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COMMUNITY LIFE

Library Oral History – An Interview with Rita Mitchell

An Interview with Rita Mitchell

Interviewee: Rita Mitchell

Interviewer: Pauline Curby

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Transcription: Gabrielle Godard.

Q: Right Mrs Mitchell I was wondering if we could perhaps talk about some of your earliest memories. Do you remember anything of WW1 or the end of WW1?

Yes well I do remember WW1 because my father went overseas in the end of March 1916 and he was away until the end of 1919. And at the time we were living at Glebe and then we were living with my aunt and then we moved out to Randwick and then dad came home from the war at the end of 1919.

Q: Or was it the end of 1918?

Yes it was the beginning of 1919 he came home. It was the beginning of 1919 and we went and lived in Raleigh Street, Coogee. Carrington Road was the boundary between the two.

Q: Do you remember his letters coming home?

Yes he would send home cards, lovely cards to us. And on our birthdays and Xmas and everything else. He was mainly in Egypt for a short while but then he went to France and he had haemorrhoids and had to have an operation in London.

Q: And was he in the Light Horse?

No he was in the Engineers.

Q: And he wasn't injured at all?

No, no injuries, no, no.

Q: Do you remember the celebrations at the end of WW1? You would have been at school at the time, wouldn't you?

Yes I was about eleven then. We didn't go into the town very much for celebrations but at Randwick I attended St Judes' church and Sunday School and I have very fond memories of St Judes. And I went to Randwick School, I actually did my infants and primary and Randwick Public School and then I went to Sydney Girl's High School.

Q: Seeing you've mentioned that perhaps you could explain to me how you came to go Sydney Girl's High School?

Well I passed my qualifying certificate one year and then decided that I wanted to go to Sydney Girl's High School and my mother was a bit keen on me doing art and sewing and all that sort of stuff, you know? And she thought it would be best at Sydney High School, but – it was quite good, I enjoyed Sydney High School. And another interesting thing about that was – I tell people all the time. I went there in 1920 and there was an Aboriginal girl from La Perouse in my class. And as I say if an Aboriginal girl in the 1920's could go to one of the best high schools in Sydney why didn't others take the opportunity?

Q: And was she well dressed?

Yes, quite well dressed, we had to have uniforms in those days. We had a brown uniform at Sydney Girl's High School.

Q: Do you remember her being out of things or any racism at all?

No I didn't. I didn't notice anything untoward at all really. But I can't understand – like – I can never understand why – more advancement - - they didn't advance more and integrate more than they did. I suppose it all depends, you take the chappie who was a great footballer and eventually became the Governor of South Australia. I forget his name.

Q: Yes I know. Sir Doug Nicholls.

Yes that's right. And soon after my father came back from the war one of his brothers who didn't go to the war suggested that dad and his father and his other two brothers go into business and they had a saw milling business that started down in a building which was not demolished until the opening of the car park for the Entertainment Centre. There was Hayes & Sons on the wall of that factory although they had been away from there for years. I think they were only in that building for about two years. And you could still see Hayes & Sons. Hayes & Sons was still on the site.

Q: How long ago was the Entertainment Centre built? Not that long ago?

Not long ago, the car park – it was the car park, not the Entertainment Centre – it was the year after the Entertainment Centre really you know, and as you went down the bridge, you know the little bridge near the Pyrmont Post Office there, you'd see Hayes & Sons there.

Q: And they were only there a couple of years?

Only there a couple of years. They went down to Saunders Street out in Pyrmont underneath the Sugar Company there.

Q: And timber would come from the country areas?

Yes that's right.

Q: Going back to Sydney Girl's High, I believe you remember you the shift to Moore Park? Were you ever at the old site?

Only for a brief short while.

Q: Was it a bit cramped there, do you have much of a memory of it?

Not very much because, as I say it was only a couple of weeks and it was an old stone building and small class rooms and everything else but it was – we were there – it was quite exciting going out and – as you know it was on the – the new High School was on the grounds of the old Zoo and we had our photos taken (laughs) over the bear pits and over bridges and what have you. We had a very happy time there.

Q: What are some of your memories of Sydney Girl's High? Do you remember a lot of pressure, a lot of hard work?

Well I only stayed there a couple of years actually because – at the end of my second year I was quite ill for a while and I felt that – I was away from school for a long long time and I wanted to leave and my parents allowed me to leave. I'm sorry that I did. I'm sorry I did afterwards.

Q: So you didn't do the intermediate?

No.

Q: And what was your illness? Or would you rather not -

- I had all sort of - abscesses at the back of my knees here, and I was off for about six weeks with them. You know, there was a mass of them sort of thing, but I got rid of them and then my parents allowed me to leave. My sister did the Intermediate, but I didn't do that.

Q: Just going back a little bit have you got any memories of the 1919 flu epidemic? You would have been about 12 then.

Yes we used to wear the face masks and quite a few people – fortunately we were out in Coogee then and perhaps away from the more populated areas like – Coogee in those days, and particularly where – we lived down the bottom of Alison Rd, before Carrington Rd and beside us we had a nice gully and all the trees and everything else, and so whether we were saved from all the germs I don't know. (Laughs)

Q: And you don't have any memories of your extended family or friends being ill?

No, not really. I don't really.

Q: Now going on to the 1920's you were telling me before you were a keen surfer. Was that just body surfing or did you ever get on to a surfboard?

No it was body surfing. (Laughs) But I used to surf with the boys and I used to shoot the breakers like the boys, I used to go right out and you know, they'd come out and have a rest on the beach and we'd still be there. (Laughs)

Q: Do you have memories of the surf club at Coogee in those days?

The surf club – I told you before about the young chap I saw on the Saturday afternoon – he was a life saver.

Q: Just tell me about that again please Mrs Mitchell.

Yes well I was at the Boomerang Theatre at the Southern end of Coogee and came out at interval….

Q: You were at the pictures?

Yes, and I came out at interval and looked over the sea wall and all of a sudden – see the surf life saving club was at the southern end of the beach and he was surfing and there were rocks round there and all of a sudden the water was stained red and he was dragged from the water and the shark of course had attacked him and when he was carried up to the ambulance both his arms were very badly mauled and all bleeding. And actually he was the son of the Randwick Post Master.

Q: Do you remember his name?

No I don't actually, and I can't remember – I should do because his brother was one of the group that I surfed with.

Q: And you would have been a teenager at this stage?

Yes, I would have been about 15 or something.

Q: And he died?

He died, yes, he died. I think almost – I think he died that night. I think it was from loss of blood.

Q: And having seen this you weren't afraid to go surfing yourself?

(Laughs) Well as a matter of fact after that you'd dive under a wave and you'd think oooooh what would I do if a shark (laughs) – it did affect you. You know you don't usually dive under a wave and think oooooh and hold your breath.

Q: Mrs Mitchell you were probably a little bit young to have remembered Duke Kahanamoku's tour of Australia?

No I don't remember.

Q: But you've heard of him? The surfer from Hawaii.

Yes, yes.

Q: In 1915 he toured the beaches. Promoting surf board riding.

No I didn't – I just – I don't think there was very much of the surf board riding at that time, even amongst the boys sort of thing you know.

Q: Did other girls' get out and surf like you or were you -

I think there was another one that went out and surfed with this group, and two or three of us would go out and hit the breakers. I enjoyed it.

Q: Can you describe for us your costume? What did you look like?

Oh just very ordinary. The top would have been just like a man's Singlet sort of thing and then just pants and a skirt around it sort of thing you know, I don't even know if there was just a skirt on the front, I forget now. But there might be some pictures in those things over there of some of the things. But I forget.

Q: Oh we'll have a look. Do you remember in the 1920's anyone criticising bathing attire at that time and – local government officials or church officials. They were very down on people at Cronulla for their bathing attire. I wonder if you heard any of that.

Well I think it was a bit later, when they got a bit shorter.

Q: A bit more daring.

Yes we were quite conservative (laughs) really – it was when I think; there was more criticism when they became very short. The regulation was supposed to be neck to knee. That was supposed to be the regulation, but of course – now you've got them shorter and shorter. (Laughs)

Q: Was your costume bought or made?

No, bought.

Q: Where did you buy it?

At an ordinary department store. Yes. And the funny thing about it. I always went brown on my arms, but I always got burnt on my face and I'd come home at night on a Sunday night you see after the weekend and dad would say: Well you won't need a light to go to bed tonight will you? (Laughter) Because my nose would be – the next day it would be red, the next day it would be brown, the next day it would be crackling and peeling and by Thursday and Friday it would be back to normal again, and then I'd start all over again. (Laughs)

Q: Did you have the old zinc cream? Did you ever put that on your nose?

No I didn't really, no I didn't. I just – zinc cream – that was a bit before zinc cream.

Q: Oh was it? (Laughter)

I think Zinc cream came in a bit later.

Q: No one worried too much about you getting burnt?

No, no – even I – when I was getting a bit older I thought, now this is a bit stupid. Just before I came out to Gladesville, this is a bit stupid you know, going through all this week after week. (Laughs)

Q: Now going back to when you left school, could you tell me about your first job?

Yes I was – I would have liked to have gone into an office but my mother thought that there were naughty men in offices you know?

Q: Not at the surf

I fiddled around a few times on hats.

Q: Were you trained as a milliner – no?

But that was when my mother thought it would be a good idea if I became a milliner. So she took me into see Frank Pettinger who was a gentleman milliner – and you know I thought – but he wasn't like that really, but he was a lovely man.

Q: Wasn't like what?

He was….

Q: Wasn't like what? (Laughter)

Limp wrist (laughter) he was – he was actually but he was an (indistinct) but…

Q: No one would mention it in those days. (Laughter)

Yes – and in those days – his first shop was in Elizabeth Street down near Mark Foys. It was almost opposite the Museum Station – well the Museum Station wasn't there then of course. But then he went down into the Imperial Arcade and I went down there with him and I was made head of the – it was only a small work room and I was – when the head milliner left he suggested that I take over which I did.

Q: Now, did he train you? Was it a formal apprenticeship or were you just trained on the job?

Trained on the job actually. I didn't go into any tech or anything like that, in those days – I just learnt there and of course I was married three weeks before I was 21 and Flook thought that I should start a shop. I used to call him Flook, it was Frank Pettinger.

Q: Oh right, yes.

They used to call him Flook – and he said it would be a good idea if I started a shop, but I wouldn't have been any good in a shop, I'm not a business woman. (Laughs)

Q: So you didn't start one? Just going back – you were saying that the idea of office work didn't appeal to your mother. Do you remember any feeling after WW1 people criticising office girls for taking men's jobs because before that men had done clerical work, and as women moved into office work some people thought that they were taking men's jobs.

I didn't hear that no. No my mother just had the idea that you know – there were dirty old men there. (Laughter)

Q: Tell me a bit about your work as a milliner. When you were made head, was that a lot of responsibility?

Oh, in a way but it was a small – there'd be about five of us above the shop sort of thing. And I didn't find it a terrible responsibility really. I had nice girls working there and all the rest of it. And it was an older person that recommended me for the job really, so – no I didn't find it a strain. I enjoyed it.

Q: Your husband Harry was a teacher. Would you like to explain to me again how he came to be a teacher?

Yes. Harry was a cabinet maker and joiner at Mort's Dock and his father saw an advertisement for tradesmen to go and be trained as teachers.

Q: This would have been after WW1 I assume – in the 1920's?

Yes it would have been because – yes it was in the 1920's. because he was 28 – even 25 or something, because he was 28 when he finished his training and I don't know whether it was one or two years training and he trained to be a manual arts teacher. And that included not only woodwork but metal work so he had to more or less train himself with the metal work. And his first appointment was up at Wagga.

Q: Now when he went through school he probably wouldn't have had the leaving, would he? He had the intermediate?

Yes, yes. He had the intermediate.

Q: But because of his trade skills he could go into the teacher training?

Yes well you see he had gone to the tech and had – the qualifications he had were the tech ones. He was apprenticed to Mort's Dock and then he had the training from the – he would have had to have those to have gone into the teaching. And then he had to do these two years – one or two years training and that.

Q: And where did he do his teacher training? Any idea?

No I don't really. I don't know whether it was…

Q: I heard there was a class at Glebe.

No I honestly can't remember that. Or whether it was out at the you know the old jail at Oxford St – you know at the corner – I have an idea that he went there.

Q: East Sydney Tech?

Yes that's right. That's the old Court House.

Q: So you were sent out to Wagga. Could you tell me about your parent's reaction in suggesting that you might come back? They wanted you with them.

Yes, well actually speaking my – when my husband went up and at the end of the week was back again and we wanted to get married in the Easter, but my mother and father didn't want us to get married – tried to talk us into waiting till the next Christmas, but we compromised and got married on the 23rd June 1928. (Laughs) Yes – so – do you want me to tell you about that?

Q: Yes, yes. (Laughs)

That what I told you?

Q: Yes, yes.

Well my mother and father said they didn't want us to be married and have our children away from them. And I said that we didn't want a family for two years, but we were married in June and our daughter June was born nine months and three weeks later. (Laughs)

Q: And she was born in Wagga?

She was born in Wagga, yes.

Q: So people didn't discuss contraception in those days?

Well – I did afterwards – I had contraceptives, but it was a very – in those days you know (indistinct) you'd get up and cough sort of thing you know?

Q: Oh – (Laughter)

You know it was very – it was very – what should I say – it wasn't really proper contraceptive. I did after I had June I did go to a clinic in Sydney Road, there was a clinic there. I went to the clinic and I was fitted with it. But did I have to go to the Dr to be fitted with it? I – might have done too. I went to the clinic and then – yes it was sort of a diaphragm.

Q: Oh right. So before you got married had your mother prepared you for anything or did you just sort of go in ignorant? (Laughs)

Well – I don't think she knew a lot (laughs) because you see she had problems – there was nearly six years between my sister and me – I was the elder. And then my father went to the war and when he came back mother became pregnant but it was in a tube and so she had to have an operation and have a hysterectomy then.

Q: So she didn't need any contraception.

No, she didn't have to keep herself up with those things. (Laughter)

Q: So could you tell me about buying your block of land, Mrs Mitchell?

Yes my mother when she came up when June was born in 1929, she said that this block of land – which was a lovely block of land right on the crest of the hill overlooking Cabarita and the Parramatta River and she said….

Q: That was in Gladesville?

Yes, and she said: That block of land that Uncle Sid tried to buy it's on the market again, how about buying it. Which we did, but of course the depression came on and it wasn't until '34 then when the Rural bank loaned money at 5% that we built.

Q: So you couldn't do anything with the land between '29 and '34, it just had to sit there?

Sit there, yes, and of course during that time the value of the land would have gone down because some of the blocks of land around, they weren't as good a block of land because they were very rocky and would have had to have terrific foundations. They were about 125 pounds a block, you see? When we were going to build, the chappie who built my mother and father's home, we were speaking to him and my husband had drawn up these plans for the home. It was on a corner and he had a winding path up to the front door and George said: No you don't need that, it would save a lot of money if you just had a path in from the side and that would save a lot of money. And then he said, if you move this back onto a solid rock – there was a lot of rock on the land, he said if you move the house back – we were sixty feet from the front of the land – if you move back onto the solid rock you'd save on all your foundations and everything like that. So with those little savings we were able to build. (Laughs)

Q: And what was the house made of? What construction material?

Foundations in brick.

Q: Double brick it would have been in those days.

Yes, yes. It was a nice home really. And actually speaking the year we built was the last time that the 'head of the river' – you know the 'head of the river'?

Q: Yes.

Well that used to be on the Parramatta River and on the Wednesday I had visitors there looking at the heats, but in the meantime I developed a septic throat and the Dr said I wasn't to have visitors. So I was in bed but I saw the end of the race out of my bedroom window because it was right opposite Cabarita Wharf. So that was in 1930 and it was the last time that the 'head of the river' was at Parramatta River.

Q: Was there many houses between your block and the river?

Yes, there was Pile Street which had houses on either side.

Q: What Street was your house in?

Amiens Street. There was Pile Street, and there were people on the waterfront and the people opposite and then the people opposite us, but you see we were on the crest of the hill and so we were overlooking the other people. And of course the people who have bought our home they've built another story on top. So they'd have a magnificent view. But we were very happy there, we had a very happy time there.

Q: How many bedrooms did the house have?

We had two but we had a side verandah as well which we enclosed and made that into the third bedroom and later on we had - our breakfast room was a long narrow room and we had a kitchenette – not a kitchen a kitchenette. We did build upwards – after some years we built a garage and then later I talked my husband into building a big sun room out, and that was a lovely room because it was facing north so you got the sun – the sun was overhead in summer and it was lovely in the winter. We were very lucky and our home was just built – I think we had a pan – our toilet was outside and it was built on to the house, but not in the bathroom.

Q: Oh – not the backyard dunny?

Like, there was our breakfast room, then our laundry and then our toilet was there on the thing. The sewerage was just about to be put into that area where we were, but we had to have a pan I think for the first week and then we had the toilet.

Q: I bet that was a relief.

Oh certainly (laughs)

Q: Now Mrs Mitchell in 1929 you bought the land and in 1935 you moved there. Can you give me an idea of what that area looked like in those years. The streets, the number of houses around. What did it look like?

Well there were two homes immediately opposite on the corner and then there was vacant land up to Meriton Street, and on our side there were about four homes, on our side of the street, and then there were two blocks of land. I'll tell you a funny story about my daughter, she came home one day when she was - in third class they had a very strict teacher you see and June was fairly bright, and she came home and she said: I was sick and I had to come home. And I said: Well show me where you were sick June. (Laughs) She'd gone across the grass (indistinct) and wasn't there, so I said: Well come back and we'll see Miss Morgan. Miss Morgan was very strict, she should have been teaching in the sixth class, but she was in the third class you see. So I left June at home and I went up to see Miss Morgan.

Q: Oh so June had just skipped off without telling her.

She really hadn't gone. Because the boys opposite mother's place they used to be sick and stay home and do all sorts of things, so June apparently thought she'd do the same thing you see. So I went up to see Miss Morgan and I said, has anything happened that June wouldn't want to come to school. And she said, no, no, she said, she's very bright, but she used to talk, you know she'd be (laughs) out the back for being good and then brought to the front because she was talking (laughs). But she said, tell her to come up

(Tape Break)

TAPE 1 SIDE B

Q: Right, so your mother was living nearby?

Oh yes, mum and dad lived there until about 1978 or 79. Dad died in '48 and I went down every day to help mother. It was interesting that about the telephone. In 1945 we went to Broken Hill, did I tell you?

Q: Yes, you told me on the phone.

And we had had the phone before we went but the people who rented our home was a policeman and when we came back of course the policeman had – it was after the war when you couldn't get phones – and then as I say in '48 I was down looking after dad all the time and I applied for a phone because of his illness, but they said you had to have the phone in your house, but they suggested that we have an extension, and that was marvellous, we had that for years.

Q: So how did that work, an extension between the two houses?

There was a phone from mothers, and mother's was the headquarters. And in mother's home there was this fare that could be – exchange to main or exchange could go to extension, or it could be from main to extension, you see? But by having it from exchange to extension it rang in both homes and we could have three people on a conversation. It was very good really.

Q: So hang on – were you getting the phone put on in your mother's place?

No, mother had the phone. We'd lost the phone. Mother had the phone, but we'd lost the phone.

Q: So the policeman must have had it taken out, why didn't he keep it on?

When we came back to our home he had to move to another home so he took it to his new home.

Q: Oh I thought you meant you had one there before you went to Broken Hill.

We did, but he took the phone number and everything else when he went. That was his prerogative because he had – because he was a policeman.

Q: Oh I see – right.

He had to have the phone. And phones were very scarce at that time.

Q: Now having your parents so close did you feel that you had a lot of support from them and you were a support to them. For example did they babysit the children at all?

Yes, yes they did. I was very fortunate, I had wonderful parents, they were great support. And by the same token I was able to return that when dad was so ill – when he was dying actually from April to September. But it was funny, I often say how your idea of age changes. Mother would have been 59 and my aunt would have been 61 and I used to go down there every day you see to help mother nurse dad because you couldn't get nursing staff in those days and for the last month I slept down there as well because I thought well if anything happened to dad during the night, you know, the two old ladies wouldn't (laughs).

Q: Really old (laughs)

The old ladies wouldn't be able to cope. (Laughs) I often laugh at that now you know, how your ideas change. Now I think my daughter is a baby. (laughs)

Q: So that was an unmarried aunt living with them was it?

She was a married aunt, a widow, no children.

Q: Right – so, this is going back a bit I suppose but thinking about having your babies, you had one at Wagga and one in Sydney. Would they have been born in those little maternity hospitals that they had in those days?

Yes June was born in – the Dr had this small – it was only a house really, converted into a you know – a hospital sort of thing. It was supposed to be a private hospital but it was actually converted home.

Q: And June was born in Wagga?

And Rod was born in Secombe. That was called Secombe Hospital which was a private hospital in Drummoyne. And again it was more or less a converted big home really. It was very good, but that's what it was really, more or less converted.

Q: Were those places run by very starched matrons or more homely friendly nurse types?

Well they were very nice. It was funny with June. June wasn't expected for another three weeks really, she came earlier than expected but – and I had visitors for the night, you know a young couple had come and they were going to have supper and everything else and all of a sudden I had a bit of pain and my waters broken and so I went in – and the home we lived in at Wagga was actually a converted Dr's residence, you know two storey and all the rest of it and I went into the person who managed it, who was as old as my mother to see her about it – and I rang the hospital up from her unit too and they said that I had to get rid of my visitors, as soon as I could come straight round you see, which I did and I went round to the hospital and they prepared me and everything else, and they said if – and you know, and ring the bell – and anyway June was born about half past twelve that morning.

Q: So what time did you go into labour?

Well I would have started about 7 o'clock or something when I had a bit of a showing.

Q: Not too bad for a first baby.

And with Rod, the second one, I had showing at 6 o'clock one night and went into – and the Dr said go into hospital and he arrived at 6 o'clock the next night. Not that I had terrible pains or you know, I think June's was the worst birth being the first I suppose, and of course with June I said to them, June was known as June from the time of her conception.

Q: Because you married in June?

And I like Junes you see. And so I said to the Dr, is it June? And he said, yes and then of course he made a joke about the afterbirth, he said, this is Rodney – he didn't say Rodney, he said this is Johnny or something. And then I said, is it the 16th and he said yes, because it was Harry's brother's birthday the 16th of April, so that's the way it goes.

Q: And were you prepared enough to know like – when your waters broke, you weren't frightened or anything, you at least had that much knowledge, you understood what was happening?

More or less, I had a bit of a knowledge, yes.

Q: And they didn't knock you out with gas or chloroform or anything?

No, no they didn't really, no. As I say they prepared me and got me all ready and then put the bell beside me and said if the pain got too much to –

Q: Did they make you lay flat for 10 days, not get up at all?

No, no, no not really. Oh well we didn't get up – and actually speaking for the first three days I had so much milk, with both my babies, it was terribly painful, and I didn't want to get up actually. Like to get out of bed, I wasn't lying flat. No we didn't get out of bed for seven or eight days – that's right, we didn't.

Q: So you breastfed?

Both of them yes, and of course we decided – although it was still the depression that we wanted another child and so I stopped playing tennis in the December and Rod was born in the next August (laughs) pretty fast wasn't I?

Q: So what do you mean, you stopped playing tennis when you wanted to get pregnant, you thought you'd better stop.

No – no – by that time I was having, I had (indistinct) then – you know what do you call it? You mentioned it before.

Q: The diaphragm. Oh right.

I stopped using it and stopped playing then. But my daughter of course I thought she'd be the same but she had plans to teach – she was a teacher – teach for the three years and then become pregnant, but she didn't and did all sorts of things and she didn't have a baby for five years. And then our Minister and his wife had about five children and June said, well if Alison can have children 18 months apart I can too, so she had Debbie, and then she had Sue 18 months later and then she had Karen 18 months later and then she had

Andrew two years later. (Laughter) because you see she was 28 when she started and she thought she was old then.

Q: Oh – very old. Now would you have attended baby health centres or were they not -

- yes I attended a baby health centre at Wagga.

Q: When you came back to Gladesville was there any around handy for you?

I would have gone with Rod. It was near the Post Office up at Gladesville, I went to the health centre, yes.

Q: And were they helpful or bossy and nosey?

No they were good. I believed in the health centres, I think they were very good, personally. Particularly for inexperienced people. Well even our parents weren't terrible experienced in lots of things because of modern medicine and all the rest of it and so you had to - a lot and with - before my time – it was more or less you fed the babe when you wanted. But of course in my time it was three hour feeds when the baby first came home and then four hour feeding sort of thing you know.

Q: And you stuck to that?

Yes I did really. June with her night feeds, she'd start to cry, she'd get the wind and she'd cry and it would be about – I'd start at 10 o'clock and it would be about 12 o'clock before she was finally fed. And with Rod, he'd put on an ounce a week. I plenty of milk and I'd lie down and I'd sit up and I'd do everything and he put on about 2 ounces a week.

Q: How much did they say he should have been putting on?

Oh, about six ounces or something like that. And my mother said, I do hope that Lorna can have a family because Deb and Lorna are so fond of children and Lorna had had a few problems and Lorna had this gorgeous baby, I think nine and half pounds and put on a pound a week. (Laughs) Beat my little Rod.

Q: But Rodney was perfectly healthy?

Oh yes, that's right. But he was a little boy, just a little boy until he was 17.

Q: Did they make you anxious by saying this is what he should be putting on? Or did you have a gut feeling that he was okay?

No, no I didn't like it. Even when he was about three or four or something like that, I had to make him sit there and eat food, you know I couldn't let him go without his food sort of thing you know. And my father said, never mind Rod I was only such and such at 15 and dad was about 5'11 you see, and fifteen came and went and sixteen came and went and at 17 Rod grew.

Q: Were you conscious of doing different things to your mother in regards to child rearing and feeding practices. You mentioned that before were you very conscious – like was she saying to do one thing and the baby health centre saying another?

No, no, she went along with it.

Q: But you realised she had done different – had different ways of feeding.

Yes, well of course it was just on request then. It's on request again now I think isn't it? That's right. No, mother was very good about that sort of thing. She would mind the children and then of course when we came back from Coogee I think I told you, mother saw these weatherboard homes, oh we won't go down there George, but when they saw the lovely little bay and everything they loved it and they bought the land beside, and I think I told you that mother said to June, how about building next door, and June said that we'd build out the view, but mother said she'd rather not have the view, and it was wonderful for both of them really. It was a new life for mother and I.

Q: When would this have been?

That would have been in 1957. June was married in 1952 and it was in the fifties when she had her first baby, but she was down in her home, that would have been about 53 – 54 she would have built next door to mother.

Q: Oh so they were living out at Coogee, so June was living next door to her grandmother at Coogee.

Oh, no no no no – no mother was at Gladesville. We came out in '26, it was mother that came out too. Mum came in '26 and then lived in 26 and bought that land, you know that I told you about. So mum and dad were there in 1926, May '26 they moved out there, they moved out and lived in the home next door to them where they were building and they moved in August.

Q: Now Mrs Mitchell I thought I might ask you about your memories of the depression. You were saying your immediate family weren't really affected. Did you see any visible signs of it in the area, and people that you knew perhaps that were affected by the depression.

Yes, but not unduly really. Up at the school – actually you see, for the first part of the depression we were in Wagga, we were there '28 '29 and '30. Well '29 and '30 were the beginnings of it and people had to be helped up at the school, you know there was a lot of help up at the school.

Q: Where your husband was teaching?

No, no. This was up at Gladesville School. When Harry came back from Wagga he first taught at Carlingford Public School and then he went out to Sydney Tech High at Paddington and he was there for 13 years. He was there until – in 1945 we went up to Broken Hill for three years. It was funny June said, June at that time she had just finished her Inter and she was going to go and do home science and do cookery demonstration and all the rest of it and she started at Burwood Girls' High School and of course Harry went up to Broken Hill, we went up to Broken Hill, and she said, I don't know why we've got to go up to Broken Hill why can't daddy go up and board? (Laughs) You can imagine my husband boarding. And we weren't up there six weeks and we were discussing a job at the teacher's college, and she said, oh we don't want to go back to Sydney mum, I want to do my leaving up here. And also she couldn't do her home science in the third and fourth year up at Broken Hill and she already was about grade one or two in music, in the piano, so she decided herself to take music and she went to the convent up there. So did Rod with the violin and then she got a teacher's college scholarship and when she came down she was one of 13 chosen to do the specialist music teaching. So she's the specialist music teacher.

Q: And was she trained at the conservatorium?

Yes, she did. And she was there for three years. So it's amazing how things change.

Q: Just going back to what we were saying about the depression. You were saying children at the Gladesville School needed help. Was that with clothes and shoes and things like that, or did they actually come to school without being fed properly?

Well I didn't hear of anybody actually being that poor really because there were people around to help them. And certainly none of the people around us were that poor, you know. My husband's parents suffered more than my parents. As I told you my parents were lucky, dad was able to hold on, but two of Harry's brothers were always out of work, but I think the father kept his job and the other one was still at school. But I didn't experience really, didn't know a lot about the depression, I must admit that because I was married and away from it.

Q: And your husband had a secure job.

That's right my husband had a secure job and dad had a secure job, so we were very fortunate during the depression.

Q: And you don't remember for example hearing about the married women teachers being sacked? You don't remember that.

In those days I think married women weren't allowed to continue teaching were they?

Q: Well they had been but during the depression they stopped them.

Oh I thought it was a rule – I might have been wrong.

Q: They brought the rule in during the depression.

I was only conscious of the fact that once – now you take the bank – my brother-in-law was in the bank and actually a bankie wasn't supposed to get married until he was about 25 when he became a teller, sort of thing, you know? I wasn't conscious of a lot of the rules with the teachers so much sort of thing. Of course when we were at Wagga June Bronhill was one of my husband's pupils. She was in the same year as June and she used to come down to our home and June would accompany her on the piano and everything else. She was a lovely lass and her father, before we went up there, he was the secretary of the Broken Hill hospital and it was the first hospital in Australia – no I'm not quite sure….

Q: No this was at Broken Hill, you said Wagga, June Bronhill's from Broken Hill.

Broken Hill I mean, did I say Wagga did I? Sorry. When we went to Broken Hill in 1945 her father was the secretary of the hospital and it was the first hospital either in Australia or the southern hemisphere to have air conditioning. And they conducted – I was a tour conductor when I first went up to Broken Hill because they had so many visitors and I'd take them up to inspect the hospital which was quite lovely, and actually I used to – I was in St John's so I used to do VA work up at the hospital too. And at the zinc mine, they had tours to the zinc mine. And Broken Hill was a wonderful place really because there were no restrictions. We went up there in '45 before the – VE day and VP day was while we were up there, but we were six weeks in Broken Hill when the war ended.

Q: What do you mean there were no restrictions? Do you mean there was no rationing at Broken Hill?

No that's right.

Q: Why was that?

I don't know, because they wouldn't stand it. (Laughs) It was an interesting town. In 1919 I believe they had a 19 months strike and out of that came the lead bonus. Whereas anybody, even if you only worked on mine site for a while you'd get that lead bonus – part of the lead bonus. Sometime the lead bonus might be almost as much as their wages, but that was on condition that there was a continuous flow of ore from Broken Hill down to Port Pirie. As I say while we were up there, there was a strike but it only lasted a week – the bus and tramways went on strike you see, because when we were up there – because you see you didn't go right through. When we went up to Wagga, you went overnight to Parkes and then you got the Comet out to Broken Hill.

Q: The City Comet? Was it called that in those days?

Yes, yes – and then you got the – there's the Silverton Tramway from Wagga out to the border.

Q: From Broken Hill to the border.

And actually speaking Broken Hill was an Adelaide town. You see they had, I think it was Victor Harbour was almost Little Broken Hill, because they closed down all the mines over the holidays and they took over – and one time I believe some of the people put up their prices and they had a meeting and they boycotted them and they had to bring their prices down. (Laughs). Oh dear – yes it was a – and they had a beautiful Police Boys' Club out there, it was built specifically for them, the mines built this club and it was a beautiful club, I believe it was the best Boys' Club around and they also had a theatre and they had an excellent director of the theatre out there, one of the managers of the cinema, the movies, he was the director of the – and they put on some wonderful plays, and the props were good because they had artists from the zinc mine and no – it was a good place to be at really. And even the children enjoyed it. Although as I say June didn't want to go, she enjoyed it after. As a matter of fact she had a bit of an inclination when she was finishing her teacher training of going back there, and I said, well June it will be, a different Broken Hill when you go back, because all of the people will have spread all around the place sort of thing, you know they won't be there.

Q: So I suppose you mixed mainly with teacher's families probably?

We did, as adults. I think I told you about the lass on the other side of the laneway telling my husband how to reduce his water bill.

Q: No. (Laughs)

Well she said – we lived on the corner, on the lane, you see.

Q: What Street did you live on?

We lived in Southway Street.

Q: Was it a corrugated iron house? Did they still have them?

Corrugated iron and it would be – it had a brick wall, you know outside and it would have been about that far from our verandah.

Q: Was it a teaching housing authority house?

No Harry went there about a month before I did and he found the house. It had this brick fence and it had two bedrooms – three bedrooms actually and a big lounge room and quite a big kitchen but we didn't have a sink or anything in the kitchen. We had a fuel stove and the type of fuel stove, it didn't have a thing that you could scrape the ashes out, you know, if you cooked all day – and we had a big mesh verandah, like it was netting. But it wasn't painted and so I said to Harry ask Mr what's his name if he bought the paint we'd paint it. So he did. And our bathroom was outside again. There was two bedrooms and the bedroom and the lounge room, quite a big lounge dining room and the kitchen was over there, the verandah and out there was the bathroom, it was quite a big bathroom. And fortunately it was a chip heater, but it had a shower so we could have hot showers. And then round there was a little laundry but the copper was outside, and then down the back we had big stables down the back. Then we thought we might move into another house but it was a bank house and they were still going to keep it. So I said, ask Mr Townshend, Sammy Townshend, if he'd buy us a gas stove, which he did. So we had a nice gas stove. Yes, we had a very happy time up there.

Q: What was the woman – the one who told you how to reduce your water bill?

Oh yes, so she said that one of the water board chaps had told her husband to do it. (Laughs) He'd been winding it back, winding the thing back and the water board was almost owing him money (laughs) so the inspector said to him, you don't do that, what you do is you take the thing out of your meter and over the weekend you water all your gardens and do all your washing, and of course, I think I told you my husband was stupidly honest and he would never have thought about that sort of thing. And she said afterwards did Mr Mitchell do what, you know – I forget his name – tell you? And I said, no, not really. (Laughs)

Q: Now that would have been before the Menindee Lakes scheme of course?

No, no we got our water from the Menindee lakes.

Q: Oh, so it had started then.

They had about eight trains.

Q: Oh it came in by train? The pipeline wasn't in then?

Oh no, no. They brought in about eight – I'm not quite sure but they brought in train loads of water. I thought before we went up there, I'd heard about the shortage and I said, perhaps we'd better not take our hose up. But anyway we took our hose up and we had plenty of water because we had a big tank, which we used for our own personal use, and then we had the other water for bathing and watering. We never grew vegetables at home, we had gardens, shrubs and flowers but we didn't have – well we didn't grow vegetables up there. Like people talk about -

(Tape break)

END OF TAPE 1

Q: Now could you tell me about when you came back to Sydney Mrs Mitchell and then something about your husband's involvement in local government.

Yes, well we came back to Gladesville in 1947, the end of 1947 and I think it was the end of 1948 he went into council.

Q: As an independent or a liberal labour?

No, an independent. He was always independent. He wasn't a member of the liberal party then. He went in actually the second time with Ken Anderson, but – no wait a minute, this was the second time, because he went into council just before we went away to Broken Hill. But of course he had to resign because he was sent to Broken Hill.

Q: That was Ryde Council.

That was Ryde Council and then he went in – it was just about the time when they were having a bit of a kufuffle about the Ryde Housing Scheme. You might have heard about it?

Q: Yes I have.

And Harry went in with Ken Anderson's team.

Q: Now were they opposed to the housing scheme or in favour of it?

Opposed to it.

Q: Now can you explain why?

Because at the time a lot of people out at North Ryde they were wanting to take the land, you know, resuming it sort of thing. And different ones were right against it and they had built – they had taken out the golf links at – on the side of Blaxland there's a big area there that they had resumed and they had resumed land that people didn't want them to resume and that's why they sort of went in against it.

Q: Now did he think initially though that it was a progressive scheme?

Well he – no he hadn't thought about it being progressive really. There was something I was just going to tell you then – that was the time – when he went into council was the time when Eastwood and Ryde became joined. Before that they were two different councils and then they become one at that time.

Q: Can you remember any details about that? People at Eastwood have told me that Eastwood was in the black and Ryde was in the red at the time.

I wouldn't have known. (Laughs) I wouldn't have known really but – actually speaking a lot of people – the Mayor, the Town Clerk of Ryde before – I forget his name – have you heard his name? His wife was a member of Ryde Bowling Club and he wasn't terribly popular at the time and I think he resigned and they made the Eastwood Town Clerk, the Town Clerk of….

Q: I'll need to check his name.

I think it was, yes. I think the Town Clerk of Eastwood became the Town Clerk of the combined Ryde Council.

Q: And when your husband was a member of the council – when you came back from Broken Hill, do you remember bitter in-fighting in the council or -

- quite often yes there was. As a matter of fact you'll find in there a letter that I wrote to Eric Baum. I think I told you about the shopping centre. Ryde shopping centre – Benjamin from Chatswood applied to the council to build the shopping complex behind the shops in Blaxland Rd and the council gave them permission and then a bit later on - another group I don't know where they were from but they wanted to build out at Wicks's Rd and Harry and the people were not in favour of it, for one thing, quite often Harry said these people get you to change the – get people in – supposingly going to build these things and they don't sort of thing. And also another thing was that they'd already promised Benjamin that they would build and he felt it was right

that they should go on with that. And at the time there was a Mr – I won't mention names – there was a chappie who was against Harry and there was another Mr Mitchell on the – no relation to Harry – Bill Mitchell, and one of the chaps on the council had a paper. And before one of the elections -

Q: Was that Ron Pacey?

No, no no – it was Pilkington who was actually a carrier, he lived in Gladesville but he had this paper out at West Ryde actually. No it wasn't Ron Pacey. At timesHarry and Ron were at odds about things. Though they were actually both Rotarians eventually. But – and they were saying all things about Harry and all the rest of it and somebody who wasn't in the paper says: If one person writes about you go to your opposition – go to them first and if they don't retract, go to your opposition. Well Harry did that with one thing. But Eric Baum at the time was writing in this little local paper and was more or less implying that Harry and his people were dishonest. And as I said to you there was not a man living that was more honest than Harry, stupidly honest sort of thing, you know? And so I went in to see Eric Baum -

Q: Was he a broadcaster at the time, or was he -

- He was on radio.

Q: Yes, he was doing that at that time.

Yes, and he'd been saying it over the thing and all that. So I went in to him – and I don't know that he'd been saying anything about Harry over the air, but he'd been saying about – well I think he had – and also had written in this paper. So I went in and he came in and I started to tell him what I'd read about. And he said: I wrote it down madam, you write it down. I won't listen to you, you write it down. So he sort of gave me the brush of you see. So I never write, I'm not a person that writes unfortunately. But anyway I went and bought a pad and I went down and sat in the Farmer's – as it was then – toilet and -

Q: (Laughs) The toilet?

Yes the toilet. You know in the block, you know, and I wrote a letter to him and I think there's a copy of it -

Q: Yes I'll get a copy. Was this at Top Ryde? Was there a Farmer's at Top Ryde you mean?

No, no, it was Farmer's in town. I went into him in town.

Q: Oh, he was in town.

He was in town, I went into his offices in town. And went to Farmer's in town you see. And I said to him had he enquired, had he got any information, had he done this that and the other. And anyway he retracted. But before the paper came out – the election was on the Saturday and Harry and his people were elected (indistinct) sort of thing you know. Because people knew he was – although I always – I don't like people who generalise about politicians or anybody because anybody can say anything about anybody and I remember years ago June was going to tell me something, my daughter. And I said: Now June. And she said: Oh mum you don't believe anything. And I said: No I don't. Because I said, you take one of our doctors – Dr Paul (indistinct) at Gladesville – someone said he'd died. He hadn't died. And I said somebody started that rumour and this is true you know. so often people say these things and it becomes gospel. And I always say there are good and bad people in everything, there are good and bad politicians, there are good and bad business men and there are good and bad people in everything aren't there, really, you know. The same as countries. I believe in intermarriage because I think it's the only way we're going to eventually get peace so we begin to understand one another because I don't believe there's any nation that has all the good and all the bad.

Q: Getting back to politics and the Ryde Housing Scheme did Harry – as you say he was opposed to it because people's families were…

Yeah, yeah

Q: But didn't you feel it was a logical way of organising things with the rationing of materials after the war and the housing shortage and the shortage of building materials. Do you think their ability to buy in bulk and get houses for people at lower prices – did he think that was useful at all, or had it outlived its useful did he feel by the time -

I don't know. I think it was just – actually speaking it was just that they were resuming people's land without their permission. You know people – that was I think the main thing. And of course another thing was you know, after that – Harry was on to some of the councillors at that time – but Hills, Pat Hills he was a labour member and he was the Minister for Lands and he had the idea of putting a green belt right round Sydney the same as they've got in Adelaide and that sort of thing. And he froze the land out in North Ryde for quite a few years, the land was frozen in North Ryde, they had to keep five acre blocks out there you know – the people who already had them. There were houses out there but the people still had to accept the five acre blocks sort of thing, yes. And Harry was on the – from Ryde Council he was a delegate on to the other – the Cumberland Council.

Q: Yes, right. So did he approve of the Green Belt? That idea, or -

I think at that time I don't think he went against it or anything I don't think so.

Q: Now later on in his political career, as you said he went into council as an Independent, was he later aligned with any political party?

No – yes – we were Liberals, but he never went in as a Liberal. He was always an independent. And didn't take any – like at one time John Cramer would have given him something towards his election but Harry wouldn't take money from anybody.

Q: Oh any funds you mean for the campaigning? So you mean he was a member of the Liberal Party?

We were a member of the Liberal Party for a number of years, but he never went in as a Liberal. He went in as an independent.

Q: So were you there in that very early – when it first started, after the war?

1949 it started didn't it? – more or less.

Q: A bit earlier.

No I think it was 1949, it was Chifley wasn't it that was going to nationalise the banks. That's right, 1949. It was soon after that, yes soon after we were back down in Sydney at that time. But we weren't active members until later.

Q: Now by this stage was Harry a school inspector or was he still a teacher?

No, Harry became – that was why he had to get out of Council actually, because when we came back from Broken Hill he was the Master of manual arts at Drummoyne and while he was in the area he was at Drummoyne. In 1951 –52 – 53 and then 57 and then after 1957 he became an inspector of schools. He was a supervisor before but he could say when he went and did things – but of course then becoming an inspector of schools he had to go out into the country and so he had to retire from Council and of course he couldn't give up. He couldn't say I'll be here at this meeting each time sort of thing, yes. That's why he retired.

Q: Now was he ever a sort of a active member of the Teacher's Federation in his teaching career?

No, no. Never an active member of the Teacher's Federation.

Q: And he didn't feel himself closer to Labour with his background of tradesman and a teacher?

No he didn't really. No he didn't. And of course my father was – actually in a trade – dad might have been earlier in the piece I don't know but we were more or less always on the conservative side of politics.

Q: Going back a little bit you'd remember the days Jack Lang was sacked of course wouldn't you?

That's right. Absolutely. I do remember. Because we lived in Gladesville at the time and his sister had a shop up the main street of Gladesville, that was one of Jack Lang's sisters. And that did cause a lot of kuffufle with the banks and everything else with Jack Lang. Yes, he did make a lot of – but going back about Liberal and Labour. I do think that Labour – the State politicians have done quite a bit for Sydney and NSW. You take the Opera House, that was Carr who started that, and you take Wran he improved our museums and all of those sort of things. Gave us Darling Harbour. I don't like his monorail (Laughs). But I do think that on the whole Labour over the years have done quite a bit for the – and as I say there's not – not every Labour person's good and not every Labour body is bad and the same with the Liberal Party. (Laughs). I'm not keen on Collins and quite a few people, although I'm a Lib and as I say I worked for Ivan Petch and I don't like Ivan Petch. (Laughter)

Q: That's on the record

Is it? No but I mean to say – I worked for him in his last election, but I think it was a very poorly – I don't blame him for the organization but I went down and worked – I spoke to the local chappie, Scott, Bob Scott and I said I'd be down there at 8 o'clock. I stood there at ten to eight and of course they've always had a hut there, the door was closed. I worked hard and put all Ivan's pictures all around. It was at the Gladesville School, which was the biggest in that area. The only people that were there, it was at the school, there were three openings and Bob Scott and I were the only people there for about one or two hours. Normally we'd have miles of people and the Labour had miles of people and to me it was not only the local people who had left there, but the central people should have – it was said afterwards that somebody didn't consider that Gladesville was a marginal seat, but if it was only 2% - you've only got a margin of 2% I'd say there was a swinging seat, wouldn't you? (Laughs)

Q: Now can we talk about when Harry was Mayor of Ryde. What duties did you have. Did you ever have to wear the ceremonial robes. You would have been created Mayoress.

Mayoress, yes. We always went to – Harry and I both made it a rule that we went to – sometimes we might go to two functions in a night – that we tried as much – I only – one function and that was a pre-wedding party for my daughter. My daughter was married in 1952 in the midst of things sort of thing. But we made a rule that we accepted all the invitations. Because I think it's important, from my point of view it is important that everybody be recognised for what they do because there's so many wonderful people in the world who do – I was just saying about it recently about the people who are not recognised for the voluntary work they do sort of thing, you know. And it was very interesting, as I think I said the other night, often the people from whom you've spoken to the least you've got the most, and the people from what you spoke the most you got the least, you know? Protocol wise, you know? It was quite interesting really to meet the different people, we both enjoyed it.

Q: And do you remember the time when he actually first was elected Mayor. Were you very excited? Or did he know he had the numbers?

I think he more or less knew he had the numbers, yes. It was very nice, really. And we had a very happy time. And it was funny. My husband and I are both teetotallers – but of course we had to – Harry had to keep a cupboard of liquor and all the rest of it and when we'd be entertaining some people before a function in the Mayor's room (laughs) the caretaker was the person who would serve the drinks and everything else and he wrapped a serviette round (laughs) the lemonade so they wouldn't notice we were drinking (laughter). Harry and I used to laugh you know.

Q: They'd think you were wowsers. (Laughter)

Yes it was funny really. But no we had a very happy time.

Q: This was in the previous Council Chambers?

Yes, that's right. But that was after we left – it was about 1965, yes that's right. Yes it was in the old Town Hall. We had a happy time. In the old place. A very small Mayor's room and all the rest of it. But we had a happy time, and on the whole, the whole Council got on well sort of thing. There was no group of men who where going to agree with one another all the time are they really? But on the whole they had a happy time.

Q: Now as well as Harry being involved in local government you were – and you still are in other work on juries etc. First of all as being a Board member of the Home for Incurables, as it was called then, could you tell me how you first got involved in that sort of work?

Matron Saville asked us – asked Harry to call a meeting and as I say I became….

Q: Now Matron Saville, just explain who she was.

She was the matron of Weemala. That was a beautiful old home.

Q: It was the original name of it?

Yes, yes. And how that happened was, it was a blind person – a blind person started that. She apparently was a visitor to the hospital and she came across the chappie who had lost his legs and didn't have any family and she went to a person in Redfern and asked her if she paid his board would she look after this man and that was how it started.

Then she went round the country collecting money and they had – the inaugural meeting was in the vestibule of the Sydney Town Hall and Moses sold them Weemala and all that land for four thousand pounds on the condition they never sold it. To be retained for the Home for the Incurables. And that's where it started. And in 1927 they built Moorong which was then for terminal cancer. And Matron Saville came out then to be the matron of that for 12 months and she became matron of the whole lot and lasted for 30 years. And as I say she was a fine figure of a woman, a lovely woman and we met her through the music club really. We used to go to the music club. And that's how I became involved – first as the president of the Auxiliary and then I was invited on the Board in 1963. And that was still – we still only had Weemala and Moorong and…

Q: Now this would have been when you came back from Broken Hill, when you first started your career would have been in the 1950's?

1952. Yes, we were back from Broken Hill, yes in 1952 when Harry was there.

Q: And she asked you because of his involvement in local government.

Yes she asked Harry to call this meeting you see. The formal Auxiliary. Because they only had a Sydney Auxiliary, Concord Auxiliary and a Parramatta Auxiliary. They had never had a Ryde Auxiliary. And so that's when we had the Auxiliary and we used to work for funds and take the patiens out.

Q: And you actually started it. You were the person behind it?

Oh yes, I was the president. I was the foundation president. And I was president for the 20 years we had it. And over the years the West Ryde Lions Club had been marvelous supporters of Weemala, they'd been outstanding. In one case they – there was Gloria who was a spastic and Ted – I don't know what was wrong with him but he could only stand up or lie down, he couldn't sit down. And he was blind I think, partly blind too. And they married. And the Lyon's Club was responsible for their home out in the West somewhere, somewhere near Penrith or something like that.

Q: They actually bought them a house?

Bought them a house, supplied them with this house and gave them the wedding. And Gloria used to come back for different things and I'd say: How's it going Gloria? 'Oh wonderful Mrs Mitchell, he's a wonderful cook. That was wonderful wasn't it really? But over the years the Lions Club has been the backbone of Weemala. And actually two of the residents, Jill Dennis who was a quadriplegic and then (indistinct) was also in a chair – they'd both been president of the West Ryde, only in recent years….

Q: The patient's group?

The patients themselves. They've been president of the West Ryde Lions and you know they really have been, and Ernie Tibb who – I think he's retired now, but he was in the West Ryde Lions and he took my place on the Board actually when I retired. In 1968 (indistinct) was built and it think it was opened in 1968. I was on the Board then, we still met in the beautiful old home. It was a lovely old home.

Q: Weemala?

Yes. Beautiful staircase and beautiful timber and all the rest of it. Some of the patients were in enclosed verandahs sort of thing. But we were going to build – the Board was going to build an older person's home down where Coorabel is. I don't know if you've seen….

Q: Oh I know what you're talking about, but I haven't been in there.

Yes well they were going to build an older person's home there but the government asked us to build a rehabilitation unit down there because they said that was what the future was, it was rehabilitation, and so that's what we did. And Cutler who was the government at the time – he opened it.

Q: Sir Roden Cutler?

Sir Roden Cutler. And then the patients from Weemala came down and lived in Coorabel while Weemala was reconstructed. The centre part of (indistinct) now is just the walls of the old – it was a lovely old home.

Q: Just going back to the work on the Auxiliary and then I'll come back to asking you about being on the Board. It was mainly fund raising? What sort of fund raising did you do? How did you raise funds?

Well we had card parties.

Q: What sort? Bridge?

Well they could play what they liked. But mainly Solo – Solo and Bridge, yes. And in those days card parties were very popular.

Q: Euchre?

If they wanted to. (Laughs) But mostly it was Solo and Bridge, not the contract Bridge that they play now, it was the other Bridge, you know the ordinary auction Bridge. But you see in those days card players were very very popular for Red Cross, and all the different organizations would have card parties. They had those every month up at the hall, up at Weemala and we had the – cake – in November I think it was in the second weekend, but any way in November they always had a very very big fete up at Weemala. It was famous the Weemala fete, and we had the cake stall. And it was funny one time I'd been up there on the Friday night getting the things for the stall, and I was up there and I'd been cooking all during the week and I was up there on the Saturday morning with the cake stall and then I had to go home and get dressed and come and meet the (laughs) it was the Governor – it was old, it was Sir Phillip Street then. He was – actually he was - no I had to come back as the Mayoress to officially open the fete. (Laughter). But he received me, yes. You see – he was the deputy governor at the time but he was also – I think he was the president of the Board at the time, yes.

Q: The card parties, would they be held in the afternoon or in the evening?

No, in the afternoon.

Q: So it was all women.

All women, yes.

Q: And what sort of married women I suppose whose children were a little bit older who could get out? Was that the sort of people?

Yes mostly women, I'd probably would be as old as most of them. I used to take my mother and aunt and two of their friends to all the card parties, you know? And they'd have a separate table. But I used to take them to all the different card parties.

Q: And you drove them?

I drove them, yes. I'd have the car.

Q: Did you have two cars at that stage?

No, we didn't we had the one car. Yes – so it was very interesting.

Q: So when you were on the Board. You were invited to be on the Board of Weemala in 1963? Could you explain what your role was as a Board member, what did you have to do?

Well you had to decide – like the secretary would bring in his ideas or different.

(Tape break)

TAPE 2 SIDE B

I was also on the Board of the Homes of Peace, about the same time I was on the Board of the Homes of Peace, in 1982 I think.

Q: Now the Home of Peace, could you explain that?

The Home of Peace is an Anglican Hospital and the original one was out at Patterson Rd and it was originally for people who were terminally ill. The Dr would have to sign a paper to say they had six to eight weeks to live sort of thing. But then it again became a rehabilitation hospital and now it's called the (indistinct) Care I think it is. My daughter is on the Board now. But I was on there for over 20 years too. The original one was at Petersham and then up at Neringah, you might have heard of it, Neringah is up at Wahroonga. I always say one of the best health ministers was old Billy Shehan because he…

Q: A Labour man.

A Labour man, yeah. Again he considered that Churches were the best people – Church organizations was the best people to look after terminally ill patients sort of thing. And….

Q: This was his Catholic background coming through I suppose.

Yes possibly. He helped us. The Red Cross Hospital up at Wahroonga where Neringah is, it was – the Red Cross was closing down and one of the people who was interested in the Red Cross who was also on the Board of the Home of Peace and she suggested that the Church of England buy it, which they did, and then as I say, it was only a single ward sort of thing and a double

storey house but Billy Shehan helped the Board, as I said before I went on the Board, helped the Board build a two storey hospital at Wahroonga. Then we had a lovely home down at Greenwich which had a lot of land and we were building a hospital down there, and then again Billy Sheean helped us with that. He lived up to what he believed sort of thing, you know and he was very good really.

Q: So as a Board member on these bodies you had to in consultation with the paid secretary you had to decide on the budget?

Yes, the whole policy of the hospital, yes. And you had your secretary coming advising and telling you, but you had to decide sort of thing.

Q: In 1963 when you were on the Board of Weemala were you the only woman on the Board?

No. I was one of three, another one come, we had four at one time. Yes we had four at one time on the Board at Weemala. I think I took Mrs White's place really. She was the – you wouldn't remember there was a guy called White (indistinct) and all this and she was really quite a wealthy person and when we were on the Board and we were building we went out to Shalom out at the Willandra village Shalom was their nursing home site and we went out to see their kitchen and I think Mr and Mrs White – they were quite wealthy people, but very nice people, and at that time we also went out to see Manly and we went down to – you know the Catholic one at -

Q: Calvary?

Calvary.

Q: Kogarah?

No, is it Calvary? Yes probably. It's a beautiful hospital it was built round about 1960 something wasn't it?

Q: Yes I think so. What did you see at Manly?

We went over to see the kitchen, at the Manly Hospital to see the kitchen because they had the idea that over there that they sort of cooked the meals beforehand and then just heated them up, when they took them up and heated them upstairs.

Q: Talking about Mrs White being a very wealthy woman did you find that in these sort of activities you were involved in, were you mixing with sort of the social set, the very wealthy people or was there a lot of just ordinary people like yourself involved?

No, for instance there was Mrs – there was one woman – Mrs White as I say she was very wealthy. But there was one lass who was actually the daughter – the Dickson's were responsible for – to a great extent for building Moorong. They're the people that actually owned Molle village, before it became Molle village, well their daughter was on the Board and she was wealthy. But none of the others were really wealthy – like I mean to say they were comfortable, they were better off than I was. (Laughter). There was a Mr Scott, he was an accountant, he wasn't short of money. And then there was whats a name – and he was a solicitor and Mr Mortlock he was an accountant – they all had more money than I did, but they were not snooty, they were very nice.

Q: And when you were the Mayoress did you have a dressmaker? Because you would have had to keep up -

Yes, yes I did have a lass that made my frocks, yes. And I'll tell you a sad thing about that. I did have some quite lovely evening frocks and of course when I was going to come up here – and even before that – I didn't want evening frocks, but I didn't want to give them to the Smith Family or anything like that sort of thing, and one time I belonged to the Henley bowling club and these people from the Hunters Hill – the theatre, the Hunters Hill theatre club, they were buying some things down there and I said: Oh would you like some evening frocks? And they said, yes they'd love it. So I gave them my evening frocks and not many years after they had a fire and they all went up in smoke.

Q: June didn't want them?

No – well you see June's bigger than I am. I did have some quite nice frocks and but – yes, they all went up in smoke. (Laughs)

Q: Could I pop back to WW2 now – jumping all over the place. How did that affect your life, did you find restrictions on what you did, or did it change anything in your life? You told me earlier how you thought perhaps you might work at that stage, and then you decided against it.

That's right. Well it did change my life in as much as I joined St Johns and I was a foundation member of St Johns in Hunters Hill and then 1943 I became a foundation superintendent of the Gladesville division of Hunters Hill. I went up to Broken Hill and I was an acting superintendent up there.

Q: And that was all voluntary work?

All voluntary, yes. And then I came back and then I became Corp officer and when I retired in 1973 I was the District Superintendent of NSW, you see, so I was quite involved in St Johns. I was also involved in Red Cross and of course in the Homes of Peace. Before I became a Board member we used to go out about once a month or something and do sewing out at Everslie, mend clothes or do something. And of course I was involved with the Parents and Citizens and one time just before we went up to Broken Hill I was the president of the Mother's Club at Riverside. So I became involved in voluntary work and didn't have time for tennis. Never played tennis after.

Q: (Laughs) And you were a keen tennis player before that, you were telling me.

I was yes, we went to Melbourne a couple of times with the Women's (indistinct) .

Q: Oh, so you were (indistinct) – it wasn't a hit and giggle, it was -

Oh no, no, however, it wasn't serious but you know I was keen.

Q: And did your mother look after the kids while you played when they were really little or – you got right into it when they got to school?

Yes, that's right, more or less. I used to take Rod with me, when I played tennis I'd take him with me, and it was funny another friend who had a little girl a bit younger than Rod, she used to say, Rod and what's a name play well together, she said, when she's with her cousins she fights. (Laughs) But – no I used to take the children to – and when we were up at Wagga, when June was a baby one time the lass that was our landlord more or less, she managed the flats, she was a champion croquet player and a couple of times we were invited out to play at one of the country towns to play tennis and she took – it was only for the afternoon, and she wheeled June around to the croquet club (laughs) and looked after her.

Q: Were you thinking of undertaking paid work at all?

Yes, I was. I thought I could go into – see during the war with St John I was also a VAD and I did work….

Q: Could you just explain what that is? What sort of things did they do?

Voluntary Aid Detachment. I went out to the KGV Hospital and I went down – was allocated the ward underneath where the serious cases were you know where they had complications and things. And I would work there at least once or twice a week and one time the sister in charge, I'd been there for quite a while and she said: Would you like to see a caesarean birth? And I said, yes. Although I should have been home, it was going to about five

o'clock. So I went up and you're looking down over the glass over the operating theatre you see, and you were watching. It was all right when the cut the first layer – the skin you know, and that was all right, but when they cut the womb, you know all this blood spurting and you thought oooh, and June was 12 at the time and I said oh what if this happened to June? You know? The things that come into your mind. But I did duty out at the Concord sort of thing, you know you did these things like that.

Q: So you were thinking of actually getting a job but you kept on with the voluntary work instead?

Yes, that's right, yes, yes. I did that.

Q: What sort of paid work would you have got? Would you have gone back into being a milliner?

No I don't think so. I think I would have got into an office or something like that sort of thing. I would have felt more like doing something like that. I hadn't thought about it really but I might have – I don't know what I would have done really.

Q: And tell me though why you didn't. You told me before but -

Well because mother said – Harry my husband didn't want me to go and she said well, my mother said: Well if Harry doesn't want you to go I think that's a good idea if you don't go. And I think that was good advice that I took from my mother. Because I think Harry was the type that would not have liked it.

Q: He felt he was the bread winner and -

Well that's right yes, and of course in those days it was a different atmosphere altogether. As a matter of fact he wasn't terribly keen when our daughter continued working after her marriage. That didn't please him very much either. (Laughs)

Q: Did he say anything, or did he just keep it to himself?

Oh no no he didn't interfere. No, but he wasn't terribly keen on that sort of thing. (Laughs) VAD's they call them, Voluntary Aid Detatchment. But during the war St John were VAD's as well, we wore our St John uniform when we were out on our ordinary duties but when we went into the hospitals we wore VAD uniform. And we performed – because you see in St John you're trained in First Aid and Home Nursing and also to become a VAD I had to go to Ryde Hospital and do some training in the Ryde Hospital before I was able to out into the hospitals sort of thing. So that's what we did.

I always think the Lord's been very good to me because I've had a marvellous mother and father a marvellous husband and a wonderful family, and I don't think you can ask for more. In my opinion the most important thing in your life is your family. Money doesn't mean a thing if you don't have a good family,

and I think, sadly, too many people think that they can just give their children money and it makes up for their love, but you've got to take a real interest in your family before – because they appreciate it, you know and we've always had a very close family and my mother's always had us at home for a Sunday night tea and all the rest of it and I continued that with my family and we always get together on birthdays and functions sort of thing, the whole – and I think I've told you my daughter has three girls and a boy and my son has three boys and a girl and my daughter has 10 grandchildren and my son has one little grandson who has made such a wonderful difference. But to me family is the important thing.

Q: Thank you very much, that was wonderful Mrs. Mitchell.

(Tape break)

END OF INTERVIEW