. He said, 'Gwen's been a Land Army girl for'...and of course being Gwen,
- 34:00 I said, 'I was not a Land Army girl for twenty-three years, it was only twenty-two months'. And he said, 'You were a Land Army girl for twenty-three years', and I really was until we moved down here.

So it was quite a risk.

It was, wasn't it, yes. And really probably my Mum might have done me a favour by saying, 'Well, you're determined to do this. You're marrying someone you don't really know. You make your bed my girl, you lie on it'.

- 34:30 That's a pretty harsh thing to say. And when things were a bit unhappy and things are often unhappy. You'd be lying if you say that every day was rosy. The fact that his mother...I mean my mother loved me...until she met my mother. His mother thought I was going to be a real burden to him, that I would still want to buy clothes,
- 35:00 and still want to be a dolly bird. She didn't think I'd be...I think she thought I'd drag him down. For a start it was pretty hard. Anyhow it finished up she could see I was quite a good worker and I was worthy of her boys. And we became good mates. I've got a friend
- 35:30 I've met...she and her husband and Was [and] I were a foursome who got around together. She met her husband through her Land Army experience. Our experiences were so much the same. Her mother-in-law didn't like her marrying him. She had to go and live right out in the back-blocks of Adelaide in a country place, almost in the desert there, I think. She had the same experience.
- 36:00 We couldn't work. We were just silly city girls.

I'd like to hear about your next experience at Tallyho. Perhaps you could tell me about how you got to and how you were placed at Tallyho?

Well of course, just the same thing. The people who were on the property

- 36:30 applied to head office Land Army to have a girl sent to them to help. So he would have done that, and I was just told when I came back from my leave, after war had finished that, 'You're going to this property at Tallyho'. So that was quite easy. By that time I knew how to catch a tram and a bus. I wasn't the greenie. So it was quite easy to get out there,
- 37:00 and they were alright for a start too. They were nice people. Particularly the wife. She was a nice person and I enjoyed working there until he got a bit silly when my husband was coming down - he wasn't my husband then - when my boyfriend was coming down. He got a bit silly and he used to try and tease me and tease me about...well
- 37:30 the thing I hated was, tease me about...well the names of the prisoners of war used to be read out...the ones who were missing or believed killed, and if they were, they would read them out. And he would say, 'Oh, another one'. He was German extraction, which he wasn't. I think he would have been interned if he had been. I think it was just to
- 38:00 tease me. But it used to make me feel very unhappy because I used to know quite a few boys from home who were missing. We didn't know if they were alive or dead. It was a pretty nasty thing to say. But he wasn't a very nice man. I didn't like some of the things he did just to embarrass me.
- 38:30 **Like what sorts of things if you don't mind me asking?**
- Well as I said before he used to put his hand under his wife's dress at lunch time, and I'd go scarlet in the face because I wasn't brought up like that. And then I think another incident...he used to be very kind and on the weekends we didn't have to work.
- 39:00 So on Sunday he would take us for trips, or take me for trips with the family around to show me different places in Melbourne. Then of course when Was was coming down, that all stopped. I had to work Saturday then. The bus into Melbourne would go right passed the door at five to six, but I couldn't knock off until six o'clock. So I had to walk out onto Ferntree Gully Road, I guess it was to get a ride. Often I'd thumb a ride into ...
- 39:30 the tram didn't come right out in those days. And I'd thumb a ride into Batman Avenue to meet Was and we'd go to a show. But one particular day we were quite near the Boy's Home there at Tallyho. It was getting fairly dark and these boys went passed and they said a few sexy thing you know, a bit of cheek
- 40:00 and I told him. I said to him, 'These boys...you know'. And he said, 'Well we'll lay a trap for them next Saturday night'. He said, 'When you're out there...they'll probably come past again. They're probably allowed on Saturday'. He said, 'You'll be working'...I had to work in the garden, and he said, 'You be there'. He had a stone fence and he hid behind the fence and the boys came along and they started to say a few
- 40:30 sexy things and what they were going to do and so forth. And he jumped out at them and [they] went for their lives. I thought I had done an awful thing to them. I mean they weren't touching me or anything. They were just all talk. That night I got in my little room and I had to tap on the window when I wanted the light out, and he
- 41:00 put the mop up at the window...it just looked like a head coming in my window. That was a bit teasing of him.

Tape 6

- 00:33 **OK, I'll just clarify the story you were telling at the end of the tape regarding the farmer of German extraction at Tallyho. So he was trying to scare these boys and then he turned around and scared you that night.**
- Yes, I thought, 'Those boys aren't going to think too much of me'. You know, that he was standing there waiting for them, or squatting there behind
- 01:00 his fence. I thought I was a bit nervous and he knew I was nervous, so I had just got into bed and the next minute...it just looked like a head coming through...and there was no way I could put a light on because I didn't have a light out there. I used to have to tap on the window when I wanted them to put the light on. He played a few tricks like that on me after that. He crept in the room one night.
- 01:30 His wife put the light on thank goodness. I just had a feeling that he was in the room...that there was someone in the room, and she put the light on and he was right beside my bed. I mean, I would have got an awful fright if he had grabbed me. To him it was just a big joke because it was probably easy to get me going. But he was just a tease. He just wanted
- 02:00 to have a bit of fun with the green Land Army girl I think. I didn't enjoy...you know. He was a different person after Was came down. I wasn't his favourite any more I don't think, because I didn't want to spend my weekend with them anymore. I wanted to spend my weekends with Was. He always had

weekend leave because he was billeted out

02:30 with his Auntie, so he was right. But he wasn't a very nice man.

I remember this farmer was quite inappropriate when his wife was off having a baby?

Oh yes. That wasn't mine, that was Nance's experience. No that was Nance's experience. Yes. This fellow's children were school children.

03:00 I felt sorry...they were afraid of him. He really had the children under the thumb. I really felt that his wife was a bit afraid of him. As far as I'm concerned she was embarrassed by him trying to embarrass me with his hand under her dress. It was embarrassing. It was very demeaning for her, wasn't it? But it was the sort of person

03:30 he was. I know he delighted when I...I learnt to drive a tractor there and I was driving under the apple trees and a branch came across my face and took the skin off the side of my nose. Then it was going to heal up but we used to have spray with... bluestone I think it was we had to spray the apple trees with. I used to drive the tractor

04:00 while the man used to spray the trees on either side. But I used to get it all over me, this bluestone, and it had gotten into this scratch and it got awfully infected and it looked terrible. And he used to say to me, 'You're going to finish up with a lovely scarred face. He won't love you anymore. You're going to have a scar all over your face'. He was odd. He wasn't nice. I mean, I wasn't used to anyone like that.

04:30 Thankfully I didn't go back and work for him after I got home at Christmas time. He wanted me to go back and stay there, even though I wouldn't have been with the Land Army, but just as a lot of the girls did, went and worked on the farms they were on. I said, 'No thanks'. If I wasn't told to stay there I was going to get out. So I got out in the January.

05:00 No he wasn't...you wouldn't choose a man like that to work for.

And you found out later that another girl had...

Yes. Later on I found out that another girl had been with them and had put in a bad report about him to head office, and I really don't think they should have sent another girl there. When I found out

05:30 later that that had happened, I thought, 'Why on earth had they sent me and given him a second chance'? But I was the bunny to have to go and work for a man like that. I suppose in a way he...might have been protective. I know there was a little old man who lived in a hut on the property next door. He was a musician.

06:00 He was a little deformed man but he played some big...like a bass, and I've always loved music, and there again...by this time, I was twenty-one and still pretty trusting, I suppose. He said did I like music and I said, 'Yes', and he said, 'Come to my hut; it's on the next property'. And I said, 'Oh yes, after work tonight I'll come down to your hut'.

06:30 I was prepared to go but he wouldn't let me go. So he was alright in that respect, wasn't he? But he had worked out what sort of gullible person I was. He said I wasn't to go. 'You're not to go down there'. So in that way he was alright. But I suppose I was just there,

07:00 a real bunny and someone to have a little fun with, and he did. But it wasn't very pleasant when you were the butt of his tricks and I mainly was. That was the only...as I say, some of them had bad experiences, but that was my worst. Which wasn't real bad I guess, but it could have been. I suppose the fact that his wife was such a decent person.

07:30 She had a bit to put up with, didn't she? No, I wouldn't have gone back and worked there, not under any circumstances. But he really shouldn't have...he was another one. It really wasn't policed well enough I think. Some of the girls were alone. I know one, she was on a property

08:00 down at Phillip Island and she never got any time off at all. And she was a brilliant lady. She worked at the university out here. She's written a book on some of her experiences, and she said she was a woman, her boss. But she didn't get any time off at all. She never got a weekend

08:30 off or a weekend to come home. She was a Melbourne girl, and Phillip Island isn't that far away that she couldn't come home, but she didn't. I mean, I suppose the time I was at this place at Tallyho, it was from September to Christmas time, so it wasn't long. I didn't go home but I used to go to Pill's people place in Coburg.

09:00 And that was like a second home. So I would go there and Saturday night I always stayed there because Was was...we'd go out somewhere, and his aunt's place was at Brunswick so that wasn't that far away. He wouldn't stop kissing and cuddling and I'd say, 'The last tram will go'. And he'd say, 'I'll catch the next tram'. And he often missed the last tram

09:30 and he would have to walk back to Brunswick, but that was his prerogative to do that. No, I was lucky that I had Pill's...because she had gotten out of the Land Army after the war finished. She had gotten

out in the August and I was in for those extra months. She had gone back to her civilian job and I was still in it. But I used to see her every weekend so it was

10:00 wonderful.

So in retrospect, as you reflect back to the Land Army organization, there are things that seemed pretty inadequate.

Oh I think so. I really think in the first place, my first assignment, they should have known that I didn't have any money. I mean they would have known by the appearance of me,

10:30 what a gullible girl I was, how naïve I was...I wouldn't have known my way around the city. They knew I was from Warrnambool which isn't a very big place, and yet they didn't bother to inquire, 'Are you right for accommodation'? And if it hadn't been for Doreen's kindness and taking me home to her sister's place, I could have got into real trouble. Being naïve

11:00 I could have said to anyone, 'Do you know of anywhere I could get a bed for the night'? Anything could have happened couldn't it? This was one of the downfalls of it, that it wasn't properly policed in...that's not quite the right word, but they didn't check it out well enough, I don't think. We get together now and we talk and we compare notes and there's a few of them who have had

11:30 pretty frightening experiences. Some of the girls who were country born and bred had no idea. I do think they fell down a bit in cases like that. And really, much in all as I loved working for Mr Duncan, and loved him. A lovely man and I loved him till the day he died.

12:00 But when you think of it, he really didn't need a Land Army girl, did he? Perhaps he was looking for a wife for his son. Maybe that was the idea behind it. But not this one. But he had two daughters who were quite...they had probably done it and would have been quite capable of doing it.

12:30 And the last one, well you know...I shouldn't have been sent there because he had already had a report put in against him. Unless they thought the girl who made the report was at fault, and I didn't say anything. I never ever complained, and didn't know till afterwards. Too late then.

13:00 I mean you didn't. You just thought, 'This is what you've signed up for and you just put up with it'. It's not really right. Kids nowadays wouldn't put up with it would they? I don't want to think of the bad side of it because mostly when I talk of it I say, 'It was great. It was an experience I wouldn't give up for anything'.

13:30 In a way it makes you feel a little bit guilty. I met a little lady when we first moved here. We were exactly the same age and we were talking what it was like. I said to her, 'I was sixteen when the war started', and I said - she was a Polish lady - and I said, 'Really, in Australia

14:00 we really didn't suffer much at all'. I said, 'To me, the fact that I had a boyfriend who was a soldier, it was a big romance' (this is not my husband, my former one). 'It was a great big romance as far as I was concerned. And to get away from home and to get away from the strict ties and so forth'. And I said, 'It was pretty good to be sixteen'. And she rolled her sleeve up and she said,

14:30 'You haven't got one of those, have you?' And she had the number. She'd been in a concentration camp. It really hit home to me, who you talk to now. She had had a horrible war. Her brother had died. Her parents had died. Mine was wonderful, but her war years were absolutely horrible.

15:00 You've got to be realistic about these things...sorry I'm making you cry. I'm making myself cry. Yes, poor lady. We were near enough to exactly the same age. I just used to think she was a bit strange because I had a statue out there that my son had got when he travelled. He had gone through Russia. It was a statue of Lenin.

15:30 She said, 'What have you got that there for'? I said, 'It's only on loan to me. My son was moving flats. I've just got a loan of it'. I said, 'Do you know who it is'? 'It's that Lenin', she said. See, we didn't know what they put up with. So I took Lenin off the shelf and put him inside the cupboard

16:00 because it upset her to think I had a statue of Lenin on my shelf out there. No, there's ...when people say about the war time, I say, 'I enjoyed it'. I really enjoyed my twenty-two months. I really did. I mean...even before joining the Land Army -

16:30 I didn't join until 1944 - I still wasn't having any hardship. But I don't think...I mean we did things like, I was in a thing called the Volunteer Air Observers because living at Warrnambool on the coast, the spotters used to be down on the coast in the control room and we had to do radio messages through to Laverton and we had a big

17:00 table. We used to plot things out. The spotters would ring and we could identify the planes. We had this...I've forgotten what the code is now. We used to have to ring through on a radio to Laverton down here to tell them what type of planes they were. I did that. And I joined the ARP [RAP?] [Regimental Aid Post] and bandaged up my poor young brother as one of the victims. We learned things like that. And another thing,

17:30 the War Service League. We used to go round picking up materials and things that people had thrown out of a Saturday afternoon. We'd go out on trucks. My mother didn't like that. All these hobbledehoyes standing around on the running boards of trucks. I've got a cutting from the paper...my old boyfriend is still back home in Warrnambool; he found it with a photo of us in the paper just recently.

18:00 It was Jean and myself and Kirb, who joined the Land Army with her.

Picking up rubbish?

Yes. And it was taken into a big factory and the men...all the old RSL [Returned and Services League] men used to sort it out, and they'd sort out which could be sold and which could be used for the war effort. A lot of it could be sold and a lot of it they had a bit of fun with it. I can remember seeing my father get about one day; somebody had

18:30 put him in a pair of lady's stays, you know those great big things? and someone had laced him in, and he was very embarrassed. He couldn't get out of it. But no, the one I really liked was the one where we would plot out the planes and I used to know the makes of the planes in those days, but that's all gone of course. I can't remember what they were. You wouldn't say

19:00 what they were. You had a code that you could say the number and they were to ring through to Laverton. It was great.

Were you taught to spot enemy aircraft?

Yes they would have. See, the spotters were down on the coast in the little dugout things. They would ring through to us. We were in the control room and they'd ring through what they had seen.

19:30 Then we'd plot it on this...it was like a great big table and we'd plot it with sticks and do the reading on the graph where it was and then ...it was quite good. I guess we were a little bit trained. We didn't go to school or anything to be trained. We just did a few duties and learned how to do it. And it was interesting.

Was it volunteer?

Yes.

20:00 And the young boys who did it, and some of them used to sleep there, they were cadets - the school boys who wanted to be in the air force. They had their little uniforms. They used to sleep...it was mainly the young boys who did the night duty. Yes, there was a group of us who did that, and that was good. And RAP was quite good because they used to have mock air raids

20:30 and so forth. Warrnambool was blacked out during the war, being a coastal town. No it was...and that's what I say, it was all a big adventure for me. And all this was before Land Army of course. It was nothing like this poor Maria put up with...spending time in a concentration camp. It was awful for her, her war experience.

21:00 Mine was quite exciting really. Part of growing up I think.

Did you feel you changed during the war time?

Yes, I did. I'm sure I did. I was no longer little sweet Gwen McLennan. I mean, I used to hate it when we were young

21:30 and Jean and I would get around, and we thought we were a bit good, you know. Jean...she's very vivacious, and people used to say, 'Jean's a vivacious girl, but isn't Gwen sweet'? And I hated being sweet. It was an insult to be called sweet. But I was no longer sweet. I learned to be a bit tougher I think. I could see through things a bit

22:00 more. No, I grew up. I actually needed it didn't I? I mean, that many years old and to be still under mummy's thumb. It's not really right. And my two sisters, I mean they can't speak now but they would say, 'You were always Mum's little pet'. She could put it over you more than she could them.

22:30 And I think probably they were right, but I couldn't see it then. It's only in my old age now, I can see Mum did have me under her thumb and I did try to be approved of. But I got to the stage that I thought, 'She's so wrong'. Lots of her ideas were wrong. So narrow and quite snobbish really. It wasn't about that at all.

23:00 **It takes quite a big person to realise that though.**

You think? I suppose she was a bit disappointed. She had had three daughters, well certainly Jean wouldn't. Jean was always a rebel. And I suppose if you only get one who would knuckle down and do what they're told, and then she broke out and wouldn't do what she was told and I was determined that I was going

23:30 to marry Was . And there's Mum saying, 'You make your bed, you lie on it'. I don't know...I couldn't have had any wisdom. I knew what I wanted and as it turned out it was so absolutely right, and I wouldn't have had it any other way. Nor would she if she was with us now. She would agree,

24:00 because later on they became great mates. But it does make you grow up, and I was a different person after getting out of the Land Army to the girl who went in. It probably fitted me well to be a farmer's wife.

Now the reunions of the Land Army girls have meant quite a lot to you and the other girls. They've been a big part of your life.

Oh, my word yes.

24:30 Well, as I say, we went to Adelaide in 1986 and I wouldn't have known about that only for my sister Jean, because she's very friendly with Mary Low, who's now passed away. She was Jean's friend and she was a regular at Werribee. Mary got in touch with Jean. Jean lived in Warrnambool. She said the South Australians

25:00 had kept up their ex-members association. Ours had gone...they did have one initially and I was in it initially, but then I got too busy being a blockie's wife and having children and so forth to stay financial, so I got out of that. Jean said, 'How can we get to Adelaide'? And I thought, 'Well maybe we could go by train, or fly'.

25:30 And Pill said she would like to come, so Was said, 'I'll drive the three of you over', so my husband drove the three of us over. Now that was wonderful, and Mary and Nance got their heads together and decided they would reform our ex-members association. So that was 1986 we had our first meeting. And from there on...the next year we were permitted to

26:00 march, and also to join the RSL, and we thought we had it made a little bit. It looked like we weren't on the outer after all. But Adelaide was sort of the start of it, and that was thanks to the South Australian girls. They invited us over there. We had a lovely reunion. We must have had three or four days over there.

26:30 And of course we came back and we formed our association and then we used to have a meeting at a lady's house at Bonbeach. At one of our one meetings, Mary said, 'You can have a meeting at your place Gwen', and Jean said, 'You don't want to have that'. And I said, 'I don't mind'. So three times a year we used to have them all here,

27:00 and twice a year down the other way. So now we've got it twice a year here, and twice a year down there. We've got one next Tuesday. We've got one down at Edithvale at another girl's place. Girl, you notice we're still girls. A seventy-nine year old girl. We've got a meeting next week. When Mary was alive, she was a

27:30 great organiser and she's organised lots of trips. We've been all over the place. We've been to Darwin. We've been to the Red Centre. We go to reunions at all the different places. They went to Perth. I missed out on Perth. That was Western Australia's ex-members reunion. Was finished up in hospital with a massive heart attack so I missed out on that one.

28:00 I missed out on another when he was in hospital. I missed out on a few when he was hospitalised. I made quite a lot of them, I made quite a lot of the trips. They've just had one this year up at Swan Hill that I didn't go to. I just find it awfully hard without him, with just me to face up to them any more. I went to one in Horsham last year without

28:30 him, and I'm going to one this September which I'll do. I'll manage OK. We've got a wonderful association. I don't know where we would have been without Mary's help because she was a brilliant lady. She was a Librarian in her civilian life and worked at the university in genealogy and could use a computer, and

29:00 so she more or less...she used to swear at us; 'Shut up you (so and so) mob!' when she was trying to make us line up for Anzac Day and so forth. But apart from that she was a wonderful person. Couldn't be less vain. I've never seen anybody have a shower more quickly than Mary would. She'd be in and out. If she saw you putting your make up on...what did she say to one of the women one day who had been a friend of my sister's?...

29:30 'Oh Gwen', she said; 'You still look pretty good'. And Mary said, 'Yes but she titivates'. So I wasn't allowed to titivate. Mary never bothered titivating. We've sort of gone to pieces a bit without her. We've got the young...well she's younger than most of us, Judy, who was Mary's treasurer...

30:00 she's now taken it on. She's the treasurer and she's the secretary and she's absolutely wonderful. We talk on the phone all the time and have our giggles and get-togethers. Nance is our President, and Nance and Judy are the ones keeping us together. But if it hadn't been for Mary, I think we would have fallen apart years ago really. And she didn't suffer

30:30 fools gladly. If she thought you were a fool she'd tell you so. Luckily I got on alright with her. I miss her very, very much, but life's got to go on hasn't it? And we're lucky and we've still got quite a good association. As I say, we have our meetings and our newsletters and we care about one another. We've got

31:00 a fine grapevine. If one of them is sick the whole lot of us hear, and we do what we can for one another.

It's a sisterhood. It's really a wonderful thing, I feel.

Absolutely. What was Mary's second name again?

Mary Low.

You've spoken about this just now, but are there other qualities that you think the reunions and being an

31:30 **active part of the Land Army reunion group has given you; other things that that has given you or have been good for you?**

I think just the friendship is the main thing. And caring for one another. I think that's the main thing because we do. And we practise it, we do. We care for one another.

32:00 That's the main thing. Someone said to me, 'Do you feel bitter'? because some of the other services, no, I won't say some of the other services, but some of the women in some of the other services really don't think that we have any right to march or to be in the RSL and so forth because really, we weren't made a service. We were about to be made a service and the war finished,

32:30 and I think it was a service in England. I think the Land Army was the fourth service or about to be. But when they say to me, 'Do you feel bitter when they treat you pretty nastily'? and I don't think it's anything to be bitter about. They have a bit problem with their makeup at this age, to be

33:00 so petty over something like that. We all did it for the same reason, for our country. So you don't have to say 'Well, we didn't swear allegiance to the King I guess when we joined up, whereas they did'. There are differences, but we still signed up to be sent

33:30 to wherever they wanted to send us. I mean we didn't go out of the country like they did, and a few of them will say to us, 'You did a good job girls', and it's not all of them. So I don't think it's worthwhile worrying about it. I think it's their problem if they feel like that, not ours.

34:00 Some of the girls now say, 'I'm not going to go there because they don't like us'. And I said, 'Well, we like ourselves, we like us. We're alright. What does it matter'? And a few of them said to us, 'You're a very close group. Our group isn't as close as yours', and we are. We're very close. And we do say...

34:30 we may have one member that most of us are very ashamed of but look, she did her duty, but she's a bit of a problem on Anzac Day. She likes to wear red sling backs and dance along, and we say to her, 'We wear blazers. We try and look nice', and so forth, and I think, half the men of Melbourne know her. She gets all these waves.

35:00 But I mean, she did her duty and we can't be like that. That would have been a bit like what Mum would have been like...finding out what her father did. But most of us, 99% of us, are all mates and we all get on. It's great. And of course there's special ones and most of us are mates. And this is why it's been

35:30 so good. Aren't I a talker?

No, that's all very relevant and very important for the Archive; to understand your unique perspective of the Land Army, and your perspective of the other women's services.

Yes, well theyif the way things worked out, if I hadn't got scarlet fever I would have been in the air force

36:00 and then, when I thought about it too, because I was a sewer I'd have been somewhere sewing parachutes. Now that would have been so boring. I mean what I did was so different to that, and because I was a sewer in civilian life, I didn't want to be a sewer. I mean in my imagination I would have liked to have rode a motorbike and been a despatch rider, but I couldn't ride a

36:30 motor bike. This is the imagination. You know, the silly sort of girl I was. When I was sewing, I used to imagine... when I got an electric sewing machine at work I used to imagine it was my motor bike and I was a despatch rider in the war. If I had gotten into the air force which was my first preference, I would have been only sewing.

37:00 It would have helped the war effort certainly, but I feel what I did was just as helpful to the war effort, and gave me this terrific life that I had to be on the land for twenty-eight years...you know, up there working on the land which was great.

Tape 7

00:35 **I was just wondering if in talking to some of the Land Army whether some of them were frustrated or reluctant to go back to their old life?**

Oh yes they were. They wanted to stay on. And some of them felt like the movie and the book that's

been written, Thanks Girls and Goodbye, that they were just thrown on the scrap heap.

01:00 Of course it didn't happen to me. I didn't feel like that but some of them felt that they had given up... some of them, it was three years out of their lives. Then the war was over and there was nothing for them. Yes they did. They felt a bit like that. They got to like the free and easy life on the land, and they wanted to do something like it. But really I suppose

01:30 it was still felt that it wasn't women's work was it? In peacetime it wasn't women's work so they weren't likely to be employed once there were men around to do it. And lots of things, physically, women couldn't do. I mean we were only allowed to lift...I've forgotten the weight now, but I think it was only forty-five pounds which we did that and more. It didn't stop us having to

02:00 lift heavier weights than that. But the women physically couldn't do a lot of the jobs that the men could do. So they couldn't have carried on. Some of them stayed on the land and worked their own properties. I met one just recently who bought her own farm in Warragul. She's still there, a tiny little lady, and she's never married and managed her own dairy farm down there.

02:30 So some of them did it.

What was the general expectation of women after the war?

Work wise do you mean?

I should have specified more. The Land Army women...was there an expectation that there was a certain role I should fall into after the work had finished and ended?

Well

03:00 I can't speak for all of them. But I think most of them felt that they would slip back into their pre-war jobs as some of them did do. I know my sister went back and worked in a solicitor's office as she did before she joined. And I did, only for a few months, went back into my job at Steven's Stores. Back into the sewing again, and I think a lot of them

03:30 did do that. But I have another friend, she became a postie. She delivered the mail and that's where she met her husband. You know, I think it altered their ideas and that they would rather have outdoor jobs rather than sitting in offices. It didn't really worry me because I felt that I knew

04:00 once we were married, I would be able to be outside and drive a tractor and do all the things I liked to do. I think most of them did expect that they would slip back into their pre-war office jobs, and I think a lot of them did.

And in some cases it changed their expectations for the rest of their lives?

Oh yes it did. Yes, you know

04:30 I don't if you've heard of Miss Mary White, one of our field officers. She was quite well known as...I suppose you would call her a greenie, but with conservation. She passed away a couple of years ago and there was quite a big article written about her. We just knew she was like that but we didn't know just what good work she had done.

05:00 And that's probably only from her Land Army experience. I believe she was a school teacher prior to going into the Land Army. I met a young person at Weight Watchers and she said, 'In your Land Army experience did you ever know a Miss Mary White'? And I said 'Yes'. She could really get you under the thumb. She said

05:30 she was at her college or one of the secondary schools or colleges. She was a head mistress there. So hers was a different life altogether and did something worth while with her experience, I suppose you could say. I can't sort of just off the top of my head think of any other people who became...did wonderful works

06:00 with their experiences.

You mentioned before that the farm work was still considered men's work. Do you think the Land Army helped to change perceptions on that?

Well it must have done because quite a few of them stayed and even bought their own poultry farms, which was something a woman could do. It wasn't so much heavy slogging in a poultry farm. But quite a few of them probably did

06:30 and women's lib certainly wasn't in then. I think it did. It made them more independent and realise...I think they proved that they could do things that previously they had no idea they could do. I mean I certainly never expected to be, as my mother would put it, a navvy.

Let's just talk specifically for a second. I was a bit vague on just what you did at Tallyho?

07:00 It was mixed. It was apples and I think there were pear trees. Apple and pear trees. Firstly it was pruning time when I first went there. And then the trees had to be sprayed. Also he grew cabbages and

cauliflowers and something else, and they had to be picked to go into Vic Market. He used to have big crates for them to go in. He would take them

07:30 into Vic Markets for the sales, probably Sunday night for the Monday morning sales. Yes, it was mainly mixed orchard and mixed vegetables. You know, it's amazing to think now. I've driven along there. When Was was alive we drove along and I tried to pick out where it was. But I mean, it's all housing now. There all farms around there.

08:00 A lot of the girls worked nearby at Donvale, and they're city areas now. They're not farms at all. Yes it was mainly...that's where I learned to drive a tractor and I could drive the tractor while he and the other boy that worked there did the ploughing behind the tractor, well one of them.

08:30 For the spraying it used to be two of them, but for doing the ploughing they would have to walk behind the tractor and do the...it was called...we used to do it on the vines, it was called silly ploughing. It was a plough that sort of went in, weeded around and came out and weeded the weeds out. It was much the same sort of plough that we used for the silly ploughing. I don't know if that's the correct name,

09:00 but my husband used to say we had to do the silly ploughing. That was done with a tractor.

What, you used the silly ploughing on the vines with your husband, not with Mr Duncan?

No, out at Tallyho. I used to sit on the tractor only. I didn't do the ploughing. He probably didn't trust me to do the ploughing. But I learned to drive the tractor and you had to drive in close to the trees and he had to work it in and out, the

09:30 plough and just walk behind the tractor. In the early days I think they had horses to do it. But he didn't have any horses on his property, it was just tractors, or one tractor.

And he had another person working there as well?

Yes. A young man worked there. A young teenager worked there. We worked together on the pruning and

10:00 then we used to...it was a good job, a lazy job. We used to cut the bark of the tree and kill the grubs that were probably going to get in and eat the apples. I was never there in apple picking time because I'd left by the time the apples were...I hoped they got some apples after my pruning because it was different to pruning the vines. To prune an apple tree, it was altogether different. There wasn't much left of that to be done when I got there in

10:30 September. It was almost too late to do the apple pruning.

What was your favourite sort of work?

Oh, the vines. The first one I ever had. Rolling the canes back on because I became quite good at it and I could be quicker than anyone doing it. This was after we were married. I would like to say I could do so many acres in a day and I could. I got very good at it.

11:00 And I loved doing that. And it always looked so nice after it had been neatly pruned. It looked like someone with their hair parted down the middle because the vine was here and the canes would go both ways. And to look down the patch of vines and see them all nice and neat and pruned down, looked really good. It was a job well done.

At Tallyho, was there an expectation that you would help

11:30 **with the kitchen or the children?**

No, no. I didn't have to do anything like that. They were nice little children. I think I probably read stories to them but they didn't expect it. They were just three nice little children.

Do you think that happened occasionally. Land Army girls acting as nannies or kitchen hand?

I haven't heard of it. They may have done, but I haven't heard of it.

12:00 It wasn't in my experience and I haven't heard anyone say that they did. Perhaps some of them did have to cook, or help with the cooking. And I mean, a lot of them weren't in a home situation, which I was in the three private ones. I was in homes. But some of them were just in...they worked and they were in, say, a big hut and at the end of their working day they used to have to

12:30 cook their own meals. In fact quite a few of them did that. But I didn't. So that would have been hard. I mean, I knocked off and I had a meal ready for me.

What was the food like there?

The food was wonderful in most of the places but at the last place, being German, there was a lot of fried bread. Oh I used to have an awful lot of fried bread and I didn't want to because

13:00 my boyfriend was down and I broke out in styes and I think it was the food that I wasn't used to. It was really good food there. I know I got an abscesses. I got an abscess under my arm and another one just

above my eye, and I got styes. Really my skin broke out and it was probably

13:30 from all the fry ups. It wasn't good. But I think that was just the way they ate and I ate accordingly.

You didn't have a choice did you?

No. You were hungry and you ate it.

I was wondering if the sun was ever a problem with your work...in your Land Army working life as well?

Well see, we weren't

14:00 aware of it then. Skin cancer and all that wasn't made anything of. And really I suppose, we took terrible risks. I mean at Lake Bolac as I said, when it was hot we'd work with just bib and brace overall and take off as much as we could and I used to often just wear a scarf with no shade on my face.

14:30 I don't think we cared about...worried about our skin, that we might perhaps have skin cancer. And we should have. And we liked to be brown, didn't we? That was the thing. You had to be suntanned. And I think a few of them since...well I know, I've had a skin cancer taken off the side of my nose,

15:00 and I know a few of them have had skin cancers taken out of their face. So probably they have reaped the rewards of not being very careful, if rewards is the right word to say. I don't think we thought about it. I don't think we were issued with hats to wear. Not shade hats. I know in some of my old photos I've got army hats. But

15:30 I think we probably bought those ourselves from disposal places. I don't think we were issued with hats to wear. But we should have, probably. Because we could have...I mean picking oranges, which I later did in my married life when our second property was a citrus orchard, there was no way you could pick the oranges and wear a hat because you had to get into the tree you know. You couldn't wear a hat

16:00 and pick. So I used to just wear a scarf around my hair.

I was wondering with your situation at Tallyho. Did you ever feel like you could have complained?

No, I don't think...I probably thought, 'It's what I volunteered for. If it's nasty you just put up with it'. I think

16:30 that was just my way of thinking. You don't complain because it gets tough. You just put up with it and get on with it. I think that's probably the way that you thought.

It's a hypothetical question, but did you think you could have left?

No, I would never have thought of it, no.

17:00 I didn't ever think of walking off it, no. I would have liked to have probably, but I just thought, 'Well this is it'. You know a couple of times when I really wanted to, when work was done and I wanted to go into...my little room wasn't locked. It was sort on the back of the place. And I wanted to go and have a wash and put my uniform on probably,

17:30 to go into the city to meet Was. Sometimes it would all be locked up and I would have to scale a high paling fence and the only wash I could have was an outside wash house, and I'd go and have a cold wash and put lots of deodorant on and go to the city like that. But as I say, I was lucky I had my friend's people to go to in Coburg and

18:00 I'd go out there and I could have a shower or bath out there, and be alright again. But no, it didn't. I used to think, 'Well that's done on purpose but I'm not going to let it get to me'. I was still determined I was going to go, so I could climb the fence and get into my room and get my clothes and go, which I did.

18:30 **I'm thinking more of Lake Bolac. Were you able to have a drink occasionally?**

When you're out working in the fields?

That too, but I was thinking of more alcoholic drinks?

Alcohol? I suppose, if they wanted they could go into...because it wasn't like you were in barracks. They could go out.

19:00 I mean they could go out if they wanted to. I mean we could have gone out into...there was a hotel, and they could have, the one's that drank. I never drank, and I don't know of any of them getting drunk. I can't recall that any of them got drunk. I don't think drinking was ever a problem with them. Maybe I was still too green to have woken up to it.

19:30 But we didn't. And even when we went on leave we didn't have a drink. I probably didn't have a drink, and I don't drink much now because my two sisters used to say I'm a two pot screamer they reckon, because they would give me two...and I am, I'm talking enough now. I'm more like a one pot screamer I think. I've never been a great one. I know my daughter

20:00 comes and that's her whisky decanter out there. She has a whisky every time she comes to visit me. I've got my Bailey's Irish Cream in the fridge. That's my tippie occasionally. I've never been a great one for the drink. So that didn't worry us, but I guess it was there if they wanted it. There was a hotel in Lake Bolac.

And did many of the women smoke?

Oh yes.

20:30 We all had a go at smoking. My sister smoked until the day she died. She was a chain smoker, she was. But most of them, or quite a few of them, smoked. I mean they probably did drink, but I never saw any drunks. I probably just thought they were happy.

Was it hard to get cigarettes?

Yes it would have been. They would have been rationed because there was clothes rationing.

21:00 The ones that didn't smoke...I know Pill used to get them to send to her brother. She used to get the cigarettes and send to her brother. I don't know if I took my issue and gave them to my...because I didn't smoke. Jean, as I say, smoked. I didn't fancy it very much, so thankfully I didn't take that up.

21:30 I used to probably get mine and give them to my Dad, probably. He would have been rationed too, wouldn't he? Food was rationed and just because we were in the Land Army, we still had our ration book. We probably had to give our ration books to them to get our ration of

22:00 butter and so forth that was rationed. Look, really, I've just forgotten just what was rationed. I know clothing was rationed because you could only buy so much in the way of clothing. And that's why I thought it would be so good to be in the Land Army. That's the only time I saved any money. I saved up seventy pounds which was a lot of money for me, and I could have paid up debt to my father but I didn't.

22:30 I saved up seventy pounds during my twenty-two months that I was in the Land Army, and that was good money. Because no clothes to buy. You had it all provided, which was a big saving.

I was wondering if you were able to keep progress on the war?

Yes, most people had a radio and there were newspapers.

23:00 We did, we kept quite interested in what was going on because most of us had relatives and friends over there, and we wanted to know what was going on.

I was going to ask about that. How did you find out about news of loss, or someone being captured?

Yes. It was...you'd hear some of it

23:30 on the radio and then of course people that you knew would have had the telegram, so you'd hear from them that someone had been taken prisoner or had been killed. Yes it was sad to hear the...especially people you had gone to school with.

24:00 Yes it was...and it was happening all the time. I wrote to a boy when I was at the Gas Works. He had left there to join the air force. He was shot down over Belgium. He was a rear gunner. He had most of his face shot

24:30 away. I believe it was only his mask that was holding his...you know, the shrapnel had gone right through. He had his face sort of reconstructed. Actually I've just caught up with...by doing opportunity shop duty here in Macleod, I said something about living in Warrnambool and this lady said, 'Do you know Fergusons'? and I said, 'Yes,

25:00 George Ferguson'. And she said, 'Well, he's married to my (so and so, so and so)'. So I caught up with George. He married an English girl and he's living in England now. So he's alright. So that's good. But I lost track of a lot of those people. Once I got married and went to live so far away from Warrnambool I lost track of a lot of those people. But I've caught up with her again and we're writing to one another, so that's good.

25:30 **And when you were at Lake Bolac, and were actually with other girls, did people receive bad news then?**

I don't know of anyone there who really did. I know Betty McGuinness was very worried about her brothers because they were in the service, but I think they came through alright. But I don't know of any of them who

26:00 got the telegram that said that they had lost someone. I don't think that happened. Of course a lot of the girls...there weren't many of them who were...there were a couple of them who were married. One, and her husband was a Scotsman, but I think he was in the English...out here, but...I've met him since

- 26:30 and he's passed away now. But I don't know of anyone who got the letter to say that someone had passed away. But undoubtedly they did. Not in our particular group, but undoubtedly they did. I used to hear of boys from home who were missing, and a girl I worked with, her husband had been taken prisoner
- 27:00 of the Japanese, but he survived. But it happened. I think when you're young you just think, 'Well, that's what happens in a war. You're going to get bad news', and now that I'm older I think, 'Why did we...' we just sort of just carried on. I had
- 27:30 a boy that I worked with. He was at Victoria Barracks and he never wanted to join the army but he knew he would have to. His father was a colonel and it was expected of him. And poor Clemmy. He used to talk about it. He would say, 'I don't know how I'm ever going to kill anyone', and he finished up committing suicide. I was probably about
- 28:00 seventeen when Clem did that, and that was the first friend I lost. And that was terrible to think he had committed suicide. I don't really know if that was the reason. Whether he was getting near the end of his training and he couldn't face what he might have to do, or whether something else had gone wrong. I can remember saying to my mother at the time, 'My heart's broken, I'll never get over this'.
- 28:30 But of course you do. He was just a nice young chap that I worked with. We weren't romantically interested in one another or anything. But just a nice young fellow and it was awful to think he had taken his own life. Yes, I had forgotten about that. But I had cousins who were in the army and
- 29:00 they came through it. Another one in the air force. They all came through it alright. And the friends who were prisoners, most of them survived. I don't know of any...oh, the girl who was the next number to me, her brother...it was only when I met Was.
- 29:30 He was in the army with her brother, and he was killed. He died a prisoner. I said to Was about this lovely friend, Bonny Clyford and Was said, 'Did she have a brother Gordon?', and I said, 'Yes. He died a prisoner of the Japs', and he said, 'He was a mate of mine in the army'. As a matter of fact...I've got a... I'm going to give it to a Land Army friend of mine.
- 30:00 It's the list of the prisoners of the Japs, and his name's in there. But I'm going to give it to June because her husband's in that too. It's a paper that my husband had kept and I think it would be nice for her to have it seeing her husband's name is on the list of the prisoners. But a few of the Warrnambool boys, I've just put a dot under their names. They were prisoners of the Japanese. You know we were sad, and as I
- 30:30 say, this man at Tallyho used to tease me about the names that were coming through...that they were missing believed killed and they were now saying they were dead. It was...not that I heard names of anyone I knew, but you listened and hoped you weren't going to, and it was an awful thing to tease you about when you were so
- 31:00 intense about it all. But it happened.

The men we've talked to who were overseas say they really appreciated the letters that were written to them. Did you write many letters?

Oh yes. I did. I had a cousin of my mother's. I wrote to him and then he asked me if I would write to this other chap. He was a Rat of Tobruk, and the last I heard of him he was wounded,

- 31:30 so I stopped getting letters from him, so I presume he may not have survived. I've tried to trace him since, when I've been up in some of these Land Army things. He came from Cohuna and I've been to a couple of ex-service women things in that area. I've asked them if any of them knew of a Barney Carter in that area. They knew of my cousin who was from a big family in the area, but they didn't know of him. So I presume he might have been just a shearer
- 32:00 or someone who joined up from that area, but I wrote to him just as a pen friend.

Just as a favour to...

To my cousin, yes. I think that happened. A lot of them liked to get letters from...you didn't have to know the person. You swapped photos. I used to have photographs of him. Actually I've got Podge's photographs

- 32:30 out there to be sorted and she's got some of my photos in her photograph book sent to me by this Barney Carter bathing on the beach at Gaza and so forth. So I'll take them out. They're mine. I'll claim them again.

What sort of things would you write to him?

Just day to day things that you did. I mean, probably mine were a bit frivolous. Something about going to the beach

- 33:00 and a game of tennis and things that you did. Whereas his...they couldn't say too much. They would often have bits cut out where they censor had been at work. Yes, I mean, it's amazing it would be of interest to someone. You would send photographs. I would send photographs of myself with my bathers

on to give it a bit of a thrill.

33:30 Whether it did or not...but he would send photographs to you and I'd send photographs. And I wrote to my cousin too, as well as this mate of his. But my cousin got to be either a lieutenant or a captain. But Barney Carter still stayed one of the boys. I think he might have just been one of the lads and my cousin was probably a bit sorry for him because he wasn't getting

34:00 any letters. Podge used to write to this cousin...his brother who was also over there. She wrote to an Englishman, probably out here. But he was an Englishman, and I think after when she went nursing, she nursed at Hammersmith

34:30 Hospital in London for a while, and she met up with this George. She found out where he lived and went to visit he and his wife in England somewhere. So they were just really pen pals.

Again, some of the men had shared letters. Did women do that as well?

I don't know

35:00 if any of ours did. I didn't share mine with any of my friends. And I used to receive letters, especially from George Ferguson, the one who was wounded. He was awarded the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal actually. His letters would have been alright because he was just a mate, but any love letters I wouldn't have shared with anyone. I kept them to myself. I wouldn't have shared

35:30 Was's letters with anybody. They were for me.

Did those letters help you to get a sense of what it was like for the men?

No, not really, I don't think so because they weren't allowed to say too much. I mean, half the time you didn't know where they were. You couldn't guess. Well, I suppose you could guess if you were looking

36:00 ...no you couldn't look because there was no TV. But you'd listen to the radio and get an idea of where the big battles were going on. So you'd have an idea. But I think George's letters from...he was in Port Moresby; I don't think they were so heavily censored as some of the ones that were overseas and right in the thick of it.

36:30 They were pretty much censored. This Barney Carter and Cyril were both in the Middle East, and my cousin Frank was also over there, so those letters didn't give away too many military secrets. You could only guess where they were.

So what sort of things would they write to you about?

37:00 Probably just you know, 'We went for a swim'. Or, 'We had some leave and we went to (so and so)', and that would be scored out. They probably skimmed over things pretty well. I don't know...if they had known you as my cousin Frank did, he might talk about things we did when we were young.

37:30 'Do you remember when we did (such and such) when we came to Koroit'? He was older than I was and he rode his motorbike to Koroit and Mum thought he was going to go bald so she rubbed something in his hair and he reckoned it took all his hair out. He was a great joker. His letters were alright because we had plenty of 'do you remember' stuff, which wasn't any harm to the war effort. And really I suppose a rather light hearted letter would be

38:00 better than if they said, 'We lost (so and so)'. I don't remember getting too many...although with Barney Carter, I can remember him writing from hospital and saying he had lost his foot. He had lost his foot, and that was probably one of the later letters I got from him.

38:30 He may have died. I never ever heard, and I lost track of Cyril too, my cousin, because he went to New Guinea and I think he was missing. But then after he came back, and he was in New Guinea as well.

39:00 I've heard since that he's some fairly well up in the Legacy movement, only through this old ex-boyfriend who's so up with the ...he came to see me at one of my reunions. He went to Warrnambool and he came to see me just after Was had died and he said, 'You used to write to someone and I've met him since at a Legacy thing'.

39:30 He said he was a captain. I said he wasn't a boyfriend. He was a cousin, my mother's cousin's son or something like that. He really wasn't, but I said he was my cousin. But that particular one was my forty-second cousin I think. So yes, George had met up with him at some Legacy reunion or conference more than a reunion

40:00 at Ballarat. So whether he lives around Ballarat I don't know. I should try and find out where he is and say 'Do you remember'? We used to write to one another. But it's a long time ago.

00:33 **I was wondering what it was like in Australia during, or just after when the Japanese had entered the war and whether people had a real fear of a Japanese invasion?**

Well, I think so. Once we heard that the submarines had gotten into Sydney, I think we really did think there might have been, and of course

01:00 we lived on the coast too, and we thought we were pretty vulnerable down that way. We did think, until the Americans came in, that the Japs could have overrun our country.

What were your impressions of the Americans?

Do you really want me to say?

I do. Especially now.

Well I didn't like them. I thought they thought

01:30 they were God's gift to women and that they thought the women would swoon and fall into their arms. And they did, they gave you that opinion that all they had to say was, 'Hello honey' (I'm sorry about this, here's this little girl with her American accent). No I really didn't like them. A lot of the girls did, and said they were great fellows, but I didn't.

02:00 I think the girls were at fault as much as anything. They had a lot more money than our Australian boys. They could get you silk stockings and ...they did. They were a lot better dressed than our soldiers and the girls would go for them. I wasn't going to be one of those. I wanted an Aussie soldier. And yet I can't say

02:30 I personally let myself know any of them because I just wouldn't be nice to them. And yet they...what would we have done without them?

Whereabouts would you have come into contact with those troops?

Actually before I joined the Land Army there was a band of them who came to Warrnambool, an American band. I mean, some of the really good girls, one in particular, made such a fool of

03:00 herself. They wouldn't get off the train. They had to stop the train at Camperdown or somewhere and hurl a couple of these good girls off. They had just fallen in love with the American soldiers, and that's... and then you'd just meet them when you were on leave. 'Hello honey, what are you doing tonight?'

03:30 I just didn't really let myself get to know any of them because I just sort of thought...I had seen how some of the women had fallen all over them. To me, it was the fault of the girls. They did, the women went mad. They were so special compared to our...well they were. They were much better dressed and had the very best of everything.

04:00 They must have had a lot more money than our boys to spend on the girls. So I wasn't one of them. But I've got one of my ex-Land Army friends now. She now writes to a chap that she met then. He was married and he was lonely and she went out with him. And she said there was nothing. He wasn't romantically her boyfriend and he was just a nice fellow, and

04:30 of course some must have been alright. But no, I didn't have any liaisons with the American soldiers.

What sort of things were other men saying about the American soldiers?

Well, I know my husband has told me since that the girls up there in Brisbane...the soldiers didn't like the way the girls went for the

05:00 Americans rather than the Aussie soldiers. They didn't like it. Apparently there must have been a big brawl up there. The American soldiers and the Aussie soldiers had a big brawl up there at one stage, probably over somebody's girlfriend I guess. I didn't really see any of that happen here but...I don't think our soldiers did. I don't know...

05:30 there were air force boys as well. But I think there was a lot of jealousy...their food was better apparently, and they had everything a little bit better than what our boys had.

Now at the time was there a real sense of gratitude towards the American troops,

06:00 **that they were here to help?**

Not with our generation because I think we were a bit young and silly. But the older generation probably yes, I think so. I mean, let's face it. Where would we have been without them. The Japs were so close to...we didn't really know.

06:30 It's all hindsight now. We didn't know then how close we were to having the Japs take over. But apparently it was very close. No, I think we've got to be grateful to them. They are certainly different to us. I think our Aussie soldiers were a bit more down to earth. A bit more...

07:00 well maybe not. They were larrikins I think. Our sense of humour is so altogether different to theirs. It

is now, so it probably was then. I'm not very much of an authority on them. I just didn't like the way the girls behaved, so I wasn't going to be part of it.

How was the media portraying the Americans?

- 07:30 Oh they just went overboard for them. Yes, that's what I felt. See with me, I've got this stick-in-the-mud thing in my mind that there's nothing better than a good old Aussie soldier. Nothing would dislodge that from my....so I'm probably being a bit too stick-in-
- 08:00 the-mud. But I think they were portrayed as being pretty glamorous. Of course there was that soldier, the one who murdered the girls, Lyonsky. I can remember there used to be some pretty sick jokes going around, that they caught Lyonsky
- 08:30 at Flinders or Spencer Street Station. And where he was going...he was going to Kilmore. I mean there used to be all these awful sick jokes going around. But I mean, that was just one man. But I'm not really an authority on them because as I say,
- 09:00 I cold-shouldered them. But I do think probably...our boys certainly, if they had gone to another country, they would have been just the same way, wouldn't they? It was just boys being boys.

I was about to ask you about that actually. Whether the women at home wondered about what the boys

got up to overseas?

Well see, I didn't have one overseas. Well I did, but he was in New Guinea. I mean, my dear old wise father said to me...he knew I wouldn't finish up marrying him because I didn't seem to worry very much about him and I didn't. It was all romantic. I had a boyfriend.

- 10:00 He was in New Guinea. But I didn't think he was going to get killed. So maybe my Dad saw through me more than I saw through myself. I didn't really have a proper feeling for him because I wasn't worried about him being killed. But the women who, the wives, they must have worried mustn't they? My husband's told me since that some of his mates,
- 10:30 some of them were bits of bad boys. He knew they were married men and he said they would have girl friends wherever they went. So it happened. It just happens doesn't it? See I didn't. I just had George up there and I mean he could have gone off with a little Port Moresby lady and ...probably they did
- 11:00 misbehave. And probably the way I really didn't have a true feeling in my heart for him, I probably wasn't caring very much whether he did or not. I was having a bit of flirtations while he was away. That was it. They probably did misbehave.

Do you think it was harder or easier

for the married women among you?

Oh I think it must have been harder for them. It must have been really hard for the married women to be separated from their loved ones. I can only imagine now what it must have been like. Especially if you were older and you had little children. It must have been really dreadful.

- 12:00 Yes I think so.

Just talking about the media before. I was wondering how they portrayed the Japanese?

Oh they were barely human. They really were portrayed as almost animals because they were really cruel what they did to those nurses and the prisoners.

- 12:30 If the prisoners speak, and nine times out of ten they don't speak. My friend's husband doesn't. He was in Changi. He doesn't speak much about it. I think we just thought that they...and I think the same now - I don't really think they think quite the same way as we do.
- 13:00 Even though I've met some...not so much Japanese, but Vietnamese people and I think they're not so different to us in their thoughts. It's just their culture isn't it? It's different to ours and they were doing what they were trained to do, and I guess if some of the stories come out, some of
- 13:30 our men might have treated prisoners just as badly. If the boot was on the other foot, maybe.

How did that news begin to come back home about the Japanese atrocities or bad treatment?

It must have been in the newspapers because...well it would have been, and really

- 14:00 I suppose, the really bad stories probably didn't come out until after the war had finished. We knew that there were things happened, but it was probably just war. Yes it would be newspapers because actually I guess there would have been a clamp-down on it, wouldn't there,
- 14:30 at the time. But a lot of it has come out since with films and documentaries that have been written and ...I mean some of the stories of the nurses who were massacred. Some of the stories were probably...I'm

trying to think of the general who

15:00 was supposed to have abandoned his men. Can you remind me of what his name was?

Was it Gordon Bennett out of Singapore?

Yes, yes. My husband said a lot of his men thought he was marvellous because he only did what he had to do. He was their General and it was up to him to escape. But you know,

15:30 most of the civilian population probably thought he was a traitor, that he walked out on his men. There's different stories come out, but my husband said that a lot of his men thought he was just great. But as I say, at the time probably none of this means as much as what it does now.

16:00 We've learned more about it, but then it was all shrouded in secrecy. We didn't know so much about it I don't think.

The attacks on Australia weren't necessarily public knowledge either. Did you know of the bombing of Darwin and Northern Australia?

I think we did. Yes, I think we did. But not as much as what we know now. We knew about

16:30 the Japanese submarines. I think we found out about that. But I mean there's different things. I mean even, there was something washed up down near home. I was trying to think what it was...a wing of a Japanese plane I think was washed up along the coast down around there. I mean, they must have been fairly close...although you wouldn't know with

17:00 the tides. If it had been in the sea it probably could have washed in with the tides. But there was always scare stories going around. That further around wasn't very safe because the sea was open. Where we were was in a bay and it was a fairly rocky port to get into. But it used to be talked about, that we were pretty wide open to the open sea.

17:30 But we sort of ...I can remember my father getting stirred up with one of the ships that went down. There was a man who took over his job in Koroit, and I think he used to tease my father because he would get a real good bite from him. There was some boat that they had predicted had gone down and they finally got it. They did sink it and I can remember

18:00 Mr Guinea coming with a great big smile on his face to tell Mac that they had finally got this...can't remember the name of the boat. That they had sunk it. 'They've finally got her Mac!' I thought there was going to be murder done in the kitchen at home. Just teasing my Dad because he used to bite fairly well. He took the war in very much, and he would because he had been there.

18:30 Whereas to me, it would all be in my imagination as far as I was concerned. My father had the reality of it and it would have been different.

So sorry. It was an allied ship that was sunk?

Yes, I'm trying to think of the name of it. This is one of those things I was saying before. Names just escape you. I remember Mr Guinea saying, 'Well Mac, they've finally got her', and they had.

19:00 Several times there was scare-mongering that she had been sunk, and they finally did. I can still see him now with his big broad smile telling my Dad. He took an awful risk because my father was very heated when it came to anything in the war. And Mr Guinea had never been in any of the services so it probably wouldn't have meant as much to him.

19:30 Because old Mac used to get really very stirred up about it all.

Would your father talk to you very much about the progress of the war?

No, I think he was a bit disgusted that I was having such a good time, and really wasn't caring about this supposed boyfriend. I really wasn't caring about him. As a matter of fact, I would get a letter from George and he'd have S.W.A.L.K written on the back, and that was

20:00 'Sealed With A Loving Kiss', you know. And my father used to say to me, 'Write "Inagmagnoon"'. It was Egyptian or something he'd learned in the First World War. 'Write "Inagmagnoon" on it when you write back'. I said, 'What does it mean'? And he wouldn't tell me. And I found out it meant something like, 'You're crazy' or 'You're mad' or something like that. So anyhow I wasn't going to write Inagmagnoon on the letter. But my father was

20:30 very...the news used to really get him. We used to say, 'Pappy's sucking his tooth. Things aren't too good'. And he really did. Probably he'd get his map out and he'd know the places and so forth, where things were happening. And probably he didn't have to use

21:00 his imagination. He would know what it would be like, what hell it would be because it certainly must have been. Their war was supposed to be the war that would end all wars, which it wasn't.

So I suppose it stirred things up for him?

Yes it would have. And I think the fact that...I can remember when Jean was going to join the Land Army and she was only seventeen, so she

- 21:30 had to have Dad's permission to go. She said 'Pappy will you write my permission to go anywhere in Australia?' and he said, 'I don't care if they send you to the thundering Middle East, Jean'. Jean was giving him a bit of a bad time so Jean could go to the Middle East as far as he was concerned. He didn't mean it of course, but I suppose he thought...and he was probably right,
- 22:00 we were a bit too wrapped up in our own...having a wonderful time to really take in the true seriousness of it. I don't think we did. I'm sure we didn't. I think it had to be someone a bit older and with a bit more sense to really worry about it. At eighteen and nineteen we were still enjoying
- 22:30 ourselves. That's terrible to say isn't it.

Not at all. That's what eighteen and nineteen year olds are meant to do.

Yes. Now, with this last Iraq business, I was so worried. I've got an eighteen year old grandson, and I was thinking, 'Oh dear,

- 23:00 not in my lifetime again'. I mean I grew up listening to or admiring my father....because there weren't any gory stories, but thinking soldiers were just the salt of the earth, and he wasn't back in Australia until...I've just found an old letter of his there, written from where he was in different parts, in Gallipoli and so forth. It's in the old magazine of Podge's.
- 23:30 I mean he was back in 1919 by then, and he was married in 1921. Podge was born in '22 and I was born in '24. So the war would still be very much in his mind. He hadn't long been back from the killing fields had he, and he was married with young children. Then of course in 1939 he
- 24:00 was too old...but he would have, but he was in the Retreads as they used to call them...the VDC, the Volunteer Defence Corp and he was doing garrison duty down at Queenscliff and Port Arlington and down that way during the war. That was the war that I grew up in, and since then there's been Vietnam.
- 24:30 My son Ross would have...he was one who would have been called up but he had been in an accident and had a plate in his leg, so he was physically not fit. But I've had a father and if I had been a boy myself, a son, and if this Iraq business went on...Paris just wanted to be like Granddad and be a soldier, so God willing that won't happen,
- 25:00 that he goes into the army, but I suppose it has to be. There always has to be an army. I don't think... Anzac Day to me...people say we're only glorifying war. I don't think we're glorifying war. I think we're just proud.

Have you noticed a changing perception of

25:30 Anzac Day?

Only just recently I think. I felt it this year with the march. The crowd seemed to be a lot better, a lot bigger. The commentary as we marched was absolutely wonderful this year. And we were only a small group this year. We only had twenty-eight of us marching. We all felt it.

- 26:00 Maybe, the children seem to be learning more in the schools. I think...my husband mainly used to talk to Paris about...he wasn't interested to hear...I would say, 'I was in the army too', and he would say, 'I don't want to hear about yours Grandma, you didn't kill anybody'. And I would say, 'Well Granddad didn't either. He was a transport driver, he didn't kill anybody'. But that's young boys.
- 26:30 They're bloodthirsty and they thought war was all play. I think we don't glorify war and I do think if you asked the kids they probably do know more about it now. It seems to be. I don't know if it's because of the trouble in the Middle East
- 27:00 and they're doing comparisons or what it is. But they seem to be...not so much...although they're doing these pilgrimages. They're going back to Gallipoli and they'd be great-grandchildren, wouldn't they? They wouldn't be grandchildren, they'd be great-grandchildren of the original ANZACs. So maybe they are learning more.
- 27:30 I hope they never stop it. I hope they never stop Anzac Day or change our flag. But that's another thing isn't it?

Just going back, I'm wondering what sort of recruitment drives they had for women's services?

I think they were pretty good. I think there were plenty of posters around. The railway stations used to have the big posters, you know...

- 28:00 I've even got one somewhere; it says: 'Join the Women's Land Army'. It was posted up. It used to be in public places. And I think...I mean there were all sorts of things. The bonds. They used to have these rallies where you'd buy war bonds to help with the war and so forth.

28:30 They had rallies to join up and so forth. I think women's services was just mainly...it wouldn't have been like the men's I guess. It was just mainly done with posters everywhere. And of course they looked pretty glamorous and made you want to put on one of the uniforms.

What sort of image did they paint for you in the Land Army for example?

29:00 Well they didn't paint very much of an image of what you'd really have to do with cows, for instance. I probably would have waited and joined the air force. No, it was just a picture of a girl in uniform. And there's a lovely one I've got out there of a girl carrying a sheaf of wheat and she looks so happy with the haystack behind her. And I thought, 'Oh how wonderful to be able to do something

29:30 like that'. I never ever learnt to ride a horse and I never worked with horses. No animals at all. But I don't think the posters to ask you to join...they just depicted a girl with a uniform which was much the same as the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] uniform. It was, 'Join the Land Army, Your Country

30:00 Needs You'. Something like that. And it didn't...maybe the air force one would have an aeroplane in the background. The AWAS would have the rising sun and it would look a bit more military-like. I don't think it really...the Land Army one wouldn't really prepare you for the fact that you'd have to work with pigs, and some of the things that you

30:30 wouldn't perhaps want to do if you had thought it through properly.

Did you get a sense that the other women's services were quite distinct from one another?

No, really because a lot of them did do the same sort of work. Doing office work, doing paper work and I think probably the ones that I thought

31:00 were probably pretty good and would have appealed to me, was some of the girls who were on the search-lights. Some of them worked with the...and the drivers, the girls who were drivers. I thought some of them were a bit more outgoing. But I thought the ones who worked in the city and worked at Victoria Barracks and places like that;

31:30 to me it was very much like what you could do in civilian life. But it all had to be done. But I don't know if I thought it was so...I think I was looking for the glamour side of it more, or something different to do, rather than more of the same than what you were doing in civilian life.

So you were looking for a different

32:00 **experience?**

Yes. And I think some of the young soldiers who joined up, from what you hear, they went along for the adventure. They really didn't know...they probably didn't dwell so much on that they were probably going to have to kill somebody. Otherwise why would they go off with smiles on their faces? I think it's all part of being

32:30 young and you don't really - you know, when you're young you don't really think of the hard and gory parts of what might happen. And I think probably the fact that there was a war on and comparing...as I said to Kristen [interviewer] before, with the little Polish lady that I met; comparing my

33:00 war and what I felt like at sixteen and what was happening to her over there in Europe. Being in a concentration camp. We really didn't suffer much in Australia. I mean, our boys did. Our boys that went to the war did, but we didn't really. But some of our poor nurses who were slaughtered by the Japanese and the ones in the Middle East...

33:30 the ones who went overseas, they had it really tough. I don't think if we stayed at home and worked, it was work but it wasn't so very dangerous was it?

Which leads me onto...because we're very near the end of this tape, the story involving the hat pins. Can you tell us about those?

34:00 Oh yes. That was on leave from Lake Bolac, which we used to occasionally do. We had come up by, I suppose by bus, I think it was bus. We had to go up to Ararat where you could catch the Adelaide express coming through at some ungodly hour of the morning. So we had to book into this old place in Ararat. It was down near the station. We had been to the pictures. There were four

34:30 of us, and Pill was one of them. And as I say, Pill knew all the ropes. We'd been to the pictures and afterwards we went to supper, and there were these young lads eyeing us off. There used to be a song during the war: 'What's good is in the army and what's left will never harm me'. And they were only young boys but they were still being quite flirtatious to these four Land Army girls. And Bonny and Pill, who were

35:00 both pretty worldly-wise said, 'Watch it when we leave here because they'll jump us'. And Bonny or Pill said to me, 'Have you still got that hat pin in your hair'? which I did have. She said, when they grab you, stick the hat pin into them and they'll go for their lives. Well, just as we got round near this place, it was very dark and they grabbed us. I took my hat pin out and jabbed it in and he let out an

- 35:30 almighty roar, but I must have jabbed it in fairly far because I lost my hat pin and he went running off and we didn't have any more trouble. I could have stabbed, him couldn't I? I think it was in his bottom. I hope it was in his bottom. But I lost my hat pin. It wouldn't have been very nice, would it, to have a hat pin jabbed into your bottom?
- 36:00 My son said I should have told you that one.
- That's a beauty. So you did see combat didn't you?**
- Well I think I caused it. I didn't have anything done like that to me, thank goodness. That was happening in poor old Ararat. It was an awful old place we used to stay at. It used to have bugs and the girls said, 'Don't hang your clothes in the wardrobe. When you take your uniform
- 36:30 off you hang it on a chair in the middle of the room', because there were...I don't know what sort of bugs, but they said 'Don't put your clothes in the wardrobe'. We were only staying the night. We'd stay there and then we'd get up very early in the morning and catch the train as it came through - the Adelaide express going through to Melbourne. That's what happened to the poor boys in Ararat.
- 37:00 If they ever hear of this, they'll probably come and get the old lady who stabbed them with her hat pin.
- I just want to clarify something. You had a hat pin because your hair was longer too, longer than it should have been?**
- Yes, yes. We were supposed to have our hair an inch above our collar, but I used to like mine long, so I would put a ribbon around it and roll it over the top of the ribbon, and then when you put your hat on you still had your hair all neat and an inch above
- 37:30 your collar. So the hat pin had to hold all the mop of hair down. That was breaking the rules because you weren't allowed to have long hair. You had to have your hair cut off nice and short.
- Was anyone enforcing that?**
- Oh yes. When you had your uniform on, I mean, my photo there, my hair's too long. It's right down on my shoulders. That was taken at home on leave,
- 38:00 so it didn't matter. If you were around any of the field officers they'd say, 'Your hair is supposed to be an inch above your collar'. You weren't allowed to have long hair. I mean, in those days it was the thing to have long hair. But some of them had little plaits and they used to plait it and tuck it in their hats and that was alright. Bonny used to do that. I just used to
- 38:30 roll it up and the hat pin sort of held the hat on. But it was also a good stabbing implement.

Tape 9

- 00:31 **If we could just start talking about the Civilian Service Medal and your attitude to it as well. Was this only a recent medal?**
- Three years ago I'd say. Three or four years ago. Well it might have been longer because Mary was the instigator of us all signing up and say how many...you had to have been in for at least
- 01:00 twelve months to be eligible for it. It would have been probably closer to four years ago that we...I could tell you exactly if I looked at my tapes of my Anzac march, because the commentator says, 'This is the Australian Women's Land Army wearing their recently awarded Civilian Service Medal'. Probably 1999 we got them. Maybe
- 01:30 '98. We had to be in at least over twelve months before we were eligible. And they're a lovely medal, and we only wear them on, say, Anzac Day or special occasions where it's the protocol to wear them. We just don't wear them to our get-togethers or anything. We don't wear our medals. But we're very proud to wear them.
- 02:00 They've got our maiden name on it as well as your name now, I think. No, it might just be our maiden name. The name we had when we were in the Land Army.
- And your sister Jean wasn't as keen on the medal as you are.**
- Not a bit. She didn't want to...by the time the medal had come out she had given Land Army away because she had a falling out with Mary
- 02:30 who was really running the show, and Jean said, 'No, I don't want to have anything to do with her. I won't have the medal', and Mary said I can't apply for it on her behalf. She's got to be passed away and her next of kin...so that's happening now. Her daughter is applying for it and we'll probably get it for her. I hope so, because her daughter would love to have it. It was a bit sad that she didn't want it,

03:00 and never ever wore it. She said, 'No', she didn't want it. And yet at her funeral her daughter-in-law and family had a whole display of photos of Jean in her uniform and her Land Army friends and so forth. I think it did really mean more to her than she liked to let on. She was just too determined to give in and say she would have it.

03:30 So we hope we can get it now.

Was her Land Army experience as rewarding for her as it was for you?

I don't think so. I think she hated the pruning. She hated having to go up to Merbein. Understand, she was only seventeen when she was doing it. I was already twenty by the time it happened to me, and with three years difference in our ages I was probably a bit more mature.

04:00 But she really thought it was going to be glamorous, but it wasn't very glamorous to be up there in the frost and the cold. Just out in a vine block. There were no boys about to impress with...she was really a beautiful looking girl. And I don't think it was what Jean thought it was going to be.

04:30 Her friend, who's also my friend, and she's still with us and still comes to our reunions, said Jean was a bit of a devil. She was kissing the boss's son down near the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK yard or something or other. That was one of the stories. He came out, and Jean said it wasn't her but it was Kirb who was kissing him, and he really took a set on Kirb, and Kirb said 'He never ever liked me'. She said, 'It was Jean. She dobbed me in'. She said she never ever

05:00 confessed that it was her kissing the son. I suppose the son was old enough to be kissed, but Kirb got the blame for that, not Jean. And then I think the fact that she came home with appendicitis, and went back, the rest of her Land Army...she was only in it for twelve months, and she had had enough of it so she got out and went back to her job.

05:30 I had joined by that time and...I think she enjoyed being at Werribee alright but I think you could join up for twelve months or the duration. So she joined up for twelve and her twelve months were up, so she got out. So I don't think it was as rewarding really...she had some lovely friends.

06:00 You know, the friends at the Research Farm, she stopped friends with those, but she didn't have the experiences that I had. She just went to the two, the vine block pruning and then home to get her appendix out and then to the Werribee Research Farm where she worked with the chickens, as you saw in that photo.

06:30 It would be just like doing the same thing day in day out. Whereas I found the different places I went to made it altogether different. I think the glamour wasn't in it for Jean so she was pleased to be out of it I think.

Were there many stories of romances with bosses sons, or farm hands or..

Yes, yes. Lots of the women married...sometimes

07:00 it was the boss himself. A lady who lives in Warragul - she married the boss. He wasn't that much older than her. He had been in the army and came back and had his own farm. She married him, and quite a lot of the girls married or had romances with the sons or next door neighbour. But of course they

07:30 would have to be disabled in some way to be home, because as the old song said, 'What's good was in the army', and they were probably young or older, the men who were about, except in my case he was home on final leave. And this was it.

08:00 It did happen but...another one who I was speaking of before, she married at Lake Bolac from the hostel. He was just a local boy and she met him and they were married there. She was still in the Land Army when she got married. And they're still together. So there were quite a few of them who did marry

08:30 ...had romances during their Land Army time.

It seems the Land Army changed the course of a lot of people's lives.

It did. Yes it did.

How would you say it changed your life? And changed you as a person?

Well I would never have worked outside and picked oranges until I was nearly fifty, when we left the block up there.

09:00 Yes I was forty-nine when we sold out and came down here to live. I would never have done that, or I wouldn't have had the stamina or the good health that I've had. I don't think hard work hurts anyone, and it was a hard life but it was a great life, so yes, it certainly changed me.

09:30 I probably would have married the chap who went to New Guinea, and everyone said I should because his uncle was the Mayor of Warrnambool. And I probably would have done it because Mum wanted me to. Mum thought it was quite nice to be able to say that her daughter is going with the Mayor's nephew. It's horrible stuff and I probably would have finished up just living

10:00 down there just having a day to day dull old life. Whereas I've had this interesting one doing all these things I was able to do being a blockie's wife. It certainly changed my life, and it changed my life in my attitude towards people. That you really don't judge people by what they look like or speak like. You get through to the character that's underneath.

10:30 And it's great value.

This is a pretty broad question but how did you feel the war changed Australia?

I don't know. I think probably Australia...I mean there wasn't a great period of time between the Great War and we're at war again in 1939. I think probably they were the same

11:00 sort of young men who joined up to go again, as their fathers were. I mean I can't judge really because I think Australia's always been a great country for all my life, so I don't know whether it did change Australia so much.

11:30 I think it's only changing now. I think it was a very...I mean we still sang God Save the King in those days. We don't bother with that any more. No, I think probably it didn't change that much between the two wars but now is the great change. Since the war the great change has happened. And it's getting more so every day.

12:00 It's different now. It's a different country altogether. It's not the country I grew up in, in the twenties and the thirties. So I don't think it's as good. I think the old days were better. I think the values were better and I think the friendships you made were stancher and you stuck by one another. And I think the soldiers found that with their mates.

12:30 They stood by them. To me Australia...I don't think the war spoiled Australia really. But then, that's just my opinion. It probably did, but as far as I was concerned it didn't. We still had good lives after and we were able to...

13:00 I mean, when Was and I were married we had nothing. I had my seventy pounds that I had saved by being in the Land Army and not be able to splash all my money out on clothes, and I think he had five hundred pounds deferred pay. They were wonderful happy times. We had nothing. We used to make things out of next to nothing. He could turn his hand to building a few things

13:30 and I could sew. We had an awful old house. Our first house was an awful old house that had been moved there from the wheat country. As we'd get a good crop we'd tear down some walls and build it. You wouldn't see the young kids these days living like it. We would never have anything unless we could pay for it. We both had

14:00 Scottish forebears and I think that's a bit of that. If you can't pay for it you don't have it. We didn't have much. We had an outside toilet again and we had a bathroom where the walls were lined with hessian and painted with...I did that...painted with whitewash to make it look good. And this was very early days. We had nothing.

14:30 But we were very happy. It was great. And see, I liked that after being a townie. I thought I was like the poem I learnt at school... 'The Woman of the West'. She faced the wilderness, the woman of the west. That was me and it was all romantic and wonderful to do these things. But I think Australia...it was pretty good then, from my experience.

How did the poem go?

15:00 'They've left the vine-wreathed cottage and the mansion on the hill, The houses in the busy streets where life was never still, The roar and the rush and fever of the city died away, The old time joys and (something) have gone for many a day'. Oh look, I forget it. But...it's for love she faced the wilderness, the woman of the west. Something about the nearest woman's voice may

15:30 be a hundred miles away. I just thought you know, it was isolated and lonely, but it was ...I learnt it at school and I thought I was the woman of the west who had gone into the outback to face the wilderness and make a new life. But then that's just the silly person I was. And I've always liked poetry.

16:00 I've still got my school readers upstairs with all those old poems in.

I was wondering. Do you think the war changed the place or the status of women?

I think so.

How?

I think they...because we were the majority, weren't we? There weren't too many men around to do things, and I

16:30 think, instead of women ...you know my mother, she never ever did the shopping. My father did the shopping and handled the purse strings. I think women became independent and were able to...I certainly did in our marriage. I wasn't the wife who stayed at home and did the washing and the ironing. I was equal with my husband. And I think

- 17:00 the war did that, made sure you were on an equal footing. And it wasn't Women's Lib. It was just that we were because we could do it and we did it. And I think the war did that because we had lost so many of the men during the war that the women had to take on a lot of jobs that previously
- 17:30 they wouldn't have done. But I think comparing my lifestyle with my mother's lifestyle...I mean, my mother used to say to me, 'Ladies in Warrnambool, Gwen, have their aprons off at two o'clock and have their face on and are sitting doing their crochet work'. And I would say to her, 'Mum, ladies in Dareton have their overalls on and are still out doing plenty of work'. That was just it. She couldn't sort of ...
- 18:00 ...she didn't think it was very nice that her daughter had become just a navvy, as she used to say. She would say, 'I didn't raise you be a navvy'. And I would say, 'Well if that's what I was, that's what I loved being'. And I wasn't really. I mean, I used to go and play golf and tennis and go to the Guild and all those ladylike things as well as...when I was needed, I was there
- 18:30 to help. No, I think the war probably did...I waffled on then. Got right off the track. I think the war did make women become more or less equal.

Did you know of any situations where men coming back were unable to accept that, and had difficulty accepting that women could do men's work?

I didn't know of any but

- 19:00 I believe it could have happened. By watching this film...Thanks Girls and Goodbye thing. There's one particular lady. She's an aboriginal lady, Banfield or some name like that. She sounded quite bitter that the men begrudged them doing the work, and I can't agree with her. I didn't find it and I can't see how it would be.
- 19:30 They must have been grateful that the women did do the work that they did, and kept things going for when the men came back, and could go into their jobs again. The ones who were able to. A lot of the poor fellows weren't able to face civilian life after their experiences. But no, I think I didn't really
- 20:00 know of any cases of that happening, but it probably did happen.

Just getting towards the end of the interview, is there anything that I haven't covered and talked about? Do you have a last word or anything you would like to say?

I think you've covered it pretty well. I can't think of anything else. I was dreading it.

- 20:30 I was dreading doing it. I hope I haven't made a mess of it. But it's been a pleasure and I hope I've been able to say things that will help you to understand how I feel personally, not how we feel, because I can only speak for myself, but I think you've covered it all pretty well.

Well thank you. It's been a complete pleasure for us. We've learned so much.

- 21:00 I think Nance will do a better job than me because she's used to public speaking.