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Oral History – An Interview with Dorothea Nichol

November 2010

An Interview with Dorothea Nichol

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Date of Interview: 29th July, 1997.

Transcription: Gabrielle Goddard. Feb 1998.

Q: Mrs Nichols I thought we might start when you first came to Ryde, why your family moved from Bondi? This was when you were aged eleven.

Yes well when we were at Bondi my dad suffered a lot from bronchitis and the Dr decided that he should go somewhere where it was higher, between West Ryde, Eastwood. So he started looking for another business and he bought a Ham and Beef shop in Top Ryde. Of course we all had to come up here too. A friend of ours was a removalist and he was doing a job for a person in Shepherd St and we didn't even see that home because he took it there and then and we moved up the next week into this home, we hadn't seen it, didn't know where it was. But we all settled in quite good.

Q: Just took the removalist's word for it. So it would be good.

Well he was a friend of the family's he knew we would have to have a residence out here and so we lived there for a few years and then a home up the top of the hill as we called it. It was owned by Mrs Parry for many years and when she died it was sold and the local milkman bought it and we were friendly with him, so we moved up to the top of the hill which was just opposite our shop and it made life a lot easier for mum and dad.

Q: So the house in Shepherd St you were renting, and you were there for a few years?

Yes we were there for about five years.

Q: So the house you moved into in Top Ryde and the shop. Can you explain to me exactly where those two buildings were located?

The home was at the top of Park St and over the Road was the wood and coal yard and Harris Bros Produce and the shop was next door to that. There was only four shops in that area, once they put the big road through because that wasn't there when we came to Ryde it was just like a little dirt track. And then all of the shops went down with all their hitching posts out the front for the horse and carts that came in and it was quite different for us and our family because we came from Bondi. Quite different for us up here, because Bondi was built up, all bricks, no paddocks, no trees and we came up to Ryde and

we had all this open space and the trees, big peach tree in our back yard. Oh, it was absolutely - I thought it was the last thing - it was beautiful. We used to climb up it and the peaches were beautiful.

Q: This was in Shepherd St?

Yes, and of course as time went on a little bit more ground was taken up and the open paddocks closed in and my recollection was the Chinese gardens and when we moved to Top Ryde everybody used to walk down past our place and we'd see these Chinese. Little men running down, and we'd run for our lives. We were scared stiff. (Laughs)

Q: Were you? Why?

I don't know, I think it was just they we hadn't seen anything like this. Not at Bondi, no hadn't seen them. And they had these little black satin hats and their little pig tails down the back. And the place where all the farms that they owned weren't far away, it was just down the bottom of the hill, but we were - we were scared. We used to stand and wait for them and then run for our lives.

Q: Did you parents buy fruit and vegies from them at all?

No, I don't ever remember buying from down there. I believe you could take a bucket and get tomatoes and that but we didn't bother.

Q: Did they ever come into your shop as customers?

No, not as far as I recall, they kept to themselves a lot. I don't know where they bought the things they needed but we didn't see them. You didn't see them much in Ryde. You just used to see them running down the hill.

Q: Why were they running down the hill?

They ran everywhere.

Q: Did they?

Yes, yes, you'd see them and they're little legs would carry them and they'd run down the hill, run up the hill. Busy all the time. I couldn't even tell you how many were there, but you used to see them running down.

Q: You can just remember men I suppose?

Only the men, I don't ever remember seeing the women at all. There was another Chinese gardens along North Road. I didn't see them very much because we didn't go up that far.

Q: Can you describe the shop to me? Picture it in your mind?

Well we were quite shocked because before we went there we had a shop in Bondi Road and it was a big open shop and it was opposite the schools, the both schools, and of a lunchtime, when I came home I couldn't go through the shop, they used to think I was trying to push in to the counter. We had the residence behind the shop. But when we moved to Ryde it was a different kettle of fish altogether. Two elderly women owned it by the name of Hayes and they had hand machines to cut meat on and that. Well dad bought his electric machines up you see. And everybody remembers it, because it was all fly screened in and they had little shutter windows that used to go up and you'd put your money through and you'd get your parcel through there. And the first day dad put the electric machines in and he was cutting - the two Miss Hayes - oh! they couldn't get over it because they so - it used to take them so long to cut, and dad would flick it though in no time. But it was a good business and we were all very happy.

Q: Did your father bring any other modernisation in?

No, only as far as I remember, he only brought up the big electric bacon cutter and the new 'frig and it was a big walk in 'frig - a cool room. And he brought that up. I remember my Dad getting the butter, but it was in a box, it wasn't wrapped and packed like it is now and he would weigh it out and patty it around and wrap it up and put it back into the 'frig. Little things like that I remember.

Q: The Miss Hayes, were they very old fashioned?

Yes they were. Two little old ladies behind the counter you know. Well when dad came my eldest brother was with him and my mother, they all worked, and then as time went on my brother left and dad employed other people. But it was quite a good little business. It kept our family going.

Q: Did you ever help in the shop as you were getting a bit older?

Yes as I got a bit older I did do a little bit for dad, I didn't like it, it wasn't my - I didn't like working for my people, I would rather be out where I could back chat somebody. (Laughter)

I couldn't back chat my mum and dad, I wouldn't. They were very good and kind and that, but poor old dad he was the sort of fellow, he left all the smacking and all that to mum. Dad used to just say, 'Look Peg, I only see them on a Sunday lunch time, don't give it to me to be the bad one in the family'. Well they were alright to work for but I would have rather -

Q: - didn't suit you. Could you explain to me what they were selling at the shop?

They were selling, it was a real provisions shop, but the difference between the shops today and the shop Dad had. Dad did all his own cooking. He cooked all his own corn beef, all his own ham, made all his own brawn and his baked rabbits were known all over the district. They were beautiful, and if you brought your jug he'd give you the gravy. Only one and three pence. I can see it today. But it was quite good. The older people in Ryde, they all remember. Remember how dad ran the shop. Spotless, white coat and apron, clean every day.

Q: And did he do all that cooking on the premises?

Yes. We used to have the health inspectors. They would all come round and this day - Dad had sawdust on the floor. And he went out into the kitchen and he said, 'What's the sawdust on the floor?' He said, 'I suppose your trying to hide the dirty greasy floor', and with that my father got the broom and he swept it and of course the floor was snow white underneath. He said, 'Do you know why I put sawdust behind the counter and on the floor?' and the young fellow said, 'No'. He said, 'Well if you drop anything you've got to throw it out.' You couldn't pick a rabbit up if you dropped it on the floor, you couldn't get the sawdust off it. If you dropped sausages on the floor.....So my father kept the sawdust on the floor, behind the counter and all out in the kitchen, he used to just sweep it every second day and put fresh sawdust down. Yes, he did all his own cooking.

Q: Do you remember where the sawdust came from?

No, no. In those days the butchers all used it too. So I suppose it was a firm that just delivered the sawdust. I can see it in a big bin out the back.

Q: Do you know where he got his supply of rabbits from? Did he have regular people who shot them and brought them in?

No he bought them from Wards in Pyrmont and I know as a schoolgirl I used to go in because I could go in for a penny and I used to go in to Pyrmont, just around where the bus passes today, but of course the shops gone. I'd go in on the tram. If any of the adults went it would cost three pence you see, but I got there and back for two pence. And I would take a big case and the chap in there you dad and knew me and he would pack the bag and I'd wait outside and get the tram back.

Q: What sort of bag would you have the rabbits in?

Just a case it was, like a suitcase, but it was all lined with brown paper and butcher's paper and they were all wrapped in. Just an ordinary school case it was.

Q: How big would it have been?

Oh - well I wouldn't bring the whole lot back, it would be if dad was running short. I'd just go in, bring back might be eight, might be seven, or nine, I just forget.

Q: Did you feel that was a real responsibility?

Oh yes, yes. Dad paid me.

Q: Oh did he? How much did you get paid for that?

I think I'd be lucky if I got sixpence. (Laughs) But that sixpence went a long way in those days. It was marvelous. I used to do more I feel with my money when I first started work than what I did when I got big money later on.

Q: Now in those early years when you were living at Shepherd St, your father was in the shop. Was your mother in there a lot too?

Mum didn't go into the shop to start with for a little while because we had the young one there, she was only two. But as she got a little bit older, mum went into the shop. We lived about ten minutes away from the shop and my mother was a very hard working person. She would come home in the afternoon, cook our dinner, make sure we all had our dinner and then put dad's on a plate and the old serviette with the knot on top and take that up to dad so he could have his dinner up at the shop. In those days the shop was open till nine o'clock at night. Every night.

Q: So you never sat down and had dinner with you dad except on Sunday?

No, that's why on the Sunday he used to be very fussy about, we all had our Sunday dinner together at least. And it used to be a bug bear when we were growing up, you know and you wanted to go out somewhere and you'd be.....but you got used to it, dad was marvelous and so was mum, mum was wonderful.

Q: Now just explain those Sundays to me. Being a Catholic that would have started with Mass?

Oh yes. We were never ever - it wasn't so bad when your twelve, thirteen, but when you got to fifteen - and I was allowed out only on a Saturday night to go to a local dance or a party or something. We still were woken up Sunday morning for seven o'clock Mass. Hail, snow or shine. That was it. 'Mum, I think I'll go to....' 'No Dorrie, no go to seven o'clock Mass, I'm going to seven o'clock Mass'. And of course that was it. We'd all go as a family. All except dad. Dad would go to the late mass, so he could have a sleep in. But when we came home dad used to cook our breakfast every Sunday morning. And when I think of it now I shiver. Bacon and eggs. Eggs boiled, bacon grilled and the fat

off the bacon poured off on to the egg. And every Sunday morning dad cooked our breakfast.

Q: What Mass would he go to?

He'd go to the late Mass at ten o'clock. But we, hail, snow or shine....?

Q: And you'd walk from Shepherd St to St Charles

We'd walk from Shepherd St and get the tram down. But it was a lot easier when we moved to Top Ryde. The tram used to stop outside our shop and mum would be making the bed and we had a form like a seat on our front, and we'd stand up on there and we'd see the tram from the terminus pole move and we'd say, 'Righto mum' and we'd all fly up the hill and get the tram down to Mass.

Q: Was the shop exactly in the spot where the Civic Centre is now, or across the Road?

No, no, no. Where the Civic Centre is now. You know the front part of it? You know the library? That's the closest. Well where the library is, the shops went around like that. Around the curve.

Q: So you were facing the Masonic Temple?

Yes the shop was facing opposite. Our address was Blaxland Road. Blaxland Road came down and went up and there was only the tram line on the top and all those houses were in Blaxland Road and ours was Blaxland Road.

Q: So when Ryde bridge went in that would have been in the early years when you were living there. Could you explain the road works that went on there, what you saw?

Well I don't remember much about the Ryde bridge. I remember the first double decker bus trip I had, we went over the Ryde bridge. But they put that big road through which is Devlin St and of course they widened it and they built it right up and the houses on the right hand side going down to the bridge, you went down about ten steps. But I remember the road going through. They took down a lot of the shops that were there. Haywood's old milk bar and a few of those old shops along there, and of course that was marvelous.

Q: You thought the road was marvelous?

Well the road, I mean going through made it opened it a lot. Used to have to come right round. But dad was a bit worried, because it broke them off from the rest of the shops. It was one big row of shops. Well when they put that road through, those two or three shops were taken down and divided. And dad thought the people might not walk over, well for the first few weeks the

business did go down, not rock bottom, but it went down. But, they couldn't get the home cooked meat. So they gradually came back.

Q: You actually remember the road being built? And do you remember the sort of people, perhaps unemployed people working on it?

Well I wouldn't have known what they were. All we knew was the big machines. There weren't a lot of machines, it was mostly pick and shovel. But I remember they cut off a lot of people's front yards along there, and widened it. But it was only a dirt track before that happened.

Q: Now tell me about those other shops that were there beside yours.

Well next door to us was a boot repairer. Cox, he was the boot repairer. Then there was Stan Wilson's bike shop, he was on the corner. And then there was dad and then Harris Bros produce store. Well when they built there they moved across the road, they're still there. I think it still goes under Harris Bros. I don't know who owns it now. And then there was the big road put in and then there was the famous Carlisle's Corner. Anybody going anywhere, 'We'll see you on Carlisle's Corner. It was a big grocery shop and then there was a little library. Only yesterday a girl on the bus said to me, 'Dot do you remember a shop in Ryde where a Miss owned it and she had floral arrangements and a few flowers and a few fairy dresses for the kids?' I said, 'Miss Glossop'. And it just came to me. And she said, 'That's the name'. She used to be down near the hotel. Mrs Dashow, she had the only haberdashery shop we had here, and Haywood's little old milk bar. The first time I ever had a hot milkshake was in there. Hot milkshake, yes, she used to heat it up, dear old thing. And there was Burton's the butchers and they were there for a long while. And then of course a few shops were lost when they put the arcade down. But we used to watch that shopping area go up, over there, all the big cranes and that.

Q: And that was when it was being built in the fifties?

Yes it was quite a change from our few little shops down the street. Old Rankin had a paper shop down there. One light globe would be burning in the shop and he'd have all the magazines hanging there, and we were devils we'd go in and we'd ask him for a bottle of lemonade, or something, something we knew he didn't sell, and he used to come and push all these magazines aside and he'd say, 'Yeeees?' 'Have you got a bottle of lemonade Mr Rankin?' 'Noooo, I don't stock that'. 'Oh, goodo'. But we used to just do it to see his reaction. (Laughs) I feel ashamed now.

Q: When the Top Ryde shopping centre was being built do you remember your father commenting on it?

No dad had gone then. Dad died when he was about fifty four. We sold the business, he wasn't very well and we sold the business and just after that he died, or very soon after that he died.

Q: So that would have been just after WWII you sold the business?

Yes. After WWII. Dad was a warden.

Q: Just coming to the house when you moved to Top Ryde? Could you describe that to me? You owned this house didn't you?

No, no. It was owned by the milkman, I can't remember his name. It was a beautiful big old home but it was made into semis. They put a new kitchen on one part and we had the older part because it had more bedrooms. There was a long hall in it and the rooms went off the hall and we had a lovely back verandah and we had that beautiful view across to the mountains. It was very high. The Walsh's lived next door. And then he sold it. And mum was up there on her own for sometime, well when he sold that, well mum, well she was getting on, I suppose she would be about eighty then, and I brought her down with me and she lived with me till she was eighty nine.

Q: So that old house you're talking about has gone?

Oh yes. There are units there now. Right opposite where the library is.

Q: Could we perhaps talk about your education? When you came from Bondi you had been at a Catholic school there, so you went to St Charles, Balmain? Do you remember your first day?

I don't actually remember the first day, but I remember going up and being registered. My two young brothers and myself went up with mum and I only remember the nun taking down all the particulars and that and asking what I was up to in History and of course being me, I couldn't even tell her what I'd been up to.

Q: What do you mean, being you?

Oh well, you know.

Q: Were you a bit of a scatter brain?

I loved fun and I, you know. I - school didn't mean anything to me. I went because I had to go. But loved the days we had basket ball and I loved the days that we had physical education, they were mine, but when it came to history and geography I wasn't very keen, although I will admit I went, I didn't like school, but I never ever wagged school. I was terrified of what mum and dad would say. I settled in very well because it wasn't long after that that the holidays came and the nuns changed over and who should come up there but Sister Marcella who taught me at Holy Cross at Woollahra. Sister Madeleine that taught me at Holy Cross too. I knew them, you know. And I got on famously.

Q: What order of nuns were they?

They were Mercy.

Q: So you felt very comfortable with them?

I did because they knew me, they knew my name. So, 'Dorothy would you go and', it was only because they had to get used to the others you know. The new school was in the final stages of being built and we only had brick halls, they were built very close to the main street. They weren't very far in off the road and I had a friend whose father was on the trams and of course she'd say, 'Dad's leaving the Quay at so and so, he'll be up here at so and so'. We couldn't do our lessons, we'd be looking to see, and all of a sudden you'd see him wave and we'd all wave back, it was like a circus. But they were the things you do remember.

Q: Was discipline strict with the nuns?

Yes, it was, they weren't - I don't ever remember getting the cane. But I was a muck up. How I got out of it I don't know. But I was kept in, and we were playing basket ball or net ball I don't know, and the priest joined in with us and he was a little bit of a rough and tumble, Father Purcell. And held me over the line and he said, 'You're out'. And I put my hands on my hips, and I said, 'Your a cheat'. To the priest. And of course Sister Mary Anne was standing there wasn't she? Anyway she took me off the field. Well he had a collar, and he hung the collar on the fence and behind the fence was the cabbage garden and all that, so as soon as the game was over, they'd all gathered round, and I got the collar and I shot it into the cabbage patch and of course when they found out I'd did it I was kept in for a week. Not allowed to play basket ball. But I don't ever remember getting the cane. I didn't. But I was kept in a few times.

Q: Do you remember other kids getting the cane?

No, not really. The cane wasn't anything that was - in your mind if you did anything you didn't think, 'Oh I'm going to get the cane'. I'm not saying they didn't but I can't remember anybody really getting the cane. We were kept in more, or given lines to do. And even as we grew older and left school we still used to go out and visit this Sister Fabian out at Bondi she was, and we used to go out there and visit her. She was a dear old nun, but she was strict in her ways. And I always remember we used to pay her sixpence and she'd take us for a walk. (laughter). We'd pay her sixpence. She was all for making money you see and we'd pay her sixpence and she would walk with us and we would got out to a place called Fairylands and that's a long way but we used to think it was marvelous.

Q: Who would fork out the money?

Oh well, we used to get it from our parents you know. We were only talking about it on our last get together, about the sixpence. And we went out there and one of the girls said, 'Do you remember the day Sister Fabian kept us in?' And she said, 'Just remember the lovely days'. And we said, 'Yes, giving sixpence to walk where we could have gone for nothing?' (Laughter).

Q: Did she put it into the Convent funds? They'd be short of money I suppose. Tell me about that walk to Fairyland and what you saw on the way and what you did when you got there.

It was all bush, we walked across paddocks and I'll never forget, one day there was a bull in the paddock and we were all pushing one another forward and getting away from it. And we got out and walked down a big hill down to Fairyland, it was right on the river, the Lane Cove River, and I have a feeling it could be still there. Now they have made it into a little pleasure ground after that, but when we went out there it was just bush land and a few tables near the river and we'd all open up our lunch, and I'd swap my beautiful pork and pickle sandwiches for jam

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Q: So you swapped your lunch for jam?

Yes, mum would get up early in the morning, she'd be over there very early in the morning and put out lunch up for school and as we were going we'd call in and pick our lunch up and it was usually pork and pickles, or ham. And I'd get to school and someone would only have a jam sandwich and I used to feel - and I would say, 'Would you like one of mine?' And before I knew it they'd be having my pork and pickle sandwiches and I'd be having their jam sandwiches. But they were hard times you know in those years. I was lucky and I've always thanked the Lord that I was. I mean mum and dad were good. We didn't have a lot. But if I needed a new pair of shoes I always got them, if there was anything on at the school I was always allowed to go, but there were some poor children they just couldn't afford it. We had a uniform - well this is a bit of skite. Mum was always fussed on our uniform and we had the pleated skirts, the black ribbed stockings, black shoes and fuji silk blouses over the skirts and I used to be taken round the class to show them what the uniform should be.

Q: Had your mother made it?

Oh, no, no. Mum took us in and mum bought them. Of course I was the only one really. The boys - my older sister wasn't there, and I was the only one that was at school that had a uniform like that. Because the next two were boys, and until they went to the Christian Brothers, Burwood Christian Brothers, and

he had his straw boater and what went with it. But we were lucky, we didn't have a lot of money but we had enough and we had everything that we had to have.

Q: What shop did you buy the uniform in?

They were brought to the school. We bought them through the school.

Q: A lot of kids wouldn't be wearing the uniform at all. Did they have ordinary clothes on, or?...

No most of them had uniforms, you know, like the skirts, but they used to have little short sleeves, we were supposed to wear long cuffs and all that.

Q: And a tie?

Oh yes, we had the tie. Most of them were in uniform but I always remember a friend of mine coming to school one day and she had a cream cardigan on and Sister Fabian said, 'That is not uniform'. 'Oh well Sister it was wet at the weekend and me mother wasn't very well and she had to wash it this mornin'. I always remember that. (Laughter).

Q: So you were a picture in your uniform? How they should have looked.

Yes and I feel dreadful now, but oh I was so proud of my uniform. I used to think I was the only one in the class that had it. But a lot of the others, they were dressed too, but it was just something you know.

Q: Do you have a memory of school fees? Did kids actually take the fees in those days?

They weren't under obligation if you didn't have it. You didn't have to pay it. And I think if there was more than one going you got a discount. Like two shillings a week or one and six.

Q: Do you remember taking it to the nuns yourself?

Oh yes, we used to take it every Monday morning. Sister would sit at her desk, whoever was on duty and you'd go in, she'd have a book and you'd put your money down and she'd tick your name off.

Q: And would you have been aware, or were you too young to realise, that some families just couldn't pay that?

Oh I knew that some of my friends there didn't have the money. Their father wasn't working. But there was never - I will say that - there was never anything made of it. They were never hauled out and, 'You haven't paid your school fees'. There was nothing like that ever said. As far as I remember, but mine was always - well they knew they were getting mine every week. When the school was finished my father put all the blinds through. Roll up blinds. I

complained one day because the sun was - and I said something at home, I said, 'Oh it was hot in the classroom today, the sun was beaming in'. And anyhow the next thing dad told mum and she went up. But mum was a hard worker for them too. And we had the orphanage and they had egg days, mum used to organise egg days.

Q: Could you explain what happened on those days.

Every child in the school, not the orphans of course, they used to up at the orphanage, they came down to classes later on, but every child was asked to bring one egg, and the orphans would have eggs for their breakfast.

Q: Did you know any of the orphans?

Yes I still keep in contact with one. She was a funny little thing. She was taken to the orphanage when she was two by her father, well that's what I was told, I don't remember. But when they started bringing them down to the school, instead of having lessons at the orphanage they were all dressed in green and white uniforms and you'd always see this Joyce walking alongside of them, keeping them in line. She was like a little old mother to them. A little bit older than them, but Joyce never even did classes, she used to bring those children down. I don't ever remember seeing her in the class room. She was with them right up till - well she's still with them. She's out at Stella Maris, she's got a room down there, she's got a room at Cronulla with them. She comes with us every year. We have a day, about eight of us, used to be a few more, but time's taken toll and a couple of them have passed on.

Q: And she could have been now what they call a slow learner?

Yes a little bit, she still is, a little bit, she's alright in her own way, I mean she knows what she's doing and all that, but the last time I met her at Manly wharf she came over and she said, 'Oh how are you Dot?' and I said, 'Oh I'm good thanks'. I said, 'How are you Joyce?' 'Oh I'm good' she said, 'Do you like my hair? Sister put my hair up in rollers last night, and do you like my new shoes?' This attitude you know, she liked everybody to notice her.

Q: Childlike. And she never had any idea of becoming a nun?

No, but she worked up there for a long time. She worked in the Convent in the orphanage and I took a lot of wool up one day, they wanted wool for knitting, and Joyce was there and my sister called Joyce down and said, 'Take me up and show me your room'. And she had a beautiful room, everything was lovely you know. And she used to do the cooking up there for the nuns, and she'd have a day off and she'd go visiting all her old school friends.

Q: Now this is interesting. Coming down from the orphanage for lessons. Do you remember about how old you were? About twelve or thirteen?

Yes, before that they had lessons in the orphanage and then - I remember the first day they came down and they looked so nice, they were all in these little green and white frocks.

Q: Did they stick together as a group?

More or less, but they were young. We didn't have any in our class. They were round about five to nine years.

Q: And they weren't regarded as beneath the other kids?

No they just went into the classrooms with them. The only difference was at lunchtime they were marched up to the Convent for their lunch.

Q: I know from my Catholic background the constant need for fund raising throughout the Catholic community. And also bringing things in kind to the nuns. We used to take milk. Do you remember taking things to the nuns to help support them?

Not actually taking things to them but my mother and Mrs Walsh who lived next door. The nuns used to call them Tilly and Kate. Kate Lee and Tilly Divine. They gave them that name. And having the shop, it was no effort. But they used to have tuck shop days. Not like today with all the mothers. There would only be two or three of them. In those days the bread wasn't sliced. So the sisters used to put the bread into a big case and I'd bring it up to dad a he'd slice all these loaves of bread on the machine, on this electric machine and we'd take them back down and then they'd make up - and each girl in the classroom was given the job of writing down the name and what sandwiches they wanted. You'd each have a turn. And you'd take it down to the ladies and they'd make up the sandwiches in the day room and the kids would be given their lunch and the money would of course go to the nuns. But the nuns didn't have to buy anything because one class would bring bread and another class would bring a tin of baked beans, and another class would bring eggs, you know, and the fillings and mum would make the butter all the time. But that's how they made money there.

Q: And how often was that done?

Well it wasn't done every week. I'd say about once a month. Mum worked very hard for the school. She was marvelous. What I loved about it too, Sister Marcella, her brother was a beautiful ball room dancer Jack Keating and he used to come to the school and give us a lessons to prepare us for our ball, and of course for weeks and weeks, 'What are you going to wear? What are you going to wear?' It was a fancy dress ball.

Q: How old were you then?

About thirteen or fourteen. Getting on. And they it up in the old Town Hall. And oh! - look, it was absolutely marvelous. We used to go up for weeks before, practising you know. We'd walk from St Charles, all in a line and Jack Keating used to go up and give us a few lessons, and that was absolutely, you know, part of life. That was marvelous just to go up there.

Q: Can you explain to me what you wore?

I had the most beautiful white, borrowed organza frock and I had Eversharp. You remember Eversharp pens and pencils? Mum wrote into them and they sent out a lot of things, you know, what you can do, and I had this white organza frock with the big full skirt and the billowing sleeves and I had an Eversharp pen, like paper made out of cardboard, mum stuck it on cardboard and that went down the front and I had Eversharp written down the sleeves and - I won first prize. And that's the only time. And it was through advertising I came to get the Eversharp and I'll always remember that. And I got a beautiful Eversharp pen and pencil.

Q: I bet you were proud when you got first prize.

I was tall and thin. I was five foot eight. I've gone down a bit now. And I was like that from about the time I was fourteen you know, I was the tallest one. Physical Culture days, I was put on the back line. And this frock I borrowed from a friend and I remember going over and she fitted me, and she thought - because she was tall and thin, and look, I thought I was the ants-pants. I'll never ever forget it, walking around as proud as punch and I won this beautiful Eversharp pen and pencil.

Q: Did they get a photo of you, did they?

No, no, no. Well I mean, we had a lot of lovely photos. But when my mother came to live down here with me, she had a lot of stuff and that, and she said, 'Oh I can't take all this down to Dorothy's.' And this friend of hers said, 'Look, bring it round to me and I've got all under the house room where we do orchids'. So mum had all these beautiful photos of them and our family and their family and our family, boxes of them. And they were taken round to this place, and you wouldn't believe it, a month later this woman just died suddenly. And of course we never thought about those things at the time. You don't go rushing round. When we did go round about a month later, the son had sent them all - the whole lot had gone to St Vincent de Paul. And I said to mum, 'What are they going to do with all these old photos?' Of mum's family, there were eleven, and you know for weeks after I looked in every St Vincent de Paul's shop. We had some lovely photos. The only photo I ever had of my father. And all these old family photos that were taken when we were kids and that, you know.

Q: So at this dress up ball, did you have boys for partners? Or was it all girls dancing together?

No we danced with the girls. But the Holy Cross boys used to come up, so of course that was different you see. The nuns would stay there for half an hour and then they would go and then it was fireworks. (Laughter). Yes a lot of boys from the Holy Cross College used to come to our dances.

Q: What age did the boys go to Holy Cross?

About to 4th class at St Charles and then they went to Holy Cross.

Q: So it was single sex until year nine? Like 3rd year you did the Intermediate at St Charles?

Yes, yes, at fifteen I got my Intermediate and then I left. My brothers didn't go to Holy Cross College cause at that time the Marist Brothers at Eastwood had opened. One brother went to the Brothers at Burwood, and it was travelling. And then Marist Brothers opened and they both went up there.

Q: Getting back to the nuns for a moment. You were saying how supportive your family were of them. Did the nuns make a fuss of you because of that?

Not so much a fuss but if they needed anything, it was always our family first. And I always remember I had a bad fall and I got a big abscess on my knee and of course I couldn't go to school, and I was home in bed reading, I suppose it was one of those 'Dolly' magazines, but they didn't call it that then, and we had a little book shelf and there was Frances of Assisi on the bookshelf, and all of a sudden my younger sister came in and she said, 'Two nuns are just coming in the gate Dot'. Well, this magazine I had went under the bed clothes and I ran out, hopped over, got St Frances of Assisi and put it on the bed. (Laughs) Things like that I never forget. They were lovely.

Q: Did your family say the rosary every night?

Not so much as we got older but when we were younger. We never had dad there. He was in the business, and mum, but mum used to, mum was more for the church than dad. Dad went, we all had to go. But mum worked hard for the church and in her later life, I've seen my mother walk from here to St Charles, you know, there'd be no busses, Good Friday when there was not much transport. Mum used to go every morning, and when dad died and the shop was given up she'd go every morning. I'm afraid I didn't carry on like I should have.

Q: During those years at school, as a Catholic, stories we hear about bigotry. Was that a real thing in Ryde, you know, the Public school kids and the Convent school kids being separate and call each other names? Was there any of that around?

Well we didn't have much to do with them. Two or three of my friends went to the Public school. I mean that didn't mean a thing. But there was no sports like they have now. St Joey's playing somebody else, you know, we just played the Catholic schools and we never came in contact with the non-catholic schools. But as far back as I remember I don't remember any of that going on. Well there was only the Ryde Public school up here, because the others were Holy Cross College and St Charles and down Gladesville was Our Lady of Peace, so we only had this Ryde Public school. But we didn't meet, unless you met socially after. And I had quite a few of my little friends went to the Public school. A few of them I suppose - never said it to me, but a few of them used to say, 'Publics Publics ring the bell, all the Catholics go to hell'. You know? (Laughter) That type of thing. But I never - I'm not bigoted that way, I don't care what they are. I always say, we've all got our own religion, we all want to get to the one place.

Q: And you never heard your parents talking about bigotry? The Masonic Temple across the road?

My father used to cater to the Masonic people. They used to come to him for catering. We had a young boy there and he worked for - - - - before he came to us. And they came over and ordered so many pounds of leg ham, and this smart little boy said, 'You'll never get that much out of that leg'. And dad said, 'You just watch me'. And he said, 'Oh I bet I could', and dad said, 'Alright, have a go'. Well he got nowhere near the amount.

Q: You mean the way he cut it?

Yes, and that's why they used to say when dad cut the ham, it was cut in beautiful round pieces to go on the plate, you know he was a real good tradesman. But anyway the Masonic used to get all their stuff from dad. So dad was a Catholic and they were Masonic, but there was nothing in it. A lot of my friends, well not so much now, but a lot of my friends used to belong to the Masonic Lodge and my dancing partner used to go to the Masonic Lodge and he tried his best to get me to go. And, oh no, I wouldn't go. (Laughter). I don't remember anything like that between us. Between the schools. But then we didn't come in contact with the schools like they do today. We just played on our own, we played netball with them. But not the Public school in Ryde.

Q: Your family were fairly lucky in the Depression years. Do you remember anything that particularly sticks in your mind that indicated to you, even though you were a child, that things weren't too good with some families? Anything in particular that takes you back to that?

Yes, they used to have - a picture show was built, Gus Bowe's. And he used to run Sunday night concerts up there and I know my friend, her father was just in a job, a few days a week, and to go to that concert was a silver coin admission. But I remember going and I used to pinch our newspapers and sell them and get a penny for this bundle and take a bottle back, and that was the only she could get to go by selling.

Q: What do you mean pinch the newspapers?

I shouldn't have said pinch them, but I used to collect our newspapers. We didn't get a lot of them, but I'd see a paper hanging around and I'd take it, I wouldn't tell them what I was taking it for though, but I'd take it and I'd hang on to em till I got a few and then we'd take them over to the fruit shop and we might get a penny for them.

Q: Oh I see, for them to wrap things up in.

Yes, sell them at the fruit shop and things like that. So she could manage to go to the concert. I know a lot of the kids at school would come without lunch. There'd be two sisters and they'd have a sandwich between them, and things like that. It was bad. But I was never in the thick of it. I was lucky, I was very lucky. That's why I gave my pork sandwiches away for jam, I used to feel sorry for them.

Q: Oh, it wasn't just because you preferred jam?

Oh no. You'd see them open their little lunch and I would say, 'Would you like one of my sandwiches?' and before you'd know what you were doing you'd have given them both, and they'd swap yours and you'd be eating theirs. Oh yes, they were fun days. I hated the work at school, but I used to love being there.

Q: Tell me about some of the mucking up you did?

Oh I used to muck up. When the new school was built we were upstairs and we used to have a nun that would go to sleep, and she'd be sitting on the rostrum, Sister Mary Decklan. This day she went out and there was nobody looking after us, and she used to have a big square like a rostrum thing and the chair would be on that and on this day I pulled her chair right back to the very edge of the rostrum waiting to see it fall over, and she came back in and she just went to sit on the chair and the priest walked in and of course she stood up and I felt guilty, and so I just crept round the other side and pushed the chair back. And they all called me, you know, chicken and everything.

Q: You were an attention seeker do you think?

I could have been. I liked to be the ringleader. I liked to do things that the others weren't game enough to do. But they used to come upstairs and walk along and we'd be playing up, and you'd hear the rosary beads. Bingo, we were like little angels. But I stood outside the classroom, especially during history and geography. I was put outside the classroom to stand out on the verandah more times than anybody else in the classroom. And it got that bad, you're not going to believe this, I wasn't at school this day and Sister Marcella it was, and she was talking, and she turned to write something on the board and there was a bit of a scuffle and she said, 'Dorothy Hanson will you come out to the front?' I wasn't even there. So that tells you. (laughs).

Q: You were branded.

Yes she blamed me and I wasn't even there. School days were good but I hated the lessons, but I loved being with the kids.

Q: Was it the teaching method do you think, or the content? Or just that you were too high spirited?

I just couldn't settle down. I loved English, I loved maths. But when it came to history and geography I just wasn't interested in that. In those days you know. My English and my math got me through. I never failed an exam.

Q: Australian history? English, history, or a combination?

Australian history wasn't too bad because there wasn't a great lot of Australian history. Well Australian history was something you just sort of knew. But English history - oh! I just didn't settle down. And Geography - if they asked me where Toowoomba was I couldn't tell them. (Laughs). But I got through. And then I did the Intermediate and then I left. But I got a phone call from Sister Madeleine and she said I'm having the phone people out and they are teaching the girls to answer the phone and things like this, in case I was getting an office job. So I went back for a few weeks and they had this person who used to do a few little ideas of answering the phone and that. I went back and did that. But I didn't like office work. I wanted to do, you know, something a bit more.

Q: You worked in the office at Nestles you said.

In the sales office there. And then when I went to David Jones I went there for a while, but I was in dispatch and I liked that because there was nobody there and I could muck up down there and many a day I put one of the young boy Jones's, I forget which one, in the big dispatch basket and pushed it along. (Laughs).

Q: You mean the people who owned the shop?

David Jones, yes, one of their sons. I forget which one it was now. The younger one. There was two. It was the younger one. He was only about nine, and he'd come in with his mother and she'd leave him down in this dispatch where they came in, and there was these big baskets, they used to pack all the sheets and that in, but instead of packing sheets I'd pick him up and put him in. And you'd push the basket and it would go sliding down. He loved it. So did I. (Laughs).

Q: You were a big kid at heart. So what sort of work would you have liked to have been doing?

I don't really know. I liked people. I went into retail because I got to talk and know people and like people. I didn't like being put away in an office on my own or anything. When I left David Jones, it was a lot of travelling. I used to have to go from here right up to Fauvaux St. Anyhow a friend of mine was at Nestles and she said, 'Oh why don't you come [tape break].

TAPE 2 SIDE A

Q: You were saying you went to Nestle's with your friend.

Yes and I went into the demoulding just -

Q: - what do you mean by that? Demoulding?

Oh where the moulds come through and you demould the chocolate out of the mould. I was only there for a fortnight or about three weeks and they had a notice up if anyone would like to go into cash sales. Well that suited me better, so I put my name down and I got it. And I was up at cash sales. You know, that's where the girls come and buy stuff, and your responsible for their orders and things like that.

Q: So you enjoyed that?

Yes, yes, but I wasn't there for so long you know and I left there - well mum wasn't very well, she had a big operation. And I left there and I came and helped dad.

Q: So you were in the shop for a while?

Yes. But I wasn't over keen on it, and Harris Bros next door, he came in one day and he said he was looking for - I was only young, sixteen or seventeen - he was looking for someone to do the bookwork, the office, like the orders and that. So, well when mum got better and she came back I went into there and that was alright. I had all the young boys, the carriers and that in and out, you

know, taking orders on the phone and writing the orders up and cashing up and doing the banking. I didn't mind that because I had people around me.

Q: What was Harris Bros again?

Produce store. Wood and coal and produce. And I used to take the phone orders, there wasn't anything to sell or anything.

Q: There was a lot of people with poultry so it would have been a very important shop.

Oh yes, there were big poultry farms and a lot of people had cows, and there was hay and all that stuff was sold. I was there for a while and then I got older and I wanted something different and something better.

Q: So then you went into shoes?

No, no, I didn't go into shoes for oh - Maureen was about five I think before I went into the shoes. I went into private at Eastwood at David Glass and then Gardner's bought him out.

Q: That was a shoe shop?

Yes, and brought me with them, so I stayed with them and then I went from Eastwood to Parramatta for them and I was supervisor at Parramatta. And then I left. I didn't know what I was going to do, and my old boss from Eastwood was in town as an accountant and he rang up and I went into Shirley' which is a part of Gardner's, and I was supervisor there for a couple of years.

Q: That was in town?

Yes. And then I left there and I went to 2KY broadcasting.

Q: Can you tell me what you were doing at 2KY?

I was on what they call the engineering staff. I was a panel operator. There was only two girls in Australia that did it. Bessie Bonsall and Dorothea Nichols, yeah. I often hear different ones say things, like, 'I worked with John Harper and Bill Perryman's father', yes, I was in there for a while. Bertie Beaver. And then my young sister left school and she went to Foy's and one day Bertie Beaver said, 'Dorothy you don't know a young girl that wants a job do you, in the office?' And I said, 'No, Mr Beaver, not at the moment'. That night I was talking and Margaret said, 'Oh I don't like what I am doing'. She was downstairs doing the change in those things. So I said, 'They are looking for a girl at 2KY'. So Margaret toddled off in her little black skirt and white blouse, and she got the job and she finished up one of the top notches in there. And when my daughter got to the age that she wanted to go to work she went in there. Both Margaret and Maureen are very good at figures. And

Maureen finished up as the right hand one to the accountant. And she worked in there till she was married.

Q: So when you were at 2KY was that before or after you were married?

I was married before. And then I married Fred when Maureen was about five and I was working at 2KY.

Q: So you've always been a working mother? A lot of women of your age after they were married never worked in the outside workforce again. Did you feel you were unusual in those years?

No, no. I went to work. I had to look after Maureen and give her an education. But I was one of the most luckiest persons in the world. I had the best mother you could ever have. Mum just took over. Maureen lived with mum. When Fred and I were first married, we lived with Fred's mother for a while, Maureen was with mum. I used to see her every day, but mum used to -

Q: - because of the housing shortage I assume?

Well it was just because we were trying to build and we went with Fred's mum and dad. Fred and his father built this place. And then when we built this place Maureen came down with us. I had a bedroom in there and I had beautiful pale pink wall paper on the wall, beautiful mushroom coloured carpet on the floor, everything was beautiful. Dolly pram in the corner, single bed, everything was beautiful. So she came down and she stopped about - she was still at school - and it was a bit awkward for her to go from here right up to St Charles, but she wanted to come and we wanted it so - she came to me one night and she said, 'Mum'. And I said, 'What love?' She said, 'Would you mind if I went back with Nan?' I said, 'No Maureen, if you'd like to go back with mum, really really'. And she went back up.

Q: Were you disappointed?

A little bit, but I could see her point of view too and I could see my mother. She missed her dreadfully. It gave mum something to do.

Q: Your mother was still up at Top Ryde in the house?

Yes, and it gave mum something to do to sort of wash and iron and cook for her, you know. Anyway she went back up to mum.

Q: So you really felt your mother brought your daughter up?

Up until that age, Yes she did, she really brought Maureen up.

Q: So before Maureen started school, you were working? You were trying to make a living? And your mother was looking after her?

Yes, mum looked after her. Mum, even when she was a baby, mum used to walk from Top Ryde to Gladesville with her, and mum and Maureen were like that, they were absolutely marvelous together.

Q: And do you mind me asking, did your first husband die or?

No, no, he's still alive. And he lives in Gladesville. But it just didn't work out. He was that jealous when Maureen was born and you couldn't live with him, couldn't live with him. And I came up to Father Brennan and he said, 'Oh, you'll just have to try'. Sleeping with a knife under his pillow, and pushed Maureen and I into the kitchenette and put all the gas jets on. I haven't told - I don't talk about it - these people that are battered and that with their husbands now, you don't realise what they're actually going through till you've been through it yourself. But that wasn't good enough for me. Knowing me, I just packed up one day, I came up to mum's and I never went back. Never went back.

Q: Was your father still alive then?

No dad died six months after I was married. He died with a heart.

Q: How did you manage with the Church, getting divorced? If you don't mind me asking.

No, no. I went down and Father Brennan was up at our place one day and I came in, and of course his people were great church people. The Bishop stayed at their home while he came up to do Confirmation at Gladesville.

Q: Who's this, your first husband?

Yes. He was the depot master, you know, they were well catered for, and Des was a real - everybody used to say, 'Gee has he got a brother?'. But then something just went and he just, you know, there was no money, he was a diesel engineer, but he gambled all his money. He never gambled in his life before, I think he just got in with a crowd at work and that was it. So, not good enough for me, I just walked right out. So I came up to Mum and I said, 'That's it'. Anyhow so one day I came home and Father Brennan was there and I told him and he said, - now that's why I got a little bit - well not nasty, I went back to the Catholic church but I felt he didn't hear me out. And I said to him, 'But Father' I said, 'Your not sleeping next to a person with a knife under his pillow'. I said, 'You haven't been pushed in and tried to be gassed'. I said, 'What am I supposed to do?' Anyway he said, 'Oh girl, I think you ought to give him another chance'. And I said, 'You think that, but I don't'. And that was it. He just went on talking to mum. And that was it. And so I just went ahead and I got it.

Q The divorce?

Yes, yes. And then -

Q: - how did your mother feel about it?

She was disappointed but she knew I couldn't go on like that. I mean - the last straw was, he came up to our place one night and we were there and he had a cigarette in his mouth with ash on it and he was nursing Maureen. And mum said to him, 'Des, watch your cigarette'. And of course he flew for her. And of course I flew for him then, you know. And then we got into an argument and then he picked - mum had a base of a bowl, you know a big - and it was made into an ashtray, and he picked that up and threw it at me. And of course that was it. Mum told him to go and not come back. And he did, and he went. I've seen him since. I just said, 'Hullo', you know, that's it, but he just went right down hill.

Q: So you wouldn't have been able to marry in the Catholic Church to Fred?

No, no, no.

Q: Which church did you get married in?

The Baptist Church. Yes, up there, and oh you couldn't wish for a better living person. Fred is Church of England, he went to Bible Class till he was twenty three, he went to the war for six years, he didn't go out of Australia, but that's not his fault. And when he came back he wanted to get on the railways and he went up to see the minister of the church and he said, 'I don't know what you've been doing for the last six years'. And that ended Fred. And yet you wouldn't meet a better living person. You know, you never hear him, he wouldn't rob you of a halfpenny. You know, he's good living, he's very good living. And I just thought, well, if I'm not forgiven that's just stiff cheddar. That's how you feel, you know. No the church didn't - oh then it wasn't long, a few years ago this friend of mine, she said, 'Dot' she said, 'Have you ever thought of going?' - she knew. And I said, 'Well sometimes I do Peg because I was brought up in it'. You know. Anyhow I started to go up here to Denistone with her on a Sunday and then it got to the stage it all went all into a different thing altogether, I couldn't understand it, I felt, I wasn't getting anything out of it.

Q: Felt very modern you mean?

Yes, I wasn't getting anything out of it. But there are four Catholic girls in our group and when we go away I get up and go to Mass on a Sunday just the same.

Q: So when you got divorced you dropped going to Mass?

Yes, yes, I was so disgusted. I was honestly, I was disgusted, I just thought, well he just didn't try and do anything, you know, he just sort of brushed it off, well, go your own way, attitude.

Q: Did you ever hear people talk about annulment? They often talk about that nowadays.

Oh yes, well you can. But they didn't talk about it in those days.

Q: You were just supposed to put up with it.

And yet my daughter, her husband went to Holy Cross College and the priest was Father Lyons, was two classes ahead, and do you know he's been a wonderful friend, he's just like one of the boys, and Maureen was telling him once and he said, 'Well' he said, 'She got a raw deal, didn't she?' And Maureen said, 'Well I think so too'. But - they're good, they go, she was brought up like that, mum was strict, we were strict when we were kids. But anyway her husband died four years ago, he was only forty eight.

Q: So your mum didn't fret about you giving up your religion?

It hurt her. But she understood. I couldn't have lived a life like that. You know, you couldn't. And that's why I don't blame these women getting out. A lot of them haven't got what it takes to get out. And I felt well if God's not going to forgive me, well, that's it. You know, you're only here, you can't live your life like that. But I haven't come in contact - his mother and father have gone. I saw him once down at Gladesville and I just said, 'Hullo' and he just said 'Hullo' and that was it. My daughter didn't even want to know him. I said to her, 'Its your privilege Maureen, if you want to go'. And she said, 'No mum, no, if a man treats you like that, I don't want to know him'. So I've never made her, never forced her.

Q: Going back to WWII you mentioned your father was a warden, could you explain to me exactly what he did?

You had to go to the Police Station and you had to be more or less looked over, and he was warden.

Q: To see if you were honest and reliable?

They used to go round at night in the blackouts, they used to have blackout nights and the wardens used to round and make sure that everything - and the funny part about it was we had a glass window up above our front door, and of course on blackout nights mum rushed round and blacked out the bedrooms and blacked out everything and she never blacked out this - and of course I come in and put the hall light on, and another warden, not dad, another warden knocked on the door, 'Your showing a light', and dad never

forgave us for it. (Laughs) And it tells you how stupid we were, as soon as blackout night came on there was nothing better to do than go out and follow the wardens around and we'd walk round, a whole crowd of us, about nine or ten of us, and we were going down the street and dad was walking in front, I could see dad and another fellow walking down and of course blackout time one of the boys had a box of matches so he'd strike a match and throw it up in the air, you know, skiting, like we were all in it. Anyhow dad came home that night and he said, 'If I could get those kids' he said, 'I'd kick em from here to Bourke'. (Laughter) I'm thinking, oh I hope he didn't know it was me. But he never ever knew.

Q: So you didn't take it too seriously obviously?

No, no, no, no. It was just another bit of fun.

Q: Were the blackouts every night?

No, they used to have what they call, practice nights more than anything. They weren't every night. But they were certain nights you had to be all blacked out. The wardens used to go around to make sure everybody knew what they were doing.

Q: And do you remember your father having records of who in the area had a car and who had a phone perhaps so? -

- oh yes. All I remember is that they used to have a meeting in the little School of Arts up there and they'd work out where they had to go and what they had to do and who had the cars and where somebody else had other things, you know. But we weren't interested in that part, the only thing I was interested in was, oh tonight's the night. And of course we had to close the shop because you couldn't do anything in the darkness. Mum would be home and little angel mealy mouth, I'd say, 'Mum I'm just going up -' 'Well don't be long'. She'd think I was just going up the corner to see what was going on, but we'd meet up there.

Q: But you would have been about twenty at this stage. You were born in 1922, so 1942 you would have -

- no this was when it first started in 1939. Because I was married in '43/44? And I was only twenty.

Q: Oh right, so it was a bit earlier, you were a bit younger.

Old enough to have more sense. I often think if my daughter did things like that I would die.

Q: So were you part of an unruly gang in Ryde?

We weren't actually a gang, but there was quite a - there was Hazel who lived around the corner, she was my bosom mate. And then there was myself, and then there was a couple of the boys, they were adopted boys, the Young's and they were there. None of us every married one of them we all married out of the section. But we were just mates.

Q: Do you remember the 'Forty Thieves'?

Yes, oh yes.

Q: You weren't in that group?

No, but we would go up when the little milk bar was open, till about half past seven, eight o'clock. And Hazel and I used to go over and have this hot milkshake that we were introduced to and the 'Forty Thieves' would all be on Carlisle's Corner and all of a sudden 'zoomp;' there'd be two coppers walking right down the other end of the street. They used to do the beat then, they don't do it now. And you couldn't see these boys for - oh - dust. They'd just disappear. But they used to jump on the tram and pull the pole off, well that took the electricity off the tram and of course the tram would stop. (Laughter) And they used to go down - Norman's had a fruit shop and they used to go down and pull the bottom cabbage and of course all the cabbages would roll down. There was no drugs, there was no murders, they were just a stupid lot of larrikins.

Q: Unemployed?

Most likely, yes. But they put a chap on the trams that was a big footballer. Griffo they used to call him. And of course these kids didn't know you see and this night they go on and pulled the pole off and Griffo could run faster than them and he grabbed them and two of them were marched up to the Police Station. Well that stopped for a while, they got a bit frightened you know. But they were just larrikins, there was no drugs or murders or girls raped or anything like that, they were just a silly lot. We used to do silly things and that in our little group, but we weren't into the stage - just liked fun - you know, we didn't do anything that would hurt anybody.

Q: Did you know any of the 'Forty Thieves' personally?

Yes I did. I knew Ray Zartman and a friend of his, can't remember his name, he was a spastic boy, and I haven't seen him for a while now, but I used to see him up Ryde with his wife and he used to always say 'Hullo Dot' and I would say, 'Hullo Freddy, how are you?'. I can't think of many of the others, but I knew the boy Zartman was in there. And there was a few from Putney that used to come up.

Q: Did any of them go to Holy Cross College?

No, they were all from Ryde Public school - well they had left school by then.

Q: How old would they have been? About fifteen?

Yeah, round about fifteen. I remember the boy Zartman coming into the shop one night and asking dad could he take me to a dance. And dad said, 'Well you'd better ask Dorothy' he said 'But I don't think she'd want to go', or something. And when dad told me I said, 'Oh dad he wears these big working boots how can you dance in those?' (Laughs) He was a big raw boned looking bloke, he'd be the last one. But I never spoke to them much, you know. They used to get up to some mischief the whole crowd of them.

Q: Do you have a feeling that maybe people over reacted to them? Things were pretty quiet and this was -

- yeah, well it was just, it was at the time when, they'd be in the street they'd be up outside Carlisle's Corner and they'd be carrying on.

Q: Highly visible?

Yes, and making a noise and that, and pulling the poles off the tram and pulling the poor old fruiterer's vegetables down and stupid things like that. But whether they ever got into real serious trouble - they were just a menace, just a menace, you know, letting tyres down on the taxis and you know stupid things like that. We didn't do any of that we just had our own bit of fun. I don't know who gave them the name of 'Forty Thieves'.

Q: Were you a keen ballroom dancer?

Oh yes, Oh yes, very, very keen. I went every night in the week.

Q: Where to?

I went to my private lessons on a weekend. Yes. I loved it when I went to the balls at school. I could do all the dances then and then Jack Bell had a studio up - they've pulled it down now and a big house built on there - but it was the most beautiful old home called Lauriston, beautiful old home. And there was a ball room and Jack Bell and his wife used to run classes and of course I used to go up there nearly every night and we used to dance to records. There was no such thing as a band then. Then I left there and I went to a Miss Dales down at West Ryde and I got my teacher's [certificate] and I used to teach for her down there.

Q: You didn't teach for Jack Bell?

Well no, but he used to say, 'Dot, go and pick so and so up.' But I loved it. My sister was an exhibition dancer and my brother - eldest sister and eldest brother. They were exhibition dancers and I loved it. I loved it and even when I go to the bowling. (not now I've got this bad hip) but up until a few years ago I used to go down there and I'd take the part of the man, you see. There wouldn't be many of the men down there.

Q: Fred wouldn't dance?

Oh no. Yes, Fred went. When I taught for Miss Dale she wrote up a - got in touch with me and she said, 'Dorothy, I'm having my silver anniversary,' she said, 'and I'm trying to get a lot of my old teachers and that back'. And I said, 'Oh no, I won't come. Fred doesn't dance. And she said, 'Bring him down and we'll give him a few lessons.' So down we go to Jordon Hall and he gets a chap to teach him - stunk of tobacco and beer. Well Fred, he heaved. Fred was that sick. He'll tell you himself. We went out and there's a picture show there and a milk bar and he went and got a bottle of soda water. He was that sick. That ended it. Fred didn't care if he never put his foot on the dance floor.

Q: And did you go to the Trocadero in town?

Oh yes, yes. I went there a few times but this night there was a big do on there and I was at Nestle's at the time and of course all the girls at Nestle's were all going and I said, 'Oh, yes I'm going,' I said. 'We're going in - this Peter from Putney, his father's car.' And they said, 'Oh yes.' Peter had a little old car, you know. But his father said he could have a lend of his car. Well, Peter must have played up so his father said you're not having the car. Anyhow, and I'm telling the girls what a beautiful car it was and we all get into Peter's little old car. No windscreen and the wind blowing through it and we got down to the Trocadero and all the girls from Nestle's were there. So when we come out of the Troc there was a nice car parked out the front you see, so I went over and I'm standing near this car, and all of a sudden the girls come out 'Ohhhh.' Big smile on my face. And all of a sudden Peter's about - (cause you could park in George Street then. There was no parking stations.) Peter's about four cars down there. You wouldn't want to know. He's standing on the footpath with the door in his hand that was tied on with rope and he's singing out, 'Come on, Dot. Come on, Dot.' And they all thought I belonged to this car. And I had to sort of - 'uh' - go down and get into the little old car. Yeh we used to dance. I danced at the Trocadero. But then again you had to have the money to go there.

Q: Was it a bit pricey?

Well, it was. It was one of the high - you know. And I used to go to Petersham Town Hall. I danced a lot there at Petersham Town Hall. That wasn't quite as expensive. But the Trocadero - you know, you were paying something like, I suppose 8/- just to go in. Well, you only earnt 12/- a week. You'd save up for it. Mum and Dad used to come to the good.

Q: They'd help you out?

Oh, I used to say, 'I was going to go buy a pair of shoes this week, Dad, but I just haven't got enough money.'

'Here you are. Here's 5/-.' (Course they were only 9/11) 'Don't tell your mother.'

'Oh, Mum, I was going to get a pair of shoes this week, but I just haven't got enough.'

'Well, here's 4/-. Don't tell your father.'

Cause I'd have the money to go and buy my 9/11 pair of shoes at Star's Shoe Shop.

Q: What did you wear when you went to the Trocadero?

Oh, I always wore a long frock. Oh yes, my sister - I used to get her cast offs, cause she was an exhibition dancer. And she used to give me her old ballroom frocks.

Q: Were hers home made or bought?

No. Most of them were bought. I think most of them were bought, but I used to wear hers and then as I got a little bit more money in my pay and that, I bought some beautiful - this is one of the ball frocks I'll never forget and I was going down to Drummoyne. They used to have a ballroom place down at Drummoyne - Cairo. First time out with this boy, and I thought, 'Oh I have to have a new frock.' So I bought this beautiful pink material. It was like pink with a ridge in it, but it was soft as silk. And I went down to a woman in Hinkler Avenue, and she made it. And it was just plain. It had a cowl neck you know and it came in - and the skirt and when I turned round. Oh, look. I thought I was the last thing on two legs.

Q: Was the boy impressed?

Well yes. He was a very - he was a twin - Roy and Clive. And this was Roy. He was a beautiful dancer and he asked me to go cause he used to dance at Jack Bell's.

TAPE 2 SIDE B

Danced in the School of Arts. I danced all over Ryde everywhere there was a dance I'd be. I used to love it. And even now, even in the last - (like since I've had the bad hip I don't do it) I used to go dancing and we'd have a dance up at the ex-service's bowling club, and there wasn't many men, and I would take - (there's so many widows, put it that way. You know the husbands would go who were there, but you'd be surprised how many widows are in that bowling club.) And I used to take the man's part, and when I came round, you'd be surprised how many would say, 'That's the best dance I've had.' But you learn to lead when you're an instructor. But, oh, I loved it. I loved it. And Dad would say, 'What are you doing to night?' And before I'd get it out, 'Oh, dancing! We all went, but my sister was a beautiful dancer so was my elder brother. When I was about sixteen I used to go with him down to the Benevolent Society near the railway and we used to do an exhibition dance down there. Not that I - he would carry me, you know. But I'd get there, yes, I loved it all.

Q: Did you like the modern dancing or did you go for the ballroom dancing?

I learnt the old time dancing, that was my favourite. But then when I started dancing with this Roy, he taught me a little bit more of the jazz - jazz waltz, quickstep, fox trot, and then I took that on when I went to Miss at West Ryde. The Lambeth Walk. all those...

Q: The jitterbug?

Yes, yes but I didn't like it much, I wasn't much - my girlfriend this Hazel used to jitterbug and she was skinny like me. And she was tripping round there one night, next thing cotton wool is on the floor. Where she'd poked her boobs up, and the cotton wool had come out. There used to be a band, the Murray Brothers, and they were fantastic, and they used to play at the Jordon Hall at Gladesville and we used to go down there. And the trumpet player was a doll and we used to go down there with lemons and suck a lemon and their mouth would water and they couldn't play. Oh look, if anybody else told me they did that I'd think they were mad. But it was good clean fun. We had no money but we had a lot of good times.

Q: Did you get paid when you were instructing at Miss Dale's?

Oh yes, I think we got 10/-.

Q: There was something else I wanted to ask you. The impact of the war on your life, you mentioned about your father being a warden. Did it have much effect on how you lived? Did it affect your job prospects?

No, no, the only thing that my biggest worry, was the coupons. I couldn't go and buy the things I wanted to buy I used to have to rake around all the family and try and scratch enough coupons to get material for my frocks.

Q: Did you revert to curtain material at any stage?

No not quite to that. But my mother used to wear green and blue overalls in the shop so she didn't use many of her coupons and I used to get a few of those. No the war it didn't have the impact on me I suppose it should have because nothing sort of - the only that changed for me - I mean we had plenty food and I was still able to go to things, as I say the only thing was you'd have to look after your shoes and you'd have to change your clothes as soon as you came in to keep them nice for going out. But other than that, I remember I was at Nestles in 1939 when the war broke out. I remember being there.

Q: Do you actually remember when it was declared? Do you remember the moment when you heard about it?

Yes I was just coming up the stairs to deliver a package to one of the girls. It was in the afternoon I think. And they said it then. Oh yes it was a big - I remember that. I remember in August when the Pacific War ended. 15th August 1945. I was going to Mass at nine o'clock it was the Feast of the Assumption.

Q: So your first marriage would have taken place during the war. Did you have any trouble getting wedding gear? Or did you not have a proper bridal gown?

Oh yes, white lace, nothing less, and my two sisters were in pretty pale green lace. I got the material at Anthony Hordens. We had enough coupons, all the family came together on it. Oh yes I managed to get it all.

Q: Well this has been a very interesting interview. Thank you, I really enjoyed it Mrs. Nichols.

And I've loved doing it.

END OF INTERVIEW