

MS PATRICIA PARKER
C/- HISTORY HOUSE,
131 MACQUARIE STREET,
SYDNEY. N.S.W. 2000.

0.33 My name is Patricia Hazel Parker, nee Lawrence, and I live at 43 Phillips Street, Alexandria. I was born on the 19th August, 1937, at Paddington Women's Hospital, Sydney. I am divorced. I have lived in Blacktown for 33 years. Prior to that I lived in the city and now I've returned to living in the city. I am an Australian and I have four children, three boys and a girl.

1.05 **Pat, can you tell me a little about your family background? What did your father do?**

He did a wide variety of things over the years but mainly was a labourer. He started off and trained as a barber, as a young man. His parents were quite wealthy and owned a number of pubs all around the southern parts of New South Wales and Victoria but they then proceeded to drink the proceeds from all of them, so that when they retired they were not only penniless but left an enormous amount of debt. Dad had been an apprentice barber and qualified but actually didn't work at the trade for much longer. My mother was a tailoress and in fact was probably the major breadwinner of the family for most of the life that I remember.

1.52 **And did you have any brothers or sisters?**

Yes, I have an older brother. He's a lot older than me and left home by the time I came along. He's 15 or more years older and I haven't seen him for a number of years, so I'm virtually an only child.

2.06 **And so when you first lived in Blacktown, When would that have been and roughly how old would you have been then?**

I went there as a young married with three children. My third child had just been born and I was 21. I had four children under six years of age, so I've had them very young and very close together, and it was about the mid 1950's, perhaps 1956/'57, when I first went to Blacktown.

2.34 **And what part of Blacktown did you live in?**

We bought a house. We got a loan - my husband was in the Navy then - and we got a loan through the Building Society at the time, which was unusual - there weren't a lot of building societies around then - and we had invested, we'd paid cash from an insurance policy from a block of land that we had, and bought another block of land at Blacktown and paid three hundred pound, and then...

3.03 **How large was the block?**

It was three hundred feet wide by five or six hundred feet deep. It was an ordinary building block then, but it's quite a large block now. We invested in a building company with little money we had, and started to have the house built on it and then the building company went bankrupt. So we lost everything on the day were to move out of the Navy house. It was very traumatic, with all these little babies. So, we went to the bank the next day and they financed a house - the house had been started, and was about half completed - and they financed the rest of the house for a two bedroom place, and then my husband and I built the rest of it on into a four bedroom house within the next two years. We just kept building.

3.53 **And what sort of building materials - was that timber?**

Yes, it was fibro and we had it modified so that it was very open plan when it was two bedrooms, a lounge, dining room, kitchen, toilet and laundry out in the backyard and the bathroom of course was in the house. And then we extended it to a back verandah, another bedroom, then we extended it again and put on another bedroom and brought the laundry in, and then finally, only in the last couple of years they've put the toilet inside as well.

4.24 [BLANK TAPE TO 5.11]

5.11 So you had a large garden as well?

A very large garden - grew a lot of our own vegies. There was no fences and there was not another house in sight. Where we were was out on the edge of - it was Douglas Road on the edge of Doonside- and it was just market gardens for as far as the eye could see.

5.30 There was no curb and guttering or anything like that?

No, oh no. No road - there wasn't even a road. It was just mud and no transport. So you just... you either walked in, which is mainly what we did because we didn't have a car and I didn't drive anyway, but we either walked or eventually what I used to do was hitch-hike in to do the shopping and sit up on the back of a truck tray-thing somewhere and then just get the shopping and they'd eventually deliver, unless it was wet weather and then they wouldn't deliver because they couldn't get up the road because it was just mud. So it was an interesting time for transport and mobility, of trying to get around. We eventually bought a little car, but my husband used to drive that in and out to the station to go to work, but I didn't drive so it didn't matter.

6.23 The bus service wasn't good?

There wasn't any. The nearest one was about five miles away and you just walked to that. I mean, one of my lovely stories, digressing, is that I'd gone into shop into Blacktown one day, into Woolworths which was in the main street and done all the shopping and gathered up... 'cause you took the children everywhere, there was no alternative anyway... and got home and thought something's missing and realised that I'd left one of the children in town! It took me another two hours - even though it was only five miles away - to actually get back into town because I'd had to grab up all the kids again and plod off on foot to... and hitched... till I got in there, and as I walked into Woolworths the p.a. was saying "Little boy says his name's John and he's got on red trousers and a green shirt" - "Oh, that's mine"- and then proceeded back out home again. So I'd spent almost the entire day going in and out for shopping on the two excursions. So that's what happened. But also we had open fire, so that I spent a lot of the day getting fuel too.

7.35 What was your daily routine? Did you work?

I didn't in those early days at Blacktown. I had been working. We'd been living in Petersham and someone came along and said why don't you buy a block of land at Blacktown, they're fifty pound" and we said "Oh you're joking- who'd want to live out there" and of course when they got to three hundred pound then we decided it looked good. But it was our only chance of getting a house, so... which is why a lot of people moved out there at that time. And then when the children... probably once they'd all started going to school... I worked. But while they were little - I subsequently had another child there - and while they were little I just cooked and washed and cleaned and shopped and sewed. I used to knit for spare money and sell it in the local newspaper- advertised it in the local... and I used to sell baby layettes. So I knitted every available moment I had. I did aprons at home for threepence a dozen, but you could make... it's like they sew buttons on cards these days. And I also always - was very

active in the school P. & C and fundraising and those sorts of things. So the day went in actually existing, mainly, and my mother was very ill at the time and there was a lot of travelling in and out to Sydney until she eventually died.

9.08 Your husband worked closed by?

He was in the Navy. He worked here at Garden Island- at Balmoral, where we lived originally, in the Navy Quarters at Balmoral- then he left. When he finally got out of the Navy he then joined a bus company as a bus driver in Parramatta. So he used to drive buses for 12, 14, 16 hours a day. It was a good life. It was a very good life. It was clean and it was healthy and the kids could run and do all sorts of ordinary things, you know. It was really nice, and we did a lots of bush walking, and canoeing and all of that sort of stuff.

9.54 Locally?

Mmm... up the Mountains and at Windsor particularly.

10.01 Did the children have far to travel to school?

Initially, the two boys had to go... the only school was in the heart of Blacktown - it's still there - the Blacktown Public School... and they both went to kindergarten there, 'cause there was only eleven months between them, so they always went to the same school. And then eventually they built Walters Road Primary School and so they transferred to there and Jenny and Danny went there. Then they built Mitchell High School and Jim, John and Jenny went there. Then they built Evans High School and Danny went there. But they're all in very close proximity to that area.

10.44 And how did they get to school?

Walked.

Was it a long walk?

No, I think it was only about two mile, you know, it's not far. It wasn't ever a hassle. No, we always walked.

10.58 What about - getting back to the house for a bit, What sort of appliances did you have back in the 50's?

We saved up for the fridge. That was a really big event getting the fridge. We'd started off with an ice box, but they didn't deliver ice to us out there, so it was imperative, and especially the first month that we moved in when Jenny was four months old, or three months old, the heatwaves were just absolutely unbelievable. It was over a 105, 110 degrees every day for six days straight and I used to just take their clothes off and sit them in the bath - not with any water - but just sit them in the bath to play, because it was the only cool spot in the house.. and then each night we'd hose the house down because you could hear it groaning and creaking and it was just like an oven. But luckily you could open the doors and the window and the breeze at night would come through. But it was very difficult after living in the city, all my life, to cope with that sort of heat with new families, and at that stage not having a fridge, and we very quickly got the fridge, and that was a major event.

12.1 What was it, a 'Silent Night' ?

Yes, it was... yes, it was. And then later on it got to be a 'Kelvinator' and we just stuck with that for years. But my husband was very good. We spent a lot of time - he spent a lot of time

building on the house, cupboards and everything we needed - lots of books, so we were always constantly extending bookshelves and cupboards - listened to the radio a lot, we were all pretty keen on the radio, and it was a big contact that I had. My biggest social contact was the baker and the mailman, and many years later the mailman said to me "I knew I always had to leave time when I came to your place" he said " 'cause you were just like blotting paper" he said. "Anything I had to say, you'd say 'Then what did you do, and then what did you do?'" . So it was very lonely, but I don't have a bad memory of that loneliness, just that it was very lonely.

13.12 Did you feel isolated?

Oh, very, very. And because my mother was ill, I felt really cut off.

Did you have much help with the children?

Well my husband's very good. I mean he was a superb husband and a superb father, and would always... washing and cleaning and all of that stuff, it was never mine, it was anybody's that needed to do it. But he went before they were up in the morning and he didn't get back until after dark at night. So he used to leave in the dark and get back in the dark - very little other than the weekends to do anything in.

13.48 So what about after school care and things like that?

No, oh no, you just did it yourself. I used to just walk them down in the morning and then go back down in the afternoon and pick them up again and walk them back home. But that was my social outing as well because I'd see other parent that were there.

14.07 Did you have neighbours nearby?

No, no not within sight for the first... probably- I can't remember how long -but probably three or five years, I'm not sure. But then neighbours came and that made a big difference, just for the social contact because they all had small children. But also when you have four children, if you get four visitors, you've got eight children. You know, the place was always full of people and kids, 'cause my husband's from a very big family. He's the youngest of twelve and they all have married with children, so there were always a lot of people around. But the big change for me came when I learned to drive, because that gave me freedom that I hadn't had before, in almost every sphere. You know, with just the shopping - it got to be something that was so easy to do.

15.00 Talking about the shops, what sort of shops were there in the 50's? Were there many?

In the main street they were very bedraggled and very run down. The Chinese people had quite a lot of shops there. The Sing family had hardware shops. There was a very large picture theatre, and the School of Arts which was a really ramshackle old building -it was a main focal point. But it wasn't that long after I was there that they demolished them. The Council demolished the whole street, and surprisingly - it's a very narrow street -built them all back up in the same narrow street. So it constantly has been far too narrow as a main street.

15.46 Is that Blacktown Road?

Mm, it's where the Mall is now. But it used to be the only shops except up Campbell Street, which was the bank, another hardware shop and some fabric shops. But then Woolworths came in the main street, and that was the Department Store (laughs) where you did all the shopping.

16.06 Did you have to travel to Parramatta for shopping sometimes?

No, never. No, that would have been too hard. No, when we went out in the car we probably went to other places for shopping but I don't have a memory of that, I think we got everything that we needed. We used to grow our own vegetables and made quite a lot of anything ourselves, so we didn't buy a lot and we were never big meat eaters, so it was never...

Did you make your own preserves and that sort of thing?

Yes, yes and we had fruit trees so that you always did your own fruit and bottling, and we bought from the markets in the city and Jim would bring it by car by the box. We'd always buy boxes of fruit. But you could always go down to the market gardens and buy anything you wanted too. They were all around us, so you got very cheap and very fresh vegetables easily.

17.01 And did you swap things with other neighbours?

Well, we used to barter quite a lot with people. It is interesting to see that coming back in again. I suppose unemployment does that. But in fact I used to barter my knitting and my sewing as well as the jams and pickles and things that you would swap with people who did something or other else. And in fact when I was telling you about learning to drive, that's one of the ways I paid for the driving lessons, was in bartering.

17.35 And what did you do for recreation - the family generally – what did you all do for recreation in your leisure time?

There was quite a lot involved about the school because it was a focal point, the school, and the Workers' Club at Blacktown. And it was probably – the Workers' Club - was the lifesaving grace of everybody around there that had children in those days, because they had a bus and they'd come and pick the kids up and take them to soccer and then bring them home again afterwards because it was a long way away. And Jenny used to go to dancing and Jim used to go to judo, and John and Danny went to soccer, and varying other things. Then they joined a chess club, and all those things were associated with the Workers' Club. So, the Workers' Club bus used to pick them up and take them everywhere initially. So that was enormous, you know, because people could just never have got their children to half the functions, so that was good.

But I had ... my education was here at the Conservatorium High School in Sydney and I have a music background, and so when I began to get a little more time and mobility, what I was looking for was something with music involved in it. The only thing out there then was a church choir on Sunnyholt Road at the Baptist Church, or the Methodist Church, I think it was, at the time, and I joined that choir. And there were a hundred-odd people in the choir, which I found absolutely staggering that so many people were in the choir! That's because there wasn't anything else there! So five of us got together and formed a players group and we used to put plays on twice a year. And then, because it grew with far too many people for the amount of plays we could put on, we then formed a separate... another group of about 20 of us... formed a separate musical society. So there was Blacktown Players and there was Blacktown Musical Society, and they functioned... they went for 21 years. And they did three plays a year – three musicals a year and the Players did five plays a year. So that was my fair obsession for a lot of those years. And then eventually we formed an arts and crafts group, because everyone was doing macramé in the kitchen. So we said why don't we ask the Council for somewhere central, and Pam Green said why don't you use my place" out on Doonside Road, and so we went out there, but that was into the 60's by then, the late 60's.

20.23 So the community network was a very strong one among women?

Extremely strong. There was a group call the Union of Australian Women, the UAW, that were out there then, and those women were in everything, and they had all of the things to do that had any sort of political or social change, those women belonged to the UAW. And they used to sell... we used to go and pick strawberries out of the fields and sell those on the roadside to get money to send somebody away to a conference. So if there was a conference on somewhere we'd just go and pick more strawberries and sell them until we had enough money for the fare of whoever was to go. But it was a very tight, united, supportive community and the women, who were all a lot older than I was, were really fantastic to me because they could see me getting lost in all of these children and did everything they possibly could to make life easier for me. And, I think I told you, they insisted that I learn to swim, because I couldn't swim, and they insisted that I learn to drive. And both of those things actually changed my life because of the freedom that they gave me. But their political influence was very great too.

21.44 So, even though you were isolated you really had a very strong community which helped you to survive?

Yes, we probably only saw one another once a month, or once a fortnight if we were lucky, and then somebody would come and pick me up with the car. But yes, they were a very influential group of women in my life, and important women in the life of Blacktown.

22.15 And what political affiliation was it?

The Union of Australian Women was a mixed bunch. It comprised a lot of the left wing women and also a lot of the church women at the time. They were a very mixed bunch. But my mother and father, and my husband's mother and father -were both card carrying Communist Party members here in the city, and executive of the Communist Party here in the city, so we'd both come from a very left wing background and political background so it fitted in very well out there. And eventually we did join the Communist Party in Blacktown which was also very active at the time.

22.52 In the 50's?

Yes, very strong. And when Lalor Park developed as the Housing Commission area, they were the people who were doing all the politicking and advocating for conditions for the young ones that had been put out there in such isolation, and in ghetto. They were very influential. They were represented on Council and on most of the committees to do with the Workers' Club and sporting bodies, cultural bodies. They were always very active people.

23.28 And how did the change from isolation to urbanisation affect you as a woman?

I probably didn't notice a lot of difference because it was gradual, and because the area we were in stayed rural for quite some time. It wasn't until many years later that the housing built up, the road went through and the bus service went through. That probably changed things quite considerably. But, I mean, the buses stopped at six o'clock at night, so there was never any continuity of being able to get anywhere. But I think that gradual change... the big change for me came with the Whitlam Government. That was when I noticed the biggest change, because they'd sent out a man named Arthur Pike to do a study on cultural facilities out there, of which there were none, and they then did quite a lot of lobbying with the Council to take on a Community Arts Officer because the Community Arts Board had just been set up, and I was doing secretarial work. I'd gone to work for the Ten Pin Bowl - A.M.F., American Machine and Foundry- there at Blacktown initially. That was my first full-time job, back again. I'd been a bookkeeper and an accountant and I'd gone there as Treasurer to look after the books, and I used to do that at night when my husband came home, then I'd go to work and do their books. And then when they got up to date I just continued on to do all sorts of

secretarial work around the place, and running the place, and then when the Manager resigned I took over as Manager for a while, and mainly just did that sort of... I don't know... the day was full - it was gone! (Laughs).

25.24 So you were financially independent. I was going to ask you how you managed the household finances - if you were given so much housekeeping?

All the money went into a purse and it went on top of the fridge. So, I mean it's interesting that we have never, in all the time we lived in Blacktown and in the various places we lived, never locked a door or locked a window. I mean, obviously at first it's too isolated out there for anyone to walk out there and steal anything anyway. (Laughs) But they tend not to steal from their own. I've never the place at Blacktown. It's quite different now being in the city, having a culture here that's got bars on the windows and doors and that you can't even leave your front door open while you go out the back yard. I mean, I still don't believe that sort of culture happens at Blacktown - it's a different culture.

But the money was always just pooled. Whatever came in was just there. Most of it went on food. When you do extra work, that buys the fridge, it then bought a bedroom suite that we had so that we had all the pieces matching. It then buys more timber for another room. So, you just upgrade your appliances and the conveniences that you have, gradually, I suppose. We didn't have debt we didn't have any credit. We had a bit of money saved and we knew that was there in case we needed it. But it just... the wages of the Navy were very low, so you just survived from one week to another and some weeks were better than others. But the money was never a problem with us, it was just there to be used on whatever we set as priorities - upgrade the car!

27.21 And what sort of car did you buy for your first car?

We had a 1937 Morris as our first car which we pushed more than we drove, and neither of us had had any experience working on cars, so we used to get an instruction manual and I'd sit on the ground next to the car and Jim would be under it with the screwdrivers or whatever – spanner - saying now turn this to the left three times, and that's how he learnt to work on cars. But we always had Morris'es, for many years after that.

27.56 And what about industries that grew up in the area? They were mostly poultry farms weren't they?

Yes, well there were market gardens out where we were. There was very little industry out there. It developed a little bit later and there was a chemical plant there at Doonside later on, but there was very little industry in Blacktown except over on Sunnyholt Road which is the main industrial area. But it's actually a dormitory suburb. People don't work in Blacktown as much as they live in Blacktown and work somewhere else. So that you are always travelling to and from any sort of work, which is why I eventually had to come back to the City for work, because once you get past a certain level of management those jobs don't exist in the west anymore - or never did - so that you don't have those same opportunities for the level of employment that you are looking at.

But I went to work for Blacktown Council for ten years as their first Community Development Officer and their first Community Arts Officer and one of the first Community Arts Officers in Australia. And during that ten years I got a fellowship to go to England and did an Arts Administration degree at London University, and went through Europe as well on another fellowship with the Ministry for Arts Grant looking at community arts and living conditions in areas of high density housing and the new towns in England. I did quite a lot of studies and report on those for the Government here and then the Australia Council seconded me from Blacktown Council to go round Australia and train all the Community Arts Officers

in every State. And then I did another tour, probably two years later, with local government in every State and talking about their community development and budgets and then I instigated well, I didn't instigate it, but I was the person who put it into practice – the zero-base budgeting at Blacktown Council which they did for the first time.

So there were a lot of changes and there was a lot of diversity in that ten years. But it was mainly surveying what existed and what didn't exist and what people wanted to exist. There was enormous groundswell from people out there wanting things to happen, and the facilities were like negligible. But they still are - it hasn't changed a lot. The Arts and Craft Group... the Council set up a whole community centre at the Showground. The Theatre Group was there and the Player's Group were there and the Art and Craft Group, the Literature Group, the Society of Women Writers were there and the Fellowship of Australian Writers, the Historical Society, all of those people met in buildings that the Council built at the Showground, and still function there. It's a really dynamic little hive of activity and development.

31.15 But mainly people were spread out and that made it very difficult.

END

SIDE A

SIDE B

9

2.03 Just re-tracking for a minute on appliances.. when I asked about them you only mentioned the refrigerator. Did you have things like Mixmasters and electric jugs?

No. We didn't have many, what I'd call "gadgets" these days that you tend to take for granted. I certainly wouldn't have had a Mixmaster and I wouldn't ever have had a juicer – 'cause you'd just do that on a glass juicer over a cup - and I wouldn't have had an electric jug. Probably the radio was as modern as I got for quite some time.

A vacuum cleaner?

Yes, I'd have had a vacuum cleaner, and I had a carpet sweeper that I used to use probably more than the vacuum cleaner. But we just didn't have those sort of appliances. I don't think it occurred to have them- I don't think they were a priority. And when we got the Victor Motor Mower, that was big time too, because we'd had a hand push mower for years before that.

3.00 And what about television.. when that came?

Yes. Well probably television was around for ten or more years before we got a television set. It wasn't a high priority. We were a very musical family and my husband plays piano and clarinet, and anything else that he wants to, and the eldest boy plays French horn, guitar, saxophone and piano. They all play piano, Jenny played flute, and they all play guitar. We sang a lot. That was our activity with the family - was singing round the piano - and it was always the grandparent that came always played and sang, so that it was a usual thing to happen and not something... and one of the nice offshoots of that is that we can now just sit down and play and sing anywhere and really enjoy it. Nobody is judgmental about "that's really terrible" or any of that. It's just fun and it a lovely off-shoot.

4.02 It's a good form of entertainment.

Mm. It's good. And reading poetry. We used to read a lot of poetry with the children and my husband and I out on the back step on the hot summer nights, just sitting there looking at those beautiful sunsets. Magnificent in the west- there all pink and orange- and always have been, and long. They last a long time, and we'd sit out the back in the garden, put the hose on and just read poetry. It was lovely.

4.31 What about health services in the area. Was there a local hospital nearby?

Yes, Blacktown Hospital was there, but that's really all there was, and that's where you went if you were sick. In fact that was one of the turning points also about learning to drive, was that my husband had an ulcer in those days and he was very ill one night and I didn't know how to get him to a doctor, and we had no phone, so that it was really isolated, and knowing that I didn't know how I could physically get him anywhere. So you don't - you just deal with it until the light of day- and it was shortly after that that I learned to drive.

5.19 And did you have access to a local doctor?

No, he was at the hospital. There wasn't a local doctor - there were several local doctors, but they kept very short hours, and no-one ever gets sick in open hours. But the doctors that had been there had been there for a lot of years and they were mainly were husband and wife teams and they just saw to the... when you went shopping you went to the doctor and did all those things, and the Council did all the immunisation for the children and all those clinics. The Baby Health Centre was there- it was a Tresillian, I think, in Patrick Street, and it was there probably most of my life there. The Baby Health Centre was the place that everybody went to whenever there were problems with the kids.

6.11 Was there a local ambulance service?

Not for a lot of years. There is now, but there weren't for a lot of years. There was nothing of that type there- that functioned as such. Maybe we didn't have the thought to use it in the same way then as you do now. We just went to the hospital if there was a problem.

6.34 And what about when your children were born? Did you have your children at the local hospital?

No. I had them at Crown Street because I'd had three before I moved there, so I only had Danny. But in fact when I'd been in to visit my mother in hospital at Marrickville one night and we'd driven out to Blacktown at the end of the day with all the children and as we got to the driveway I said to my husband "Don't get out, take me back". So I went back in and had Danny that night. So he hadn't been out of the car since four o'clock that morning and here it was nearly four o'clock the next morning. We'd just been in and out to Blacktown twice from the City.

7.17 Can I ask you, did you plan - when you got married - did you plan to have four children?

Oh no! (Laughs) I didn't plan to have four children when I had four children. No, no they were all accidental. The pill didn't come out until after Danny was born, and that's when I know when the pill came on the market, 'cause that was my last child. But we'd used all forms of contraception prior to that and all very unsuccessfully. But I suppose they keep you non-pregnant for a short period of time, otherwise I guess I'd have had four in four years, but...

7.53 So you didn't have a lot of control over your pregnancies?

No, and I didn't have a lot of knowledge of contraception either, and neither did my husband. I think we were both fairly illiterate about that sort of thing, and it wasn't until after Danny, the fourth child, that I actually went and did a whole lot of reading about it. I think I assumed it would all take care of itself. Somebody told me that I couldn't fall pregnant while I was breastfeeding which is why the first two are eleven months apart. So much for don't fall

pregnant! (Laughs). But yes, it's... and Doctor Carr and his wife were the two doctors that I used to see there in Flushcombe Road, and they were an institution in the place for looking after the women and children around the area.

8.43 What about the churches? You did mention the choir. Were there other churches in the area and did they play an important social role for the women in the area?

Oh, very much so, and I mean even for someone who was an atheist like I was, my life was very much entwined in the church there. I'd had a convent upbringing before I'd come to the Conservatorium and so those ties were there anyway. But St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Patrick Street was a centre for everything - all sorts of activity. Sometimes the immunisation clinics were there. Certainly any visiting speaker of any sort was there. They used to do a mid-week mass with guitar and folk-music at some stage. I can't remember when that was, but I know that I found the music of that absolutely fantastic. The priests all had push-bikes, of course, and used to pedal around.

I had fostered - 'fostered' isn't exactly the term - I'd looked after a number of children that the church had placed with me, who were either beaten or abandoned, on a temporary basis and then later on the littlies were replaced with drug addicts that were in the process of going somewhere, or children who kept attempting suicide and they'd been taken from their parents. Initially, I refused to do it because I thought I had enough with my own children and enough to do, but Father Grew, who was the parish priest there at the time, was very persuasive and kept saying things like "Just for today. You take this one just for today and I'll find a home for them tomorrow, but I can't take them back to their father tonight or he'll kill them".

And so it just grew and grew from that- there always seemed to be always a lot of children on the way out. I'd had one little boy who'd just seen his father shoot his mother in front of him. He was eight. I had another young girl that had tried to commit suicide all the time until I finally had to say to her 'I can't handle you. If you really want to die that badly you've got to kill yourself because I can't be a policeman to you anymore. And I mean she is just the most beautiful young woman these days. When I said it I sat there when she left and cried and vomited and thought "what have I done, What have I done". But I didn't know how to handle it any more. But she's fine. It just shook her up - the thought that I might abandon her, and she just went away and got her act together. But that was because of the church, I mean they were very supportive of the kids.

11.30 So the church played a big role in community service?

Well, Father Grev would come and get me and we would go down to the police station and retrieve some fifteen year old girl out of the cells that had been thrown in there drunk and that sort of stuff, you know. While it didn't happen every day, it certainly happened every few months. I did that probably for four or five years, I suppose, until they found enough people ... I was most unwilling. I never ever wanted to do it. I felt totally unqualified to do it. It filled a role at the time.

12.08 Were you involved in any other organisations, clubs, apart from the ones you've mentioned? You know, the Red Cross or other auxiliaries?

I think I've probably been instrumental in setting up most of the cultural organisations out there at some stage or another, and we brought in a choreographer and had them employed by Blacktown Council at one stage as a choreographer-in-residence to unite the multicultural groups out there in dance festival, because they all worked very independently of each other and didn't speak to one another. They did the most beautiful work. So Margaret Walker came in and unified them all. She'd had a lot of experience in multicultural dance here and overseas,

and put together a team of professional dancers. So we actually had our first professional dance group called Blacktown Dancers out there for ten years as well.

And there were all sorts of... the Macramé Group, and then we set up another one at Mt Druitt, a branch of it at the library, and it used to have 60 or 70 people as members of that. The Art and Craft Group had six to seven hundred members at one stage. It's fallen off now because there are so many things available, but it was a reflection of how desperate people were to be creative and do something creative. The Red Cross and all of those - the View Club - I was a member of all those, and the Smith Family, and because I used to sing, I used to sing at most of their functions as some sort of entertainment - and the Hospital Auxiliary. And everybody belonged to all of those - there weren't that many of us. (Laughs).

13.57 So you all knew each other! And so when you look at the area then you see massive changes have taken place in the time you were there. What's your impression of how the landscape has changed?

Well they did, for a long time, they did really terrible things architecturally. They kept bulldozing everything and putting up a car park at the drop of a hat, and that was pretty devastating because everything that any sort of character or trees around it or, you know, anything that was a monument of past seemed to go, and that everything became very sterile, and people had a lot of problems adjusting to an area that they couldn't relate to anything in. Also, of course, they brought in huge floods of people, like 30,000 people. At one stage the population of Mt. Druitt was 90,000, 600,000 (?) of whom were under the age of 15. So it was like having a giant kindergarten suddenly plonked in the middle of the area. with no facilities, no postal, no telephone, and people were just suiciding like crazy out there.

15.11 There was no postal service either?

No. Well, you couldn't just go down the street and post a letter. You'd have to catch the bus or walk into Mt. Druitt and do all the business there. There was the old shopping centre there before the new one came, but really there were very few facilities. And also they put people together, like Serbs and Croatians, who traditionally hadn't spoken to each other for thousands of years and in fact were very violent to one another. They put all the old people in certain streets. All the people with nine children got the five bedroom houses in other streets. So you could never actually get away from your problem. If you were old and couldn't open your window because it was stuck, neither could the person next door, because they were old as well. If you had nine children and were going round the bend, you couldn't get away because the people next door had nine as well. So, it was really terrible planning, without facilities.

Blacktown Council then undertook a pilot project called "Section 94" where we took the developers to court to have them contribute so much from every block of land towards community facilities and we won that. And that was a really big, like two and a half / three year court battle, and all the Community Services people surveyed every aspect of the area from where you want your bus stop to how many children and why do they play on the road, and it was observed at the time that children in Housing Commission areas liked to play on the road. Well that's rubbish - there was only the road. So a lot of the myths were shot down during that S.94 case. So it was an important landmark for us out there for community development, because also after that came estate workers, new estate workers, facilities went in before the people went in, the bus service was lined up to go in with the first resident in the area. So that by the time Minchinbury came along and St. Clair those things - and Doonside - were taken for granted.

The Toongabbie development is a very interesting one to look at because it had enormous problems, and Garage Graphics, which is a women's silk-screen co-operative in Mt. Druitt, undertook a huge social campaign of posters and negotiation with the Housing Commission,

and we actually had the architecture of that Toongabbie development changed, which was a monumental thing to happen, because of the impact the posters had had throughout the area. And a lot of social change came about because of Garage Graphics because they could publicise a whole lot of things and communicate that to people settling into the new areas that weren't there before.

But it was a good place to live, and it was open and airy. It was challenging – nothing was easy, but it was easy also to win victories and to gain benefits once people got together and knew to do that. So it developed enormously. I don't see a lot of change in it now. I mean there is to the 50's, but there isn't to the 70's. It hasn't gone far.

19.04 It hasn't progressed since then?

I don't think so. I think it took on a character in the 70's that will stay with it I think, for quite some decades to come. But those early years were only marked by the isolation and the lack of facility, the lack of planning – I mean Blacktown just grew up all over the place. It didn't actually get planned that hard. And John Aquilina, when he was Mayor out there (he's now shadow Minister for Education), he would have been the single most important person that I'm aware of to bring changes about. He was a high school teacher up at Mt. Druitt at the time, teaching history, and he lobbied for all sorts of changes and actually made them happen. He's a man of vision.

19.55 The other thing I forgot to say was that my husband, after he left the bus company, joined the waterfront - was part of the Waterside Workers – and then I became Secretary of the Women's Federation of Waterside Workers, and during a lot of the strikes of those late 50's, mid-60's, I toured around Australia speaking on behalf of Women of Waterside Workers and why they were out on strike, and went to conferences in Queensland and in Victoria representing the Waterside Workers' Federation, and that was also paid for by that strawberry picking that we talked about earlier.

20.38 Well thank you very much Pat. It has been very interesting and I've enjoyed talking with you.

20.42

END OF SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW