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COMMUNITY LIFE

Library
Oral History –
An Interview with
Doris Kelly



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Interviewee: Doris Kelly

Interviewer: Lesley Goldberg

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Q: You don't remember her (your mother) doing work like that (helping out at the hotel) later?

Mum didn't go to work, she had enough to do here. To sew and cook and...she helped dad clear this ground because it was covered in trees and all the stumps had to be dug out. Mum would get the hole dug and by the time dad got home the hole was there and he had to cut through all the roots then and the tree would come down. Mum would dig the hole and get everything ready and for an Englishwoman this was work that she was never used to. They didn't do things like this in England.

Q: If they were living in Drummoyne and building a house here, how did they manage that one did she tell you?

Well of a weekend. There was no Saturday or Sunday work so dad would come down of a weekend and he would bring the children with him and they would hold the timber up for dad...they were only youngsters but they would hold up the timber while dad made the walls of the cottage and after a few weekends coming from Drummoyne they soon had a home, two rooms anyway.

Q: Do you know how long they lived in the two rooms before they were able to add on to this house?

I would say it was probably four years because I was born in that room but my sister was out here. I don't know how she was outside but I remember she said...the nurse caught me and passed the baby over and said 'you've got a sister at last' and I was born in that room.

Q: So you were born at home?

Yes. Yes. Those two rooms...Nurse MacPhail that's right. And those two rooms were bedrooms more or less with a kitchen table in them. That's what it was and across the corner was the dresser where dad put a rack for the china, across the room. I was born here and Perce, yes, my brother and he was born in 1920 so therefore they didn't build that brick part until after that.



Q: So the house gradually grew from then on.

Yes. (The fuel stove was right there). Yes that's right.

Q: Have you got any memories of how eight fitted into the house?

Well, no. You wouldn't...just the fact that you were all under shelter and you were warm and well fed. This is...in England they didn't live much better because they would have two families in a house and there would be one family upstairs and one family down. (We had a gas lamp there, didn't we?) That was later on when Mr. Fletcher added to the house, yes. We had a gaslight. Up until then it was a kerosene lamp.

Q: Do you have any memories of any difficulties or lack of privacy or any of that that seemed important.

No. No.

(Break in Transcript)

...The boys would go and get dole money which was 5/- a week I think dole and then some weeks if you were lucky you could get two weeks work with the Council which happened about every six months. One of the boys would get two weeks work with the Council and that would bring in some money but the house had to be paid. We had to pay water rates and of course mum didn't have any money for that and they mounted up. When I left school, I got a job at a millinery and I got 10/- a week to go into Sydney and I worked at the Regent Millinery opposite the Regent Theatre it was in George Street and I would get 10/- a week. One week's pay would...mum used to say 'take it into the Water Board and pay them 10/- off the water bill' and all the time we paid a little bit off the water bill we could have water supply but I believe some people had their water supply disconnected because if you couldn't pay the money, they would let the bill go on.

Q: Your mum was still paying off the house at that point?

Yes, she tried with what money she could get and on different things. First of all she sold the dairy because we had cows when dad was alive. She sold the cows, whatever money she could get. Dad died without a will, so it was under...the Public Trustees took it over and they managed the Estate and they said she could stay in the house all the time my brother and I were under twenty I think or under eighteen or such, that mum could stay in the house for that time. The Rural Bank was the bank that lent us money for the house and you would get a reminder every now and then that there was no rent being paid and so-forth but they were quite lenient because at that time it was a man in Parliament called Jack Lang. He was a labour man and he passed a bill in Parliament to say that no person was to be turned out of their home because



of the state of affairs otherwise the houses would all have been empty. He passed an Act called the Moratorium Act and it was to do with people to keep them in their homes until times got better because there was no way out. It wasn't peoples' fault that they were out of work.

Q: Were you the only one at that time that had a regular wage in the family?

Well the boys got jobs when they went to the Astra Hotel. This is when the boys left home and got jobs. Lew went on...he was getting dole but you could only get dole once a month at some places so they got on their pushbikes and they tried to get jobs from town to town and Lew and his mate went away on their pushbikes into the country picking up jobs with farmers or anywhere at all to get a few shillings and so mum didn't have us all at home at once. The boys did what they could. George went to the Hotel Astra first and then he got Lew there later.

Q: How did he get that job, did he tell you?

Er..yes. We had friends by the name of Mr. and Mrs. Shaw. I think they were from England and Mr. Shaw's son worked at the Hotel Astra and when they needed help they got in touch with us and George went and applied for the job and he got the first job and then later on when they needed more help, Lew got a job there. But it came through Mr. and Mrs. Shaw.

Q: Did that include board, those jobs?

Yes but they didn't get paid much but they had their keep. They had to live next door to the hotel I think. The money was very poor but at least it was work.

Q: What about your older sister?

She was a tailoress and she worked at Murdoch's and she was a very small built person and it was a hard job for her because she was on overcoats and things, and putting them through the machines, it was a heavy job but she worked at Murdoch's. When mum had the babies, she would take a couple of months off to come home and help out so mum got on her feet again. Of course you had to have your babies at home and she said Murdoch's were very good to her. She said they always took her back.

Q: She must have been a good worker then?

Yes. I would say that she was.

Q: Tell me about the relationships within the family?

Well, my sister was the eldest and I'll say that she was the light of my life. She looked after me and made my dresses and she was so proud of me. I had four brothers and they were really good brothers. I never had any trouble with my



brothers at all. We were content because mum was the ---- because we had lost our dad. Because of losing our dad mum was so important to us. We had a good mother, that's what we can say.

Q: When your father died, you've told me about the impact of -

(Break in Tape)

Q: There was a shortage of money. Can you think of any other impact on your mother from the Depression and the loss of her husband at the same time?

Yes, well... Things were very hard for everyone and you will understand but also the Council had troubles too. Now because nobody had any money the rates weren't getting paid so they went around to buy up properties that owed them rates. If you owed rates to the Council, you might owe them say £50 just as an example and if you owed them that much rates well they would say that they would have to take over and they would take the property. Well, when my brothers and sister were growing up, they bought land on Blaxland Road, three blocks of land and they had a tennis court there and they used to play tennis on the three blocks of land on the Blaxland Road. Well, later on when the land wasn't being used and dad had died and there was no rates being paid on it the Council resumed the land and I think from what I know mum got £130 for it but they took £90 back for the kerb and guttering that had been put around the land. So actually she lost three blocks of land just because of that.

Q: It seems to have affected as well things like having money for any sort of entertainment for instance?

Yes. Well the only entertainment we had was always something that didn't cost. That was it. It had to be something that didn't cost. The garage at the top of the street formed a friendly society and they had concerts there but we were all under...at no cost. There would be a concert on tonight and everybody would go but there was no cost.

Q: Who performed there?

The locals. The local ones. We had Mr. and Mrs. Watson in Haig Avenue. Old timers on the stage and they just loved to get up on the stage and make everybody laugh and they had a daughter who was beautiful and she would sing you see and two or three other girls did dances and this was entertainment. People did it freely and we had a good night.

Q: What about you and your friends, did you visit each other's places?

No, very rarely, unless we were doing something together. Unless we were doing sewing together or...I had a friend in the street. We went to school together and we lots of things together when we needed company. When you



went to school with someone you got to know them like family and I can remember when she had a birthday, she came down and she came down and said to my mother 'I'm having a birthday today Mrs. Bush' and she would say 'oh, isn't that nice. Wait a minute I'll get you something'. So she went to the cupboard and gave her half a dozen eggs. She said 'you take those home and your mum can make you a birthday cake'. Now there you are.

Q: This is from your own fowls was it?

Yes. Yes.

Q: So that must have helped during the Depression, the fact that you had a cow, a fowl and fruit trees?

Yes, plenty of fruit. Mum made jam in 6lb jars.

Q: Was she doing the gardening or were you all doing the gardening?

The boys did it mostly. They helped out and the boys were in their teens, young fellows and the boys did it.

Q: You had cousins living nearby as well?

Yes. Yes. And they managed exactly the same way as we did you know. My uncle lived up at number 10 and he was...what did Uncle do? He was like a policeman for the naval dockyard wasn't he. Police on the waterfront, yes. Yes, he was like a policeman. He wasn't in police uniform but he was a guard. He would be a guard on the waterfront I think on the islands, Cockatoo Island and the naval islands.

Q: He was your mum's brother?

Yes.

Q: This was Mr. Leggett.

Yes.

Q: And he came out soon after your family.

Yes. He came out about I think a year or two afterwards to get a home started so his wife and children could come out.

Q: So they did see Australia as a better place to be than England at that time?

Oh, yes. Yes. But the English climate was so bad that it was hard to cope in England and in Australia they didn't have that severe Winter.



Q: Was there a lot of close interaction between the two families when you were growing up?

Not only families but everybody's family. We all lived a few...we didn't live close together. It was always up the street or down the street or in the next block or somewhere away. So there was always something going on in-between families. Yes, I would say.

Q: The idea of today when people travel into the City or elsewhere for entertainment, that wasn't really on at all?

I don't think I went to the Royal Easter Show until I was sixteen.

Q: Do you remember that outing?

Yes. I can remember being taken to the Royal Easter Show but my brothers went because they were older and they would bring home things, showbags that cost sixpence or something like that and it would be full of Palmolive soap and perfume and oh, there would be lovely things in a showbag. To go to Sydney on the tram was 4d.

...END OF PARTIAL TRANSCRIPTION...