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An Interview with Jean Widmer

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Interviewee: Jean Widmer

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TAPE 1 SIDE A

Q: Now Mrs Widmer we thought we might start talking about the house you lived in when you moved to Eastwood at the age of three. Your earliest memories of that.

Well it was 11 May Street Eastwood. My father and mother came from Ridge Road Westmead, where they had lived in a small cottage, which was their first home. We came to May Street and it was an old, old house in a rather shabby condition, it was - I have found out since it was an 1890s house. There were quite a few of them in May Street by the way. However, my father bought this and with council permission he built his small factory in the back half of the yard, and he had previously been to a Mr McEwan who had a jam factory down on the river at Meadowbank. He bought that man out and then they started it up in May Street.

Q: When he started in May Street had he vacated the premises at Meadowbank or was he running the two operations?

No, no. Just the one in May Sreet. I don't know what happened to the building at Meadowbank.

Q: Do you know exactly where in Meadowbank it was? Were you too young to know that?

Really a bit young to know but as far as I can make out it was approximately where the present or the old railway bridge went across on the riverbank somewhere near there. But I don't really remember as a small child.

Q: So the place in May Street. Are any of those buildings still there, the house, or the jam factory?

No, its all gone. May Street is now all units. I can't tell you when that happened. My father moved out in the mid '50s and anyway the whole street is now been turned into home units. But as I grew up there were little things that I remember I suppose things that are outstanding in reality. Strange how

an incident will stick in your mind. But dad had his factory running up there and he started only with a utility truck in which he went out each day delivering his jam. And my sister and I, we were about eight I suppose we were close together. We always gave him a push as he left and it came out of the factory, down a ramp and then down beside the house and out into the street, and this particular day dad had got in and quickly got out again to do something, and we pushed the truck loaded with jam. Well, did he move. He got in and he stopped it because otherwise it would have hit straight into the back of the house. One little funny incident I remember.

Q: So they can't have had handbrakes in those days, or one that didn't work very well.

Well dad had good legs that moved quickly I'll say. But - oh, there's lots of things that went on one way or another.

Q: Could I ask you a little bit about the jam factory? How many people worked there?

Well it started out, very small. There again going right back to when I was a small child it was as far as I can remember my mother and father did it. Cooked and sold and took the jam around the metropolitan area. When I grew up later I remember my mother saying, 'I never knew how much money I had to spend till dad got back and I knew what he'd sold'. And this was the depression. That's something that stays in my memory because it was hard hard times trying to get a business going and not knowing how much you'd sell. It was sort of door-to-door. However it did grow of course.

Q: Could I just ask you about that? In those early years you think he may have been selling to individual households rather than to big shops or -

- No, no. It was all shops. Mostly what we called the 'Ham and Beef' then. No delicatessen. As time went on though, and he got a traveler, who incidentally was my mother's brother, went out to represent them and the staff began to grow, he then got into some of the quite large stores and I remember he used to take large quantities up to the central coast.

Q: By truck or train?

No, by then we'd acquired a larger truck you see, a five ton flat top truck and he used to load this and go up to the central coast. And for some reason the Ourimbah Co-operative sticks in my mind, where we used to deliver a very large order. However it kept growing and the business was coming in very well, and so did the staff grow. Not that it ever grew to be huge, I guess at the most there were ten people. Those folk were all locals that came and dad employed them, and it’s interesting to remember the people who were there.

Q: Who were some of the people?

In particular the man who came and took over his cooking, he eventually married my mother's cousin so he became part of the family. But he was a young man from Wentworthville. My grandparents owned a grocery shop in Wentworthville. This young man lived with his parents opposite the shop and when it came time for him to go to work dad said, would he like to join him. Which he did. And he stayed there till dad sold the business and we're still in touch he's a very close friend.

Q: When exactly did your father sell the business? You said it was in the 1950s. I don't suppose you remember the exact year.

I would think '51.

Q: Was that because he was getting older? Was that the only reason?

No, business was changing. You know? The bigger companies were taking over the smaller ones and of course he was getting older. Unfortunately my mother had had a stroke and he undertook to nurse her you see, so he couldn't do two things. But before he stayed at home with my mother he had amalgamated with Miss Muffet jams at Leichhardt. He went down there for a couple of years helping with the management, but he then retired and there he was at home. He was about sixty I guess then. But the factory went on and it was surprising how it did grow. As I say he finished up with about ten staff and still only ever with one lorry. Before the big truck he had another one, a panel van covered over with a lovely picture of a label on it, which was very, very pretty to look at, it was very nice.

Q: What was the exact name of the factory?

'Meadowsweet Jam.' The business grew, I've got a cutting from the local paper which somebody handed over to me. Dad had applied to the then Eastwood Council and this was a record from their meeting which said the letter had been read that a steam engine had wanted to be installed so they could up the production for the war effort, and because it was for the war effort the council passed it. But it was an oil burner and this was to give us steam and dad had enlarged and renewed all the cooking utensils, which were stainless steel, steam jacketed pans, if you know what I mean. So there he was, he got involved with production for the troops, which was a lot of extra work and the inspector used to come regularly and look at what they were doing. By then I was working at home and I used to meet this gentleman that I didn't like.

Q: Why didn't you like him?

Oh he was a nasty man.

Q: Where exactly was he from?

He was a government official. I don't know whether he was army or health department but he had to come and see that everything was done properly, but he was an arrogant sort of a man. I just hated the days he was there.

But this is moving on a bit now to the war time. Of course there was always the coke burner on the side of the truck in the good old days at the war.

Q: Because of petrol rationing?

Yes. And I remember being at school. I was at Hornsby domestic school then. I can remember sitting in class one day and seeing my father going up the highway with his old coke thing, I think it was coke, what else did they have? They had, some of them had shale, didn't they? Or wood. But anyway he had this burner thing on the side and off he was going with his load, obviously up to Ourimbah and those central coast areas and I can still see him going past. Just another one of those recollections. But the thing was, when I went home, of course, in the afternoon and it got dark, no dad home yet from the coast. But it was the days of just having little slits over your headlights.

Q: Because of the blackouts?

Yes you couldn't have lights. So you just had a little tiny slit in the middle of the headlight. And he used to drive back in the dark from the central coast on the old highway, which twisted and turned. However he made it, he got home.

Q: Heaved a sigh of relief I bet.

Yes, but I mean it wasn't as though you were coming down the present freeway. So things were done the hard way.

Q: You were saying during the war they upgraded the steam engine - boiler, that's what it is. What sort of equipment had he used before then, the earliest equipment? Can you remember that and describe it?

Yes. The first was gas fired, great big gas rings and on that they used to have big cast iron pans with enamel in them, but they weren't nearly the capacity as these great big steam jacketed pans. Otherwise that was the major change. The factory didn't alter that much. It expanded a bit. From the small factory dad built at the back of the house he did enlarge it.

Q: Was it attached to the house or -

- Oh no, no. It was up in the back garden. It was a big block and there was a space between the house and there was lawn and a bit of garden. But over the years my uncle lived in the house next door, this was the one who became the traveler, and we took the back half of his yard and dad extended right

across there and that's where - he had the store then. You see they used to get the pulp that they made the jam with a lot of it came from Tasmania. Particularly the berries. That used to be shipped up from JAG. Turner's at Hobart and my sister and I used to love to go to the wharf while dad picked it up in the truck.

Q: Where exactly would it be shipped to? Darling Harbour?

Walsh Bay. That's right isn't it? They're now turning it into theatres and things.

Q: Yes that's Walsh Bay where the piers are.

Well we loved to go there to see what was going on in the big city and pick this pulp up and take it back and other fruit came from Western NSW. The blackberries.

Q: Murrumbidgee, Shepparton? Out there?

I don't remember any coming from there. Most of it came up from Tasmania for some reason. A lot of it he bought fresh from Mr Watkins at the city fruit market and then there were men in Orange and Bathurst who organised pickers and dad would send these kerosene tins out there.

Q: Well washed I hope. (Laughter)

Oh yes. Though mind you what the men did with them when they got them there you'd wonder. But anyway he used to send those out and the men used to go out picking and pick blackberries. And they used to send them back in five ton lots. Well of course it all had to be handled when it got back and bits taken out and washed and you know, a lot of handwork involved. But that was another way of getting fruit. Then he would go along Vimiera Road maybe to an orchardist there because that was all orchards. I remember getting oranges there. Strawberries, they used to grow a lot of strawberries out there.

Q: Now you were talking about getting pulp from Tasmania and if you were going up Vimiera Road you were obviously getting fresh fruit. How would it be processed then when it was brought back to the factory? Do you know exactly what happened?

No, I can't remember exactly. I know there was a lot of handwork. Things had to be picked over and looked at. I know in the school holidays we used to get the job of going through strawberries and things.

Q: Did you eat more than you cleaned?

We certainly ate our share, but of course a lot of apricot jam was made with dried apricots which came in great sacks, we used to love getting in amongst those for a nibble. But it was very labour intensive. Not the way it is now. And it wasn't until getting near the end of dad's time in the business that they started to get a bit of automation. You know the belts to roll things on and all

that. But to begin with it was hard work and labour intensive. Every jar was filled by hand, and then wiped to get any stickiness off it, then labelled. So it took forever to do things. It wasn't 9 to 5 I might say. It was very early morning to midnight sometimes. I remember being put to bed and my mother would say, 'Now you are alright, I'm just up in the factory'. And I can still remember going to the back door and screaming, 'Mum I want you', you know. (Laughs).

Q: How old would have been then?

Oh probably about five, just started school. But anyway those were the days of the jam factory and then he amalgamated with Miss Muffet and in my teens I was working in the city with an accountant, I then took over. My mother backed off, because she used to do the jam, do the books, you know.

Q: And run the house.

That's right. Sew and wash and clean, you know, to keep us kids going and so she backed off and I took over all the office work.

Q: While you were doing your full time job as well?

No, no. I resigned from the city job and I stayed at home and worked there.

Q: Now when you were helping in the school holidays, would you get paid to do that?

Oh no. No, no, no, no. You helped. It was a family concern. And as I said earlier, money was short. Having gone through the depression, it wasn't a concern where you made a lot of money because even when he died he wasn't wealthy. He had enough to live on but I guess, in reality, that was his aim, just to know he could live comfortably and that's what he did.

Q: And when you started working for him after you left your job at the accountants in the city, you were paid like a normal person would be paid?

Oh yes.

Q: How did you feel working for your father? Did you have a good relationship, or did you feel you would have preferred to be out in the workforce?

No - well I wondered what I may have been missing. Other girls went out to work. I mean I'd had an experience of it. No I wasn't concerned because we did have a good relationship with both my mother and father and he just left it to me. 'You’re in charge of the office'.

Q: How old would you have been then?

Oh about eighteen. No I took that on, and he'd come to me for help. He was the practical one outside doing the work and supervising what was going on.

Q: So in that position were there times when you would have to deal with staff problems, with maybe people much older than you?

No, that would be left to dad. And if I'm honest, we didn't have staff problems, you know? As I said - well the worst person around the place was the union leader. That was another man I used to hate the sight of. (Laughter).

Q: What union was that?

Oh - sorry I can't tell you.

Q: So this was the union your workers were in, and he would come to inspect things? And you didn't like him?

Hated him.

Q: What was his name do you remember?

No, I don't. He was very, to my mind, underhand. He'd get them in a corner and talk so that you know, dad couldn't hear or I couldn't hear and you always had the feeling they were stirring. And for no reason, because, if I was honest, I'd say it was a nicely run little organisation you know. And dad was a caring sort of a person.

Q: And they'd be getting award wages and all that?

Oh yes. And, no, as I say he was a real stirrer and I hated the sight of him. And maybe because he could see this going smoothly he wanted to be a stirrer. No, but people who worked there were locals. In the good old days we had the station master's house and the fettler's house opposite one another above the subway, that used to go under the railway line, and this family lived in the fettler's house. I'm not sure whether the father had been a fettler, anyway these two young boys from there came to work and then there was a family living out on Epping Road on the corner of Epping and Balaclava where you go now to the University but then it was out in the wilds. I can still see the little weatherboard house they lived in. Well there was a girl and a boy came in from there, you know, they were friendly nice people.

Q: And would your father ever had advertised for staff or would it have been more word of mouth, from families he knew?

I don't ever remember him advertising, I would say, more word of mouth.

It was all a lot of hard work every jar was hand filled and every bag of sugar was unloaded from the back of the CSR truck. Five ton at a time.

It came from the CSR works in at Pyrmont. You'd send a cheque one day and a day or two later a five ton truck would arrive with the sugar which as I say -

Q: - it would come from the North Coast probably.

Oh I don't know where it was manufactured. I'm pretty sure it was manufactured down there at Pyrmont. So I guess the sugar cane was shipped into there. I'm sure it was. Well you know it was so long ago. Fifty years ago now. But no, that was all manhandled. Huge sacks of sugar and stacked up ready to be used.

Q: Now when you said earlier about your father extending into your uncle's place next door. Have you any idea whether he would want that bit of land or perhaps it was a private arrangement? Was your uncle a shareholder in the company?

Oh no. No such thing. I don't know how dad paid him to be honest, cause - well by the time I got to the office my uncle had gone to live at Coonabarabran and the people who owned the house then were Mr and Mrs Whitebrook and Mrs Whitebrook was the daughter of the headmaster of the school we went to at Eastwood here. She used to teach us in Kindergarten. So that was an old friendship revived. But no, I'd say dad rented that from them.

Q: What material were the factory buildings made from?

Fibro in those days. Wood and fibro. No problems with it then.

Q: Was there any other industry in that street or around that area, or was it purely residential, with this jam factory in the back yard? A one off thing?

The only other industry. I don't remember it operating, had been the Ramsey's Printery, which was opposite. But just when that ceased operation I don't know. And Mr Troy who was next door to Ramsey's he was the local bus man running the busses from Epping Station to Top Ryde and I don't know where he housed the busses, certainly not there in May Street. But no that's the only industry really in the area.

Q: And as you said permission originally was from the old Eastwood Council, then towards the end of your father having the business it would have changed to Ryde Council when it was absorbed. Do you remember that change being significant? Or not having any impact?

No, I don't. No - but these are just little things that have happened down there. I guess there are other little stories I can relate I just can't recall at the moment. Certainly pushing the truck out without a driver was one that sticks. (Laughs)

Q: Could you describe your house to me now? Was it a brick house, or weatherboard?

No, a double brick house. Built in the period, by the turn of the century?

Q:Federation?

I guess Federation, or Victorian. It was a cottage style. There was nothing elaborate about it at all. It was, to my mind just the usual sort of house and in fact there were many of them up the street, all the same, with just a front verandah and a room that came out which was either a bedroom or a lounge room, and then straight down the hall and all the rooms went off it. Then you went to the back with the kitchen. This one had a big open verandah, but eventually that was glassed in.

Q: For sleeping accommodation?

No, no. It was our living area.

Q: There were four children in the family.

No there were only two, my sister and myself.

Q: Oh! Sorry. (Laughs). Did you have your own bedroom?

We shared a bedroom. My parents and ourselves were in the front and then eventually my grandparents came, took the next bedroom. And there was a big lounge living room. Well it was just kept as a lounge room and then going through again there was a little hallway that went between the original kitchen and a small room and there was a laundry in the middle. But this original kitchen, which had a big fuel stove in it became - dad altered it all - and that became the dining room and the laundry he converted into a kitchen and the other little room was then used as the office. And a laundry was built out of this enclosed back verandah. But this main kitchen was the old original style as I say, with the fuel stove and not many comforts I might say.

Q: And that office was your domain when you started working there?

Oh no. That was the original office. By the time I started to work, there was an office built in the big shed at the back.

Q: How old would you have been when your grandparents came to live with you?

Oh I was in my teens. But I couldn't give an exact age. No.

Q: And so your mother then had the added responsibility of looking after them. Were they elderly?

Oh yes. Dad thought that he was helping mum by bringing them there, because otherwise she was traveling almost daily to Westmead to look after them, but anyway, I'm not so sure in my old age whether it is a good idea.

Q: Might have been too much on her you think?

I'm sure. On top of all the work she had done. One thing I never want is to be in on top of my children. I don't think it's fair for them. Of course we didn't have nursing homes in those days where people could go.

Q: So as a teenager, did you feel any conflict there with your grandparents in the house? Or was it just on reflection now, thinking about it?

Well there was conflict. I know - the thing was, my mother's father when he moved in, he wanted to help so he had odd jobs around the factory. My father's parents had moved to Doomden Avenue, and that elderly gent wanted to help his son. Then there were two grandfathers on the premises. (Laughs) All day. And a grandmother sitting in the house, and my poor mother she was always cooking for some reason or other. But every morning there they all were having morning tea, and lunch, and of course there'd be afternoon tea. Anyway this particular day the two old boys started on politics and they were on opposite sides of the fence.

Q: Who was on which side?

My mother's father was labour and my father's father of course was liberal. And this argument - well it wasn't an argument, the old boys were having a quite friendly discussion. But the grandmother on my mother's side got it all wrong and I put in a word, and I don't even remember what it was about. But she got the huff and left the room and locked herself in the bedroom. Now these were the silly stupid things that happened you know? Now my mother had that extra tension, all the time. At the time you don't think about it, but when you think back, it’s not fair. Such a big responsibility. No doubt about that. And I've always said, 'I'll never move in with my children'. So we'll see, won't we?

Q: In the factory, what jobs did your mother do?

Everything. Everything. Anything that needed to be done from **[tape break]**

TAPE 1 SIDE B

Q: Did the whole place have a distinctive smell, can you still smell it? Was there a sweet sort of smell?

Yes, you could smell the jam. In fact Father Giuliani, was it? That wrote that book. He refers to the smell in there.

Q: The book on Eastwood?

But he's got us in the wrong St, he said - - - - - Street, but perhaps he walked down - - - - - - Street. He may have been one of the young men who was at Curzon Hall in those days, being educated for the priesthood. I always remember them walking down May Street in their black attire, their suits and black hats. They used to walk down about ten at a time to go to the railway. Goodness knows, they'd be going into the city to something or other. So maybe he was one of those I don't know.

Q: He's a brother not a priest, so, maybe not, but he was brought up in the area.

Yes, well he's now called brother. The priests are the brothers.

Q: No.

Oh, not they're not? Distinctive is it?

Q: Oh yes.

(Laughs). Well I'm confused aren't I?

Q: So how far away could you smell the jam?

I honestly don't remember that. No. Another unfortunate odour was - once again as dad grew and he was getting in extra fruit and things for this war effort. You know where the tyre place is on this side of the railway line now, that was a great big old garage left empty and he used to store the fruit in there. Well occasionally a tin would burst. So it would be sour fruit. Not that it was so awful, not like drains or anything, but you were conscious of the sour fruit. Oh I remember we used to hop into the truck with him and he'd go into the goods yard that was there then and unload a truck of things that had been sent in the train.

Q: Now in that earlier stage that you remember when your father had the business, which was hard work, but going reasonably well, these were the depression years. Do you remember, or were you too young for that to have any impact on your memory? Do you remember the poverty of perhaps children you were at school with, or people around out of work?

No I don't. I don't remember anybody that was having hard times. The children were always well clothed and well fed. Whether anybody was getting assistance I don't know, but I never heard talk of it. I just know how my own family got on. And I mean we were always well fed and plenty of warm clothing when it was needed.

(Break in transcription)

Q: Could you tell me a bit about the importance of religion in your family? With a Presbyterian background, was your father an active person, and your mother, were they active people in their local church?

Dad, very. Religion had always been very important. Starting with my grandfather.

Q: Your paternal or maternal grandfather?

Paternal. Because this started way back in England where he was a singer and he got very involved with choirs, then when they settled in Granville he was once again involved with choirs starting at St Marks in Granville. Then, I always say, that they changed from Anglican to Presbyterian because that's where the music took them. And my grandfather became the choirmaster at St Andrew's in Parramatta. There were the four children, my father being the eldest, and they were all choir members. My grandfather conducting and the whole lot of them singing, and they were the four different parts. Soprano, alto, tenor and base. And when they were in their late teens, early twenties they sang over 2FC when it was just opened and it used to be in Farmer's store in the city. Anyway from there dad took over being choir master at St Andrew's Parramatta and then when he moved to Eastwood he took over being choir master at St Andrew's in Eastwood. It tell us in that book how many years, I've forgotten.

Q: The book we are looking at is 'Three score years and ten. The History of St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Eastwood'. By Frank Ramsey.

So dad took over there, but this meant - well when we were growing up, it was three times on Sunday to go to church, you know. Church in the morning, Sunday school in the afternoon and evening church again.

Q: Did you enjoy that?

Yes. That's where my friends were. This particular friend was in the Presbyterian Sunday school and I met lots of others. The other friends I had at school were at the Anglican and the Baptist church locally, but, no - and we often, Geoff and I look back now and say, 'They were fabulous years'. We grew up with all these people, the war took some of them away, others weren't old enough. But now if anybody calls a gathering of those people together there's as many as can be there are there, you know there's a friendship that's gone on down all these years and it was a wonderful friendship that you made with these young people, and it wasn't all so terribly religious. I mean it was good times and good friendship and religion of course was the background that helped keep us on the straight and narrow. But it's the fact that now we get together. Of course we are at the age where people are dying and it's amazing how many will turn up at a funeral. These are old friends. So St Andrew's has been a wonderful place for us and that's why we are so very sad now that having joined in with the Uniting Church they want to take us over completely and destroy - well they're talking - whether it will ever happen. Selling our buildings off for money. Well, we're fighting it, because those buildings are used full time by other church groups and community aid and quite a lot of outside organisations. But anyway that's not what we're here for, we're here for history.

Q: So were you all good singers in the family? Talking about your father being choir master.

Oh well we all had to sing.

Q: So you have a nice voice?

Oh - well, yes, if I say so, I think I was a pretty good soprano in my day.

Q: So no wonder you were scathing of the teacher up at Hornsby. Who didn't run the choir properly.

Oh well, I mean, yes. We all had to sing. My grandfather saw to that. As a matter of fact when my sister and I were married, of course all the family - my grandfather had eight or nine brothers and sisters and they married and had to sing, and most of them had a wife or husband who could sing. On my mother's side though, unfortunately they weren't singers. However, they joined in where possible, but at our weddings there were enough people there to have a choir, so we sang the Halleluiah chorus of all things from the Messiah. And that was at both weddings, cause in those days you didn't go to a reception house, we hired the St Albans hall in Epping. I don't know why that was done, but it was done. And later on somebody up there from the Anglican church made a comment to my mother about how wonderful to have such a thing happen you know. Anyway, yes, we sang and I was in the choir and my sister too and my mother, until she decided to pull out. My father's youngest

sister, the soprano in their quartet was then living in Eastwood, so she was in the choir as well, and my grandfather who was a base. So we all had to do it.

Q: And there was a piano in the house I assume?

Oh, yes, yes, every house had a piano.

Q: So you were all good players?

No. (Laughter) There was nobody that was a good player. But they tried, they did their best.

Q: Who taught you to play?

Oh I went to a lady who - well here's another little story about May Street. A lady who used to live down the street a little, she was a piano teacher. And then of course my poor father who was also the secretary and sang in the conservatorium choir, decided I had to go and learn from Marjorie Hessie, who was the accompanist with the conservatorium choir. Well you can imagine she had a name for being a pianist, but she gave me away as a bad job. (Laughs) I wasn't a pianist. No.

Q: Did you do exams?

Yes, I tried.

Q: What grade did you get to?

No - I can't remember. I do remember going to the conservatorium theory classes and they were run by Livingstone Mote who was a very well known figure in musical circles, but he was so far above my head I gave that away. You know I just couldn't keep up with it.

Q: Did anyone in the family play other instruments?

My sister learnt the violin, and that's where we were supposed to accompany one another you know, but it didn't work, and of course you know what sisters are like there's always a squabble going on. So no, that didn't work out either. But we did sing duets together. She was an alto, so we achieved that much.

Q: What were some of the songs you sang, do you remember?

Oh dear me no. No they've gone.

Q: So you didn't just sing religious songs, it was a secular thing as well.

No I was trying then hard to think of - we sang for my cousin's wedding, but no, sorry they've gone.

Q: Did you ever sing and actually get paid for it?

No - well I didn't - there again you see, I used to sing duets with my father and my sister and you've got to really go into it and do it properly to get anywhere, and I didn't. I did have singing lessons at the Con. and I went to another lady, a well known singing teacher at Strathfield. But you've got to give everything else up to achieve something if you want to go into a paid musician's job and by the time I'd got to start doing it of any consequence I was engaged to be married. Well you got married and you played the housewife. You didn't go and do your thing anymore then. And so I just carried on doing a little bit when I could. And this is the way my family thought.

Q: But it was something you really enjoyed obviously.

Oh yes and now when I look back on it, if I hadn't been married I think maybe I would have tried to get somewhere with it. But you've got to be good, you really have and I may not have achieved it. Goodness knows.

Q: Would you like to mention anything about getting married in 1949 and settling in this house at Eastwood?

Yes.

Q: In that time of housing shortage and building materials? Will we leave that to your husband or would you like to talk about that?

Well this is his part of it. I enjoyed being married and living here and all the rest of it, because we were still living amongst our friends. If you move away from the district you start all over again. But harking back to the factory, there was one little thing I was going to say, just a little matter of interest, those people that lived in the house out on Epping Highway.

Q: The two that came to work for you?

Yes. This is more or less to let you know how the district was and undeveloped. Where the University now stands the two sons of that household used to go out shooting at night and they shot a red fox on that ground out there which they brought in - or brought the pelt in - gave it to my mother and she had it dressed and used to wear it as a stole, you know the way the ladies had them? She wore this red fox and I've still got it. And it's still in perfect condition. She sent it away and had it done. But that's just a little point of interest you know, of something that was in the district, because as I said there's all these orchards all the way down. And going back to May Street, you asked about other industry there. Well there was the printer and then the man with the busses, but down a little further, nearer to the railway there was the Lancaster family and they had a little hall down there. Did you know about that?

Q: No.

Well the little hall was two blocks from the railway line and they used to rent that out for functions and that's where I had my first piano lessons until dad bought the piano. On the piano in there, because the teacher lived at the back of there.

Q: So their family owned the hall?

Yes. And as far as I know there are still one of the Lancaster's living around and about.

Q: But the hall's not there now?

Oh no it's all home units? But that was just something else in the area. Harking back to the factory in those days there was a household garbage collection but dad had to take his own rubbish, once again out beyond the University to where the river runs down and all the rubbish was tipped into there and this is where the household rubbish was put as well. As well as -

Q: - this is in the river?

Yes, the Lane Cove running down there - and it all went over the edge and into there as well as the lavatory collecting man. He used to take all his rubbish and dump it there. Now dad used to take his out there. Of course another truck ride, off we go. We used to go out there and watch him do this, but the thing I remember before the laws were passed that you couldn't pick the flowers we used to come home with beautiful beautiful bunches of flannel flowers for mum. And that's just a little thing, but in May Street I'm thinking of the families that were there. There are still two ladies living that I meet regularly at church who lived up May Street. Mrs Donald is one, she's just had her ninetieth birthday. Her mother-in-law used to live with her, and she was a dressmaker and she used to come down to our house on a daily basis and do sewing for mum and make our clothes, when we got a bit older. The other lady was Dorothy Banks who lived two doors nearer the railway and she is now Mrs Dorothy Race and she's still living in Eastwood. And I might say during the war that house my uncle owned, we had immigrants from Singapore living in there. People who were brought out during the invasion of Singapore and they were English and Scottish, and they lived in there.

Q: They had been evacuated from Singapore when the Japanese came into it?

Yes. And of course you've heard about the famous train smash down at the bottom?

Q: Do you personally remember it?

No, but you know about it. During the war every time a troop train went down, have you heard this as well?

Q: No, you tell me.

Every time a troop train went down they'd pip like crazy and of course we'd run on the verandah and wave the boys goodbye and I wasn't home on this occasion, we were still coming home from school and a cousin who was living with us, she ran out to wave the troops goodbye because the train was piping madly, and it wasn't the troops, it was - she watched it come over. But we were then delayed coming home from school and the worst of it was over.

Q: So your cousin was living with you at that stage?

A cousin of my mother's. She was there from the country.

Q: Would you like to talk about the early fifties, having your children at that time, how did you feel you prepared for the experience of childbirth and coping with motherhood, and did you visit the baby health centre afterwards?

Well when I married, Geoff still was doing two years of University study, so we decided no, no children for two years anyway. I also got married, determined I wasn't going to have a baby in the first twelve months as so many did. I'm not the motherly kind apparently. My grandfather asked another member of the family, 'Are those two alright, there's no babies yet?' Llaughs).

Q: So he obviously didn't know about contraception, obviously it wasn't used at all.

No.

Q: Had that been talked about? Like had your mother talked to you about contraception, or had you made it your business to find out yourself?

Well we found out ourselves. Although I talked with mum about it, in a vague way. But then they didn't know these things. Anyway I made them wait for four years. And our daughter was born the day before our fourth wedding anniversary. Yes I looked forward to it when I was having her.

Q: Now hang on, were you working in those four years?

Part of it. I worked a bit of it. Just with dad still. And then my sister came and took over from me. I was still there after I was married, but anyway it didn't go on for a very long time. Then I had my daughter. Yes we were delighted with her, but motherhood was a bit of a shock I might say. I couldn't feed properly

and everybody of course says, 'Oh you must feed, you've got to feed.' Well anyway I didn't so the minute she went on a bottle she grew and went ahead like nobody's business and so from that day on I've said, 'Look they thrive on a bottle and if you can't do it you -' I mean I was getting to a stage where there was something really wrong about me that I can't do this. My sister was like a jersey cow I might say. (Laughter) Not me.

Q: So how old was she when you put her on the bottle?

Oh almost straight away, I had to supplement you see.

Q: You just didn't have the milk supply?

No, it just didn't ever come. So I was supplementing and that meant feeding, weighing and then supplementing with a little bit in the bottle.

Q: You're talking about the famous test weigh that they used to use?

Yes - terrible, absolutely terrible. Yes, I went to the clinic.

Q: Were they supportive or were they making you more anxious?

Oh well, no I'd say they made me more anxious because you know, this weighing and testing - oh dreadful. And then getting the mixture right in the bottle because you had to put things into the cow's milk and you had to boil it for so long.

Q: Oh, so they didn't have formula then?

No. Oh there was a sort of a formula but they didn't suggest it and you had to make it up with cow's milk boiled for so long to take something out of it, I've forgotten, take something out of it and then you put cod liver oil in and the smell of that was disgusting.

Q: That would have been for the bowels would it?

Oh I suppose so. Disgusting. Because they kept burping up, you know. And the same procedure happened with my son and I distinctly remember by poor father one day I handed him the child for a little cuddle and he said, 'Do you really have to feed this boy this terrible stuff?' (Laughs) Oh - you know - you'd have to put a bib on them.

Q: Was there a problem? Was your daughter a settled baby? Is there a possibility that she was going quite well and all that test weighing was a bit deceptive? They don't do that anymore.

Oh no, you get a formula, in fact now she's had her children, she gives them soy milk and you should see the four year old, he was weighed recently because he cut his forehead and they had to give him four stitches and the doctor weighed him to know how much anaesthetic to keep him quiet and he

was the weight of an eight year old. I mean he's a gorgeous boy he's got huge shoulders. He's going to be a big, big man.

END OF INTERVIEW