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An Interview with Olive Taylor

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An Interview with Olive Taylor

Interviewee: Olive Taylor

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Q: Mrs Taylor we were just talking about how you have lived in this area all you life and you were explaining to me about this house we are now sitting in, in 10 Hughes Street Meadowbank. Would you like to explain to me how this house was constructed?

Oh yes, my parents came from England. I believe they lived in a tent when they first came out from England.

Q: Whereabouts?

Here. My father was a bricklayer. He built what I call the kitchen, which was everything. It had a fuel stove in it and it was just enough for my mother and father and then when my brother was coming along my father built the next room. And then when I was born I was born in the end room and my brother and sister who are twins were born in the end room. That's the front room where the verandah is.

Q: So you were born there in this house? When did they come from England. Do you know what year that was?

It would have been about 1913.

Q: Just before World War I. Do you have any idea why they migrated?

I think things were. Well he was a what they call in England a stone mason. And I think in the winter time they couldn't work on account of the bad weather, snow. They came from ----stock. I think he being married and not a lot of work they decided to come out to Australia a warmer climate where you could work the whole year. I think he liked it.

Q: And so he actually built the house himself.

Yes

Q: Would he have had any other assistance or any other tradesmen?

Oh, no other tradesmen. He might have been friendly with the Hunts. They were - - - - - then. Well he might have helped him. He wasn't in that line but he might have held things when hammering was being done.

Q: Can you explain what this house is? What building materials were used in this house?

Originally it was weatherboard with brick foundations. And then my husband took off the weatherboard and its fibro now. This is all fibro.

Q: And as you say you were born in the front room, could you tell us about your very earliest memories? Perhaps even before you started school.

I started school at five up here at West Ryde and there was no other homes so we used to go across the paddocks, there is a creek at the bottom of Hughes St and go up to the school. The boys were barefooted in those days, they didn't wear shoes. The girls wore shoes. We had no school uniform, often had hand-me-down, or things that were cut to fit us. Things weren't the best in those days. Financially I mean.

Q: Do you remember that very first day at school?

No. (Laughs) I remember the headmaster, Mr Fraser.

Q: What was he like?

Oh he was a real crank. Everyone was frightened off him. He had a deep voice. He used to cane the boys, but I don't think he ever caned the girls but we were all a bit frightened of him. I think it was his voice, a demanding sort of voice.

Q: Do you remember your own teacher?

I remember Mrs Wurley. She was nice, that would be about fifth class. I remember her.

Q: Do you remember the sort of things that your learnt and the way you were taught?

Yes, we started off with little slates and we didn't write in ink till we were about fourth or fifth class. We used to have to get the right slant. On Fridays it was always dictation. Spelling. First thing in the morning we'd all try to get as many as we could right. Put our hand up, wobble our hand. (Laughs)

Q: And how were you with that?

Oh, well I liked spelling.

Q: What was it like writing on a slate? Did it make a scratch noise?

Yes it did. We used to rub it out.

Q: What did you used to rub out with?

Cloth, I don't know whether it was dampened or not. I just remember it was a piece of rag.

Q: And explain to me when you first used ink, what sort of pens did you have?

We had ordinary pens, but we had ink wells in our desk.

Q: Did that cause any mess in the classroom?

Oh we sometimes would skylark and flick it at each other.

Q: Did you come home for lunch?

Yes we did. We came home for lunch. Because it was only across paddocks, and at the bottom here where the creek was it was just a couple of clumps of trees, we ran across. Most of us lived fairly close. We came home for lunch and back to school.

Q: When you came home would you have a hot midday meal or just a light lunch?

A light lunch. I don't remember much about lunch, only running home from school, and running back, I don't think it was a hot lunch. Might have been soup in the winter time. We had the hot meal when our father came home.

Q: You'd run back I suppose to get into all the games?

Yes, that's right.

Q: What sort of things would you play in the playground?

Hop scotch, skipping. Hidings. Hide behind trees or any building we could.

Q: What was the school playground like then? Did it have lots of trees?

It had lots of trees. It didn't have asphalt or concrete like they have now. Just earth, steam rolled to flatten it.

Q: Talking about running to school. Can you tell me some of the things that you saw around this area when you were very little? What sort of area was it?

It was a bush area. Lots of trees, lots of bush. Everyone seemed to have one or two dogs. Sometimes there'd be a dog fight in the school play ground. (Laughs) I remember that. We all seemed to keep together as families. Like a family would play with another family.

Q: And do you remember people have - I suppose you had chooks?

Yes, we had a cow too, so there was always plenty of milk and cream and baked custards and things like that. I presume my mother made bread I don't know. I can't remember that. But we did have fowls.

Q: Who milked the cows? Was that one of your jobs, or your brothers?

No, no, I think my father did it - or it might have been my mother, in those days, women worked - I mean in the home.

Q: How big was this block? Was it much bigger than it is now?

Oh, three - three blocks. This house was sub-divided after we lived here.

Q: So this one block is now three blocks of land, and yours was the only house on it?

Originally it was the only house, and then my father built that place. Next door and then when my brother married he built in the next place, so at one stage there was three of us in the family on the three blocks.

Q: So you had your parents here. Who was in the next house?

Oh then when the family started growing up we moved there for a while, next door. Then I married and I came back here to this house, and my brother was in the one further down.

Q: That sub-division. Do you remember when that took place?

No, Ryde Council would know that.

Q: When your brother married perhaps?

Yes

Q: Can you tell me about the area - more the Meadowbank area down towards the Meadowbank Park? What was Meadowbank Park like when you were little?

Oh it was a great place to play rounders in those days, we used to play rounders. There were always plenty of dogs and plenty of children. We used to have canoes made of corrugated iron, and a piece of wood each end, nailed and that would make a canoe. We used our hands as paddles. For paddling across. We used to go across to the island where 2GB is now and get a feathered sort of bullrush and we'd bring them back to Meadowbank Park and chase each other and belt each other with these branches, like feathers.

Q: This little canoe type thing. Who would have made it?

My brother and father I suppose. They used to get the corrugated iron, bend it like that, and put a piece of wood that end and this end and nail it, and then the wider part would be the centre, we used to paddle in it.

Q: It was quite safe?

Oh no (Laughs). Sometimes if there were too many in it, it would overturn, but that was part of the fun.

Q: So you were all good swimmers I gather.

Oh yes we learnt to swim.

Q: Where did you learn to swim and who taught you?

Oh I think we taught ourselves. We were thrown in or fell in. We'd dog paddle as we used to call it.

Q: Whereabouts did you learn?

Meadowbank Baths. Oh no - the baths weren't there till later.

Q: So you were swimming in the river?

Yes.

Q: Do you remember it being dirty at the time?

No, but when the built the baths, there'd be sharks the other side of the baths because Homebush Bay was the abattoirs then and they used to throw the offal into the Meadowbank river and we used to swim in the baths then. We had to because the river was infected by sharks, and we'd dive down and see the sharks the other side of the baths.

Q: You could actually see them?

Yes, swimming round. We were inside, and we'd dive down just to see if there were any sharks, but they came on account of the offal from the abbatoirs being thrown into Homebush Bay.

Q: How old would you have been at that time?

About eleven or twelve I suppose.

Q: So your earliest memories were before the baths were there?

Yes.

Q: So you were swimming in the river in the little canoe and you weren't frightened of sharks earlier on?

No - I suppose if we went too far out - we used to go across to that Island to get these branches to come back and belt each other with. (Laugh).

Q: And your mother never worried about you doing that?

Oh no, I mean there was four of us. There were two, the - - - -, that was Audrey Hunt and there was another family had four. No we seemed to all go together, all in different ages in that one group.

Q: So Audrey was one of your friends?

And her sister. Her sister died later on when she was grown up. But we seemed to just all stick together. I suppose the mothers thought, 'Oh well they're all right, they're all together'.

Q: In the river do you remember rivercraft boats? Passenger services would have been finished by that stage.

I don't think they had started.

Q: I mean the earlier passenger services that they had wouldn't have been running I don't think at that stage.

When we were young they wouldn't have had anything, they only had rowing boats. And we traveled by train. It was the cheapest way.

Q: So you remember the sculling, rowing on the river? Could you tell me about that?

Oh yes, High used to win we barracked for High. There were different schools, like Grammar and Newington. They used to row on the river. We used to go and watch the heats.

Q: Where did you watch from?

Putney. We'd stand on the wharf and watch them.

Q: Did you family row, your brothers?

No they never rowed, but we used to all go down and watch them and cheer them on.

Q: Do you remember the more major rowers? People like Major Goodsell? Do you remember any of the adult champion rowers?

No, I only remember the schools. The fours and the eights. We used to cheer them. They used to have heats during the week and then on Saturday was the great day, and they'd row. They go to Penrith now don't they? On the Nepean.

Q: What was the atmosphere like at Putney when the rowing was on?

Oh a lot of excitement. We used to wear the ribbons of the different schools. Sydney High was brown and blue, or chocolate and blue. We used to wave and get excited about them.

Q: So did you all follow different schools, or did you all support Sydney High?

Oh mainly Sydney High because we all lived around this district. But sometimes different ones would barrack for Newington or Grammer. Joey's - yes, that was a school that rowed. There was great excitement.

Q: So what other things did you do as a kid besides going down to the park and the river? Do you remember going to the pictures?

Pictures was later and further on past the Post Office on that corner there was a picture show there and we used to go to the pictures there.

Q: Were they silent ones? Do you remember silent movies?

Yes, they were silent ones. We used to get lollies, they were round balls and we'd roll them down the aisle. We weren't angels, but we used to make our own fun really. Saturday afternoon, I think it was three pence for ice-creams and three pence for the matinee. It didn't cost us much, but I suppose it was worth a lot more in those days.

Q: Were there any stars you followed, like Rudolph Valentino or any of them?

No I can't remember any film stars. Oh, Charlie Chaplin, I remember him. We thought he was great. Oh and a couple of Wild Westerns, cowboys and Indians, probably Tom Mix. We used to cheer in the theatre.

Q: Mary Pickford?

No I don't remember her. She probably was there but we were more interested in the cowboys and Indians and things like that.

Q: Mrs Taylor could I ask you some details now about the home and the jobs you did? The details of your home life. Did you have special jobs or tasks when you were a child? Specific duties?

Oh we had to wash up and wipe up and carry wood because there wasn't electricity. My father would fell trees and cut up the wood and we'd have to bring it in. The toilet was up the yard and if you went up to the toilet you were expected to bring down wood for the heating for the stove.

Q: So you had a wood heap up near the toilet?

Yes that was the idea, when you went up there, bring down some wood. (Laughs)

Q: Where did your father fell the trees from?

Here it was all trees. On this block, there was only one block when we lived here.

Q: Do you remember what sort of trees they were? Eucalyptus, gums?

Yes those and probably a bit of bush too. Cause to start the fire you had to have bush, and then put on logs. It was for heating and for the stove. We used to have a tub in the sink to wash in. In the kitchen. There was no bathroom, that came later.

Q: Now the trees. When your father felled them he'd get out there with an axe?

That's right and then saw up the wood. I suppose my mother would get on one end and he'd get on the other until my brother grew older.

Q: Were the trees very big? Do you remember them crashing down.

No, to me they weren't big. They were tall, but I wouldn't say they were big. There was a couple of them we used to call the big tree, but they didn't come down till later.

Q: Did you have favourite trees you played in?

Oh we used to climb up in the trees, yes, call out to each other. I remember possums too, they'd come in if you left the door open. They were wild, they weren't pets.

Q: So you'd have your tub of water in the kitchen, and that would be heated up from the copper?

Yes, the girls had it first and the boys had it last.

Q: Was that once a week, or twice a week?

I think it was only about twice a week. I suppose my mother used the hot water after to wash the clothes that we'd take off when we put our pyjamas on. I suppose she used the same water because we only had the one tank, or go down to the creek and bring up the water from down at the creek in kerosene tins that were cut in half. We'd bring up water that way. And mother would boil the water for cooking or drinking and then the clean water from the creek would go on to the stove. Heat it and then add cold if it was too hot.

Q: So you didn't have a town water supply, you relied on the tank?

First time the water supply came from Maxim Street and then it did come down our street.

Q: How old would you have been then when you got that water supply?

Perhaps eleven or twelve.

Q: So you would probably go down to the creek in drought times, when the tank was low?

Yes that mainly was for drinking water, or like cups of tea and that sort of thing. Especially on the Sunday we'd have to get enough for my mother's washing day, because she had a tub outside to do the washing.

Q: So there was no wash house or laundry, she'd do it outside?

There is a laundry now, but it is outside, it’s not attached to this house.

Q: So Monday was the big wash day?

We had to get enough water on Sunday for my mother on Monday.

Q: Do you remember coming home Monday lunchtime and she'd be exhausted I suppose from all the washing. You didn't take any notice? (Laughter)

It was very primitive in those days and others were like it, we didn't take any notice. When we did have the laundry my mother used to wash the blankets in the bath and we were allowed to run up and down on top of the blankets in the warm soapy water. She'd wring them out you know. That creek was wide. Now it’s in pipes, huge pipes, it goes down - - - - Avenue out to Parramatta River.

Q: What's the name of the creek you're talking about?

I don't know, it came from up towards Ryde Hospital. Came down that way, behind the shops. There was a huge paddock behind those shops. There was a very flat area and that's where garbage used to be emptied or if you had any dead animals they were taken down there and buried. It was a flat part.

Q: Where is that exactly?

That would be behind where Woolworth's is now, in West Ryde. From the main road to the other side. That was all a very shallow dumping area, flat area. Cause there weren't shops. When I was younger we had to go to Top Ryde to the shops.

Q: So do you remember any shops down here at all when you were really little, at West Ryde?

I remember them being built, but there weren't shops when I was little. We went up to Top Ryde.

Q: About how old would you have been when the first shops were built at West Ryde?

About twelve I suppose. I know if you were sick you had to go to Top Ryde for the doctor. And he came down in the sulky, the horse you know, the horse and sulky.

Q: What doctor was yours? Or did you have a number of different doctors?

It was Dr White in my early days.

Q: If you had to go to Top Ryde for the shopping, would you walk?

Yes you'd walk. Later on we had trams. Yes you'd walk up. Everyone did it, so you didn't take any notice.

Q: And the family? You didn't have any form of transport?

No, oh no.

Q: During the time of these childhood years where was your father working and what was he actually doing?

He was a stonemason. But then they didn't build so much in stone. St Anne's church Top Ryde, that's in stone, a lot of the buildings had stone. He used to travel round by train or what ever, he did have a push bike. He was a stonemason but they switched to bricks, so he was a bricklayer then.

Q: So he moved with the times. Was he working for himself or for other people?

Well he did work for himself, but he also worked for other people. It all depended on how much work was available.

Q: When you were a child did you feel you didn't have much? That you were quite poor, or did you feel you were comfortable?

Everyone was the same. I mean it was a working man's suburb and everyone was struggling to get their home together. Most of them from England of course. There were Australians here but they were mainly English and Scottish people. Not Irish, English or Scottish or Welsh.

Q: So round here was a suburb of migrants at that stage?

Yes all British. The Irish didn't come till later. No they were nearly all British.

Q: So there might have been some migration scheme perhaps?

Well I heard at one time it only cost them ten pounds to come out.

Q: In the fifties that was the case, but this is much earlier on.

It could have been an early scheme.

Q: So you can think of a number of migrant families like yourself from the British Isles round here at that stage?

Yes, they all seemed to be.

Q: But not the Hunts, they weren 't.

Yes. Boothroyd her name was Boothroyd, her mother and father came from England. Most of them at school came from England. My age group, the ones before probably came from the British Isles.

Q: So do you remember any old Australian families? People who'd been here for generations? Was there many of them around?

Oh there was Murphy the butcher. And Hunts, they were the grocers, but they built later on that corner where McDonalds is. Family of four, father and three sons. They had a shop called Hunts.

Q: You remember that shop? Did you go there?

Oh yes, it was the only grocer shop. They sold everything and you could buy broken biscuits quite cheap. A bag of broken biscuits I remember that. That's what we used to get, a bag of broken biscuits, they were much cheaper.

Q: And they did deliveries I suppose.

Yes, yes, collect the order, and bring the order.

Q: One of them told me that it was one of the first cash and carries, like a primitive type Supermarket. Do you remember that?

Yes, yes.

Q: So what, you'd go and get your basket and fill it up?

Yes that's right and when you'd get to the door they'd take them out of the basket and price them and you'd put them back in again.

Q: So when they were doing that, that would have been later when you were an adult possibly was it?

Yes. Young teenager.

Q: Now can we go back to talking about your education? When you finished school at West Ryde where did you go to school then?

Then I went by steam train to Hornsby. The first year you learnt cooking and sewing etc. And then - that was the first year, and then I went to Burwood and did a business course, shorthand and typing and business for two years at Burwood. And I got my Intermediate at Burwood.

Q: Did you do well in your Intermediate?

Oh good average I suppose.

Q: And there was no consideration to going on to your Leaving?

No most of them who went on were the boys, not so much the girls. You could leave school at 14 then and go to work, but I went on the Intermediate.

Q: At Hornsby and Burwood, did you have a uniform at those schools or was it like the primary school with no uniform.

Yes we had the tunics, the navy blue tunics and white blouse. Sometimes the bright girls would go on. But mainly they'd go to Sydney High. Might only be two or three would go. Some of them spent two years at Hornsby, the Home Science School and then went to work. I had a year and then I went to Burwood to learn the shorthand typing and business.

Q: Why did you make that change? Would you have gone to Burwood straight away from primary school.

No, no they divided it. It all depended what your parents said I think. I learnt the cooking and sewing first year like we all did, some only had another year and then left. Because you could leave at fourteen and they'd go to work.

Q: And so when you went to get your Intermediate was that considered fairly high status?

It meant that you'd done really well. Yes, well a lot of people thought the girls should go to work and not continue on to the Intermediate.

Q: And your parents thought differently I gather.

Yes, well I suppose a good average and I was capable I supppose and I didn't know why but I just - my sister and I went on and we didn't leave at fourteen we had the extra year. Instead of only the two years we had the three years.

Q: Do you remember it being discussed with you or was it -

No, I think we just, just went (Laughs) our parents decided that we were capable and I suppose they thought well we might get a better job, some reason I don't know. But see a lot of them would leave at fourteen and work in factories, like doing sewing or millinery or things like that, or shops.

Q: Had your older brother gone on to the Intermediate?

No he left at fourteen and became plumber's apprentice and same with the other brother. They only needed two years in those days.

Q: So could you explain to me about your first job?

Yes I worked in an office up at Epping in - like a sort of Estate, collected rents and did a bit of typing. Real Estate. And then I went to Cash Order and then I went to a newspaper. The Daily Telegraph after that, and then I married.

Q: And with those jobs did you see an advertisement in the paper? Did you apply for the job, or did you get it by word of mouth?

No, not word of mouth, from the paper. And I left when I married and then I didn't go to work until the girls had started to grow up, and I went to Concord Hospital then. I was in the Matron's office.

Q: As you have mentioned that now, could you explain to me about re-training to go back to the work force?

Yes I did to get my speeds up. See I learnt shorthand and typing. I wanted to get the speeds back again to get a decent job. It was important, and I went to Concord Hospital in the Matron's office.

Q: And how long had you been out of the work force Mrs Taylor?

Oh - I suppose about fifteen twenty years. Wasn't till the girls grew up.

Q: So your husband had died quite young?

Yes the youngest was six, next eight and the oldest was nine and a half. I learnt cake decorating and did a bit of ironing, anything because they were young.

Q: And you were getting a widow's pension but you needed to supplement that.

Yes, yes.

Q: And so how old was the youngest when you decided to ret-train to get back into the work force.

Oh about fourteen I suppose. High School.

Q: And where did you go to get your speeds up?

Epping. I went to a business college at Epping. It was through the government.

Q: And so you didn't have to pay for that course?

No. And then I had to sit for an exam to make sure I had those speeds before I could leave.

Q: Was it difficult to get the job at Concord Hospital?

It was Barrack Street. That was the Dept., of Health I think. Or it might have been repatriation and then I applied to go to Concord because it was closer to home. I applied for that job and I got it.

Q: So this would have been in the 1950s by this stage?

I couldn't tell you. I was 51, no 53 when I got the job at Concord.

Q: How did you feel about going back into the work force?

Oh I liked it. I liked the company. Get out of the home. Oh I used to go for holidays and travel a bit.

[Tape break]

Q: Getting back to talking about the big block of land that your parents had and sub-dividing it. The other two houses that were built. Do you remember them being built? Were builders got in at that stage?

No, after school we had to carry bricks for that place. I could carry one I wasn't very old. My brother could carry two, and I thought he was clever to be able to carry two, we had to carry enough bricks for my father to build that place on the weekends. I take it that my mother used to carry the bricks too.

Q: Where were you carrying the bricks from?

They were delivered out the front.

Q: So you were only a small child when the house was being built, about nine. So the idea was to build a bigger house for you to move into. Was that a slow process do you remember?

Oh yes, it seemed we were carrying bricks for a long time. (Laughs) My father did it in the weekends, but we had to carry enough after school. I take it that my mother used to carry the bricks while we were at school.

Q: I bet you got sick of carrying bricks.

Yes, I remember carrying the bricks, I thought it was a hard job.

Q: So he completely built the house himself? And that house is still there now?

That's the house there, yes. He had a carpenter and probably an electrician, but he did all the brickwork.

Q: That would be number 12 Hughes Street. And when that was finally finished you moved into that house out of here and was this house rented then?

That was rented yes. Not to friends or anything, some people, I wouldn't know. - - - - - - - - was her name, but I don't know very much about them.

Q: So that house was bigger, it was a brick house?

Yes and it had three bedrooms. One for the girls, one for the brothers and one for my mother and father.

Q: Do you remember the actual day you moved in?

Oh no. Don't remember the date. I just remember we didn't have to carry more bricks. (Laughs). I can't say I remember moving in, but we were all relieved when it was finished. It seemed ages, it might have been a year, I don't know how long.

Q: And then the next house down number 14?

That's my brother's. He partly built that, he was the plumber so he did the plumbing of his own house and he moved in there.

Q: And that would have been the late 1930s? Before the war perhaps, before the Second World War?

It could have been round about that time. I was married in 1941. He was married just before I think.

Q: So can you explain to me then how you got back to this house? After you were married did you come to live in this house straight away?

No I went to Katoomba, cause my husband was working in a Small Arms factory at Lithgow, he was a carpenter/builder, and when we married we moved to Katoomba for six months. And then my mother died and she left this house to my sister and I and then we came down from Katoomba when she died and I lived in this house with my sister, till she married, and my husband.

Q: When you say your mother left it? It wasn't in your father's name as well?

No, it was in my mother's name.

Q: And your father was still alive, but in the next door house?

Yes, and then he re-married, see. I don't know whether it went that way that perhaps, regarding income tax or not I don't know, but it was in my mother's name and it was left to us.

Q: And you husband and your sister and yourself were here until your sister married?

Yes, she married about six months after us.

Q: Did you need to sort of pay her -

Yes we had to borrow from the bank, to buy her out. And we had to borrow from the bank to extend it all here. And I was left with the mortgage when he died. Which was the hardest part.

Q: So you were trying to pay a mortgage off on a widow's pension. That must have been hard.

I used to do ironing, anything to get money.

Q: But you managed to do it.

Oh yes, things were different in those days, You didn't seem to want as much.

Q: So when did you finally manage to pay the mortgage off.

Can't remember. (Laughs) It seems a long time I was paying that mortgage off. I used to do anything, baby sit, anything you know, to get that money to pay off that mortgage.

Q: And when your father died, the house next door was sold?

Yes and it was divided amongst us four children.

Q: Not his second wife?

No, his second wife died before he died. And my girls used to - I used to cook the tea and my girls used to take his tea into him. He preferred to live on his own, but I cooked his tea and did his washing.

Q: After his second wife died? And so that house was sold after his death? And then the house where your brother had lived, was he still living there?

He was still living there yes.

Q: And it was sold after that was it?

Yes, he died and Kath my sister-in-law sold it and went to Canberra, because she had a daughter living there. And she moved round a bit and now she lives at Baulkham Hills. She had six girls and I think my father had eleven granddaughters but no grandsons. She had the first grandson. He was quite excited to think that at least he had a grandson.

Q: That's interesting to see how the big block of land -

Yes and I'm the only one left.

Q: Now were talking earlier about the bush. The nature of the area when you were a small child. Could you tell me about when you really noticed changes and shops coming to West Ryde and the area becoming suburbia. When do you think that happened?

Well we used to go down and play round the buildings when they were there. The church up here, the Catholic Church. They were building, and after they knocked off work they had a big pile of sand and we used to go up, like a ladder thing they had and jump off into this pile of sand. We thought it was great, you know, just jump off you know into this lovely soft sand. After they knocked off work. I remember the opening day, but I didn't go. There was a lot of excitement about that building because I think it was the first church that was built round this area.

Q: And you didn't go because your weren't a Catholic?

My parents went, but I think we didn't go on account of that. But we hung around (Laughs), but we didn't go. We weren't invited say. (Laughs)

Q: So building in the area was going on all the time when you were a child? And the area was developing?

Developing as people came out from as I say the British Isles, or mainly British. And then the water was laid on and the electricity. Gas lamps were replaced by electricity and people were building homes then.

Q: And do you remember when you got electricity? How old you would have been?

No I don't remember how old. We used to go to what the golf links are now, and go and get mushrooms. We'd go with billy cans to get these mushrooms and our mother would cook them for our breakfast before we went to school. We loved them. After a good shower of rain, and they had cows out there. And there was an old family by the name of gorrie, they had a lovely home there and he had some girls and they used to catch a train from West Ryde station, used to come in a sulky I remember that. Beautiful sulky, and these horses, dancing horses, to me it was luxury to see them come in on that sulky to go school. I don't know what school they went to.

Q: And when you talk about the golf course, where exactly?

Where it is now. It wasn't a golf course then. And then they developed all around there. I think it was a company that built those homes.

Q: So when you were a child you'd remember all the industry, down near the river. The manufacturing works, all that sort of industry down there. And do you remember it looking dirty or anything?

No, that was a bit further on from where we lived here. But I remember the punt going across the roads, we used to like to have a ride on the punt, just for the sake of riding, then come back again, have a few trips that filled in the day, and we thought it was wonderful to have a punt ride.

Q: Did you have to pay for that?

No it was free. (Laughs) A few had cars, but you could go free and it was just filling our days as pleasure you know. We used to go to the new Meadowbank Baths - Charity Creek. That was what the creek was called at the bottom here.

Q: Is that the creek you were talking about earlier?

No, we used to go through the Meadowbank Park and over a little bridge, and under the railway bridge and catch the punt, just for the sake of a treat. And we used to swim at the baths, have picnics. I remember sitting on the grass and just sitting down and eating and then playing, with the families.

Q: Were your parents particularly religious? Was the church not an important part of your life?

No, no, we went to Sunday School, but they didn't go, only occasionally perhaps at Easter or Christmas. We went to Sunday School and that was all.

Q: Some big events have happened in your life. For example the depression. Do you remember you would have at that stage by the time it started you would have been a teenager. It would have been during the years when you were first starting to work. Do you remember the impact of it? Do you remember people out of work? What it was like at the time?

Yes, you were lucky to have job. I really think having the Intermediate might have helped me. And then, having the shorthand and typing. Might have helped me to get a job. I didn't find it hard, but a lot of people did. I mean they could only do housework which was poorly paid. Or work in a factory, which was poorly paid.

Q: Were any members of your family at all, out of work, or affected by the depression?

My eldest brother, he was an apprentice then, as a plumber, and the youngest one too. They mightn't have got very much money, but they were being an apprentice, I think it was about three years.

Q: And your father always had a job during the depression?

No he was out of work.

Q: For very long?

Oh about two years I think. Well you see we had a cow and fowls and he used to walk into Sydney Town Hall to pick up what we called the dole. Like sugar bags. We'd bring them home they would be potatoes and rice and tapioca and sago and things like that. Perhaps carrots, cabbages, or bread. He had to walk in to the Sydney Town Hall because we didn't have enough money for him to go by tram.

Q: How long would that have taken him I wonder?

All day. See he had to walk in and walk back. Sometimes he'd get a lift on the tram, but if the inspector came, the one that was taking the tickets was on the outside of the tram, would give a whistle and they'd jump off see. So they wouldn't be caught.

Q: So he'd go in with the two sugar bags? When he went in to Sydney Town Hall, did he get coupons there or did he actually get the food itself?

Not coupons, no, that was where they went in those days. To the Sydney Town Hall and got the food. And they had to do relief work after to pay for that food. So many weeks, two or three weeks to pay for that food.

Q: Do you remember where he did relief work?

He did a certain amount of road work because being a bricklayer he was able to do his trade. He did that work around the Ryde area.

Q: Do you remember how it felt at the time? Were you old enough to know how he felt?

No, so many of them were unemployed. We didn't take a great deal of notice of it.

Q: So you kids were working and your father wasn't?

Oh no, we were going to school.

Q: Oh this was when you were still at school?

You see not many people were in work, mostly only the business people, who owned businesses or worked in shops. But then not many were working in shops. So there was a lot of unemployment. Most of us had fruit trees and we used to make jam and other people had other trees and they'd say, 'Would

you like to get some plums?' We shared a lot in those days. It was a case of sharing. We were all the same, we shared a lot.

Q: Do you remember in those years there were things you couldn't do that you had been able to do before, or things you could have that you couldn't have during those couple of years? Do you remember the impact it had on you?

No it didn't seem to have any impact on us children. Our mother and father probably noticed it, because my mother used to make her clothes into our clothes, but we didn't notice it. We still had enough clothes. Enough to go to school, but we had to take them off when we came home from school to keep them good enough to go to school. Not run round and play in school clothes. We put on old things, and go out and chase each other and play hideys and go down to Meadowbank Park.

Q: Do you remember when your father got a job after those few years of unemployment? Was there a lot of excitement?

No, no (Laughs). Just took it for granted that Dad provided for us.

Q: When the war finished did you go out and celebrate yourself?

No we were very happy, everybody was happy about it. We wondered how they got on in Britain, because we corresponded. Sometimes our letters were blacked out, where my father and mother would perhaps say something. And their letters were the same, blacked out, censored.

(Break in Transcript)

Q: So you kept up the correspondence with the family in England?

Oh yes and I still do with the next generation. My father kept it up and then when he got older I kept it up and now some of them have come out, but I haven't been home, but they have come out here. And I still write to them.

Q: And during your parents life, none of them came out, or they didn't go back I suppose, they couldn't afford it?

No, couldn't afford it. In those days, well it wasn't a plane trip, it would take about three months for the trip over and the trip back, well they couldn't afford not being working. They couldn't be on a boat and working too.

Q: I notice you call it home. Is that how you refer to England?

Yes I still refer to it as home.

Q: Even though you were born here?

Yes, I suppose it's on account of my mother.

Q: She always said that did she?

I daresay she did, yes. She hated Australia.

Q: Oh did she?

Oh yes she thought it was an awful place. Not only the heat, but she hated the flies, the ants, the mosquitoes and snakes were here. She thought it was a dreadful country.

Q: Oh dear, she probably wanted to go home did she?

Yes she did but she never got home. And therefore - we didn't have photographs and cameras then. I have no photos of them in England at that stage of that age. I have now, as I say we corresponded a lot. And they have come out and my family have gone home, but I never got home.

Q: Would you like to?

I would have liked to but I think I've left it too late. I've done other things. I've traveled more East.

Q: Did you father hate it too?

No he loved it, he thought it was a beautiful country. He could work the whole year. In England with the snow he couldn't work. He thought it was a lovely country. He didn't have to wear an overcoat to work and no snow. He thought it was lovely. He was always building, never lost work, but I think my mother was lonely. Not having anyone out here. I think she was lonely. And as I said, she hated the climate.

Q: There would have been, as you were saying, other English migrants around here. Did she get comfort from them? It wasn't family I suppose.

No she didn't. She could play the piano and played in England. But you see we didn't have a piano then. I did have a piano when I married my husband because his mother had one, and we inherited that. But that wasn't the grand parents that didn't come, it was his father and his stepmother.

Q: Oh your poor mother.

You see back there they don't have mosquitoes, they don't have flies, ants, not in England it’s too cold. She had two sisters. She lived a lot of her life in Europe too, and I think she thought it was - too primitive, you know? And of course she had bronchitis. And looking back she was in hospital a lot. I don't think she was the strongest. Didn't have the antibiotics then.

END OF INTERVIEW