

INTERVIEW NO. 7

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MRS. BRENDA NICCOL
52 Beach Street, (River Road)
EMU PLAINS. 2750.

****** *This copy has been edited*
by Mrs. Niccol
[Edited changed are added
in '***bold italic***' script]

0.28 My name is Brenda Niccol. My address is River Road, Emu Plains. The date of my birth is 20/4/1920. The place of my birth was Ballarat, though I didn't live there, it was the home of my grandmother. I am a widow now and I suppose I'm - dare I say it these days? - fourth or fifth generation. I have four children - four boys.

1.25 **OK, so first to ask you a little bit about your family background, what did your father do, and your mother? What sort of work did your father do?**

My father was an Anzac and he took up one of the soldier-settlement blocks in the Riverina. My mother had been in Germany at the outbreak of War. She was an Australian and had gone over to England. She was very artistic - a painter, a writer and a producer of plays and even a writer of plays. I grew up - did I say I grew up in the Riverina? But they were Victorians.

2.26 **When did you move to Penrith area - to Emu Plains?**

I'd come to Sydney with my sister. Actually we stayed in the Girls' Friendly Hostel which is still there opposite the University of Sydney. Then my mother died in '37, suddenly. She was coming up to stay with us from the Riverina and she had a haemorrhage - a stroke. I faced up to it but I was young, only about 17. I think it hit me the following year and my father decided to send me down here to the guest house. It was a guest house in these days.

3.33 **This house?**

Yes, this house was a guest house. It had a lot of other buildings around *on the property*. It was a very, very beautiful place. Emu Plains itself was a place of orange groves and peach trees and apricot trees, grape vines and dairy farms. It was something of intense loveliness really, with the hills behind and the lower Mountains behind - and the river. Across the other side was just grazing lands and again, farms. It was just such a beautiful area. And I came back again for another holiday and then I decided one summer - we'd been camping, my sister and I and a young group, at Cattai Creek which was a beautiful place then without sewerage-*pollution* through it as they are using it as a sewerage drain now - and I decided I wanted another holiday here and didn't have the necessary money so I *thought*, like a lot of young people do today, that I'd come and work in the January holidays. But of course working as a waitress ...

For the guest house?

Yes, for the three or four weeks, it was nothing like being a guest and you saw then what a hard job it was. You saw behind the scenes, what a very hard life it was. I was only young then, but I think that I ... well, my husband, of course, was one of the family here and we became interested in each other. I remember for my *21st* birthday he gave me the book 'Gone With the Wind' and 'Northwest Passage', and at the time I preferred Northwest Passage for some reason or other. I think because the adventurous men that went north - their struggles in overcoming *difficulties and* the battles with the Indians and so forth - I preferred to Gone With the Wind!

6.27 **So this is where you met your husband?**

Yes, this is where we met ... like lots and lots of others. Many people come back today because they had their honeymoon here and call in and see me. A couple came back the other day. They'd been here as children in 1928, but that was just before the family had taken over

this place. Actually the woman before us ... *it had already been made into a guest house by the previous owner or lessee*. But there were a lot of division of rooms upstairs and extra rooms added on, so today it's not as the guest house was. After my husband died in the early '60's my sons and I started to peel back and demolish the bits and pieces that were added on.

7.22 So when did you come to live here permanently? After you were married I suppose?

Well, I was too young to be married when he went off to the war in 1940 with his brother. There were three brothers and one was killed in an accident. He was a school teacher and he'd just gone down to Yanko in the February. He was engaged to be married and he was riding in to ring up his fiancé when he was killed. The mother begged the two others not to join up for a while. It had to come because we could ... well for years we could see the threatening of not only Hitler, but the fellow on the white horse. *The Japanese leader* on the Cinesound News and Hitler had marched into Austria. There'd been the assassination of Adolphus *in Austria* a few years before. That had a very big effect on me I remember. People think that we didn't have those fears at those times, but I think all we young ones were in great fear *of the expected war*. We at the time didn't realise - how close the Great War was just behind us. Anything that's before you're born or before your memory may as well be a thousand years before, so I can understand that a lot of people only go back to the 1950's now as if the world started in 1950.

9.25 So you ...

Well I know it was very hard for my mother-in-law-to-be. The two sons went off and they were over in Syria and Tobruk for the nine months and they didn't come back 'til '43, and they were to go on up to fight the Japanese, and I decided 'Blow it!', you know, 'you probably won't get the chance' ... you know, you feel that the odds are against you - which sounds a bit morbid - but we decided to get married then like a lot of the returning men who married. We'd said 'Oh, no war brides!' because the stories we'd heard of the tragedies of some of the marriages of the First World War, just marrying in haste, but we married in '43. I didn't come to live here until '45 after my first son was born. My husband was still away at the war then, going up into Borneo, and he felt that he must fight on while ever there was a prisoner of war there because we'd heard so many of the dreadful tales, and I think it had an effect on those people ... it's still in your hearts today. It's something you can't throw off, even though you're not one of the prisoners of war, it's just a heartache that remains with you. But anyway he felt that he had to go on with the others until they were released. Well, he didn't come back then until my son was ten months old, I think, before he saw him - like a lot of others. There were a lot of babies born then after the 9th Division *returned* ... oh, well they'd been back a couple of years by '45. Life here was a bit hectic.

11.51 Did you run the guest house?

My father and mother-in-law were running it all during the War and they were very busy because there was a 30-mile limit on cars, or about 30-miles, and this place was just within the limits for the petrol, and people could travel here. People who went overseas normally, would come here. Because staff was very hard to get - you weren't allowed to employ women ... or men - well, women anyway - under 45. I suppose it was the same for men, The *Department of Labour and Industry* told you where you could work and eventually people were called up for service.

Able-bodied people had to help the war effort?

Had to be told where to go, yes. Younger people who had children could work here. So that they really had to limit the number they took, because my father-in-law ended up having to milk the cows - you see there were a lot of cattle on the property for the cream on the table - and horses *for riding as well as many other duties*.

13.35 How much land did the house occupy - or the property?

It was over ten acres which is small in comparison to the outback properties, but for here it was quite a handsome lot of land around. Other properties were larger that had the orchards, but ten acres was quite enough with a guest house and they had some crops for the animals.

14.11 Did they grow vegetables too?

No, not really. They had oranges and fowls, but even then they had to buy fowls because they always had chicken for Sunday dinner. They bought fowls from the locals and plucked them, which you wouldn't do these days. It was awful plucking them!

14.38 And so you were right on the river. It must have been a lovely spot for a guest house.

Well it was a wonderful spot for a guest house, yes. They had about four rowing boats with a little wharf down there on the edge of the water, and a raft which they towed in every night, because you saw the rowers there and they often used to practice at night. So they always used to pull that raft into the shore at night so that the rowers wouldn't hit the raft. It was a wonderful thing out in the middle of the river. Mind you, I wouldn't swim in it now, but then the water was our drinking water. *We pumped it up into the tanks* and it was lovely water then. It was also Penrith's drinking water so that they monitored the state of the water always, because Katoomba had sewerage running down even in those days and also Goulburn, apparently. I remember quite a funny story in '49 where a bullock was seen floating on the river here. This was all under the Blue Mountains Council then, and someone from the family rang up the Blue Mountains Council Health Inspector to say that there was a bullock floating on the water and the water supply would be affected. So they sent somebody down and the wind had come and blown the bullock over to the other side, so they said 'Oh, no - it's not our business. It's over the Penrith side.' So they rang the Penrith Council and the wind had blown it back and they said 'No, it's Blue Mountains business, it's on the Blue Mountains side.' So they had to ring back again. Anyhow it kept blowing back and forth until it reached a ridiculous state and we said 'Well something's got to be done', you know, 'we don't care who does it, as long as it's gone!'. I don't know who towed it away, probably Penrith because it was their water supply after all. There was a holding tank down near Log Cabin. It's still there. I suppose it'll go soon, the tank - I don't think it's used for anything. But we all had pumps to the river, of course, and with all the flood warnings. Originally there was an old pump that took a lot of patience if anything went wrong with it. When my husband was here he was most patient with engines and he would sit for a long time and get the thing going again, but during the war his father didn't have that sort of time. He had to be everything. He bought an electric motor and of course you had to run down and seize the electric motor every time there was a warning of a flood. Sometimes you were caught and had to send it in to Penrith. They had their big electricity depot there then and they would put it in their hot ovens and dry it out slowly so you could use it again.

18.33 Penrith had electricity very early on didn't it, but not so much gas. People in Penrith didn't seem to have gas appliances.

Well, probably somebody else can tell you when electricity came.

It was about 1890.

I do know that in the guest house days, at eleven o'clock the lights were switched off, and anybody coming from the pictures - if the *guests* had gone into Penrith - they had candles and they had to light them and go upstairs. It always amused me but that's the way it was. Whether it was just too expensive ... *and my father-in-law wanted to get to bed.*

19.25 And did you have electrical appliances here like refrigerators ...?

Oh, yes. They had a lovely big enamelled fridge. I wished I'd kept it in a way, not that ... it ran on a motor, you know, a big thing, you had to have a cupboard and an outlet to the air for this motor to run. But it was so beautifully enamelled. It wouldn't ... I mean a new fridge can easily go rusty these days - it's a thin coating of paint or something - but these were baked enamel - wonderful big thing.

20.07 An old 'Silent Knight' or something?

Oh, no. No, it was a 'Westinghouse'. The silly little joke about the rabbit makes me remember was the name of it was.

I don't know it!

Don't you know that silly little one? A rabbit was sitting in the fridge - I don't know why the rabbit, but there were rabbit jokes then - and they said 'What are you doing in there?'. 'I'm westing!'. Yes - ridiculous! Like all the shaggy dog jokes, or, you know, "Why is a piece of string?" "Because trams run up George Street!". They were the silly jokes during the War.

20.52 Did you have the sewer on here in those early days?

Yes, they did. When they first came in the '30's - they often laughed about the 'boxes' they had behind that old stone shed, and they had to go there. And one of the guests said to my father-in-law - this is second-hand of course - he said he loved being here but he wouldn't come back until they had septic sewerage. So they got septic sewerage. *The large septic system* was on the block that was sold next door.

21.36 Did you have indoor facilities - bathroom and toilet facilities - for the guests?

Oh, yes. They had bathrooms and showers outside too. I've knocked them down, some of them. One of the buildings where the laundry is, you may have noticed, was a shower room and there were four toilets there as well. There was a connecting walkway which is not there now. I could have it put up again, but I haven't yet. It just got old.

22.18 And so you didn't have your children until the late '40's?

Well, I had the first one in '45 and the second one in '47, and it was becoming very difficult. It was very difficult for young people starting up marriage then because the building materials were very restricted. Well, actually, my sister-in-law and my husband's brother decided they'd have a little room upstairs and a second little room coming out on to the balcony. The parents gave us a choice, but mind you with guests all around - bringing up a little baby - I decided I'd go for what they called the bachelor's quarters and the staff quarters over there, because I thought I'd be a little further away from the guests and I didn't want babies disturbing them. He was a good little baby, luckily for me, but he'd still wake at five and I'd get up and take him for a walk down along the river or somewhere in the first year so that the guests wouldn't be disturbed. But everywhere it was difficult. Young couples had to live with their parents. My sister-in-law's father was a master builder and they built half-way down the paddock. The building's still there, but now it's enclosed with other houses. *My husband's father* had a heart attack and died within three months of the sons' returning. So it was a bit hectic then. He'd do the cooking. He was the chef. But he was hoping *to retire*. He said 'You must always learn to cook, so that if you have anyone in to do the cooking so that they'll never hold it over you, and you'll be left in the lurch if they suddenly decide to take off. You must be able to cook.' So they'd seen how to run that part of it, otherwise it would have been a great deal more difficult. The younger brother did the cooking for a while, and then the *Grandmother* was here. She was in her 80's and she died. She was just here on a holiday. It was a difficult time for my mother-in-law, and then she got cancer and died in 1950. The other brother decided that the life was just too hard with a family. He'd had a daughter too - couple of months older than my first son - *and then a son*, and with two children he felt that it was too much. So he sold his portion to my husband and we battled on, and I had a third child then at the *end of 1951* and it got harder and harder. It wasn't something I looked forward to. I mean, some people love that sort of business, and I think the mother quite enjoyed it, although the father wanted to retire. But I still married my husband, because *of course* I loved him.

26.24 So you really both ran the guest house then did you?

Yes, and times became very awkward. I think *it was in '49 the Government* brought in the '40 hour week - and good luck to people - but it meant that you had to put on extra staff, and the employment situation was such that we were very, very short of people for all the jobs then. People didn't want to do domestic work, cleaning and waitressing, and I didn't blame them. But it meant that any help that you *employed* was not the best. Then the wages were set, so you paid the highest wages - as high as the Hotel Australia had to pay there - and you had inferior staff. By the time I had the third baby, I remember I was breast feeding, and I'd be up 'til one o'clock and then I'd be up again at five which was a bit of a hopeless situation, because the staff had let you down. You know, some of them would go up and tiddle too much or something like that. It was a real headache. We'd have the GPS ... Newington would stay here and we had Grammar. Sometimes we'd have the interstate teams - the King's Cup - would stay here. I can remember that year, suddenly the overseas beef sales went up - about '52 I think that was - and it was so expensive, this steak that you had to provide, so that you ended up just working to pay staff. And they had blackouts and we'd had an electric stove. I think my father-in-law had put it in during the War to cut down on jobs, like having wood cut and that sort of thing for the big stove. He put in this electric stove and of course we had the '49 blackouts, you remember the strikes? The big mining strikes of '49? Well it meant that we had a lot of blackouts then, which was a strain on guest houses. By '52 we decided it was getting too difficult with the staff situation. The only guest house left, I think, was probably one out at Wallacia which had a family (and that's now Hopewood) that carried on beyond this time. The others were going out left, right and centre, and mainly too because motels were coming in and people wanted the wall-to-wall carpets. And, whereas there might have been carpet in rooms like this as sitting rooms. The rooms were covered with lino and just scatter rugs in the bedrooms. People suddenly wanted something like glass and chrome and wall-to-wall carpets and the comfort of motels. It's switched back now, and if this area had been still the rural area it was, *it could have returned to the tourist scene.*

30.17 Was there other housing around here then?

Well, the nearest house was down across Nepean Street which was about a quarter of a mile. It was a poultry farm and orange orchard and apricot orchard. There was *another* up here a little closer, I think it's about 15 houses away now... a pretty weatherboard one it was late Victorian ... but that was demolished *and a new house built*. That one had, I think, about 15 acres around it, and there were three acres in between our house which had belonged to this acreage until about 1907 when the original owner died and one of the family kept three acres and sold the main part.

31.38 And what about along the river, did you have any neighbours that way?

Well that was our nearest neighbour *I just mentioned* along the river that way. The next neighbour was about half a mile over in the middle of the paddock, the middle of the orchards and grape vines, and then there was no other house all the way up to the Mountains along river road. Buring's was back further, the wine man of Buring's wine. His place is still there. It was about a 1920's place and he had a lovely little zoo there as well with kangaroos and emus and peacocks.

32.30

END SIDE A

SIDE B

0.21 The guests used to walk over, of course, visit the zoo, and then climb on across the railway line and go straight up to the Lapstone Hotel which was above for morning tea or afternoon tea. Of course that's now the Airforce Headquarters. They purchased the property in 1949. But it was a very popular guesthouse up there. Actually I had my wedding reception up there. It sold out, I think *the owner* probably saw ahead a little bit about the holiday trade. That was something else. Caravans started, as I said before, motels ... that was quite a big change really in the life of people in the guest house, and of course there were jokes about the fires that

started up in a lot of guest houses and they ended up with insurance money. However, we didn't get to having a fire or a sale. We decided we would try out having people here on a more permanent basis. Not too permanent, mind you, because those days, if people were in your place, you couldn't get them out unless you were giving service. So we'd supply them with tea and toast in the morning and milk - we still had the cows - and we gave them their linen and blankets and so forth and they had a community kitchen.

2.39 And did their own cooking?

And did their own cooking, you see, to cut down on that work. It certainly cut down on work. I still had someone to come and help with the general cleaning of the place, but I had three children and ... thinking back, I don't know how I kept them quiet with people around, and yet you just face what's around you then. You carry on. Then I had a fourth child - the one you met - Chris, in '55. But, mentally, you had other people's problems *as well and* it became a very difficult time for me.

3.34 Did you have all your children locally, in local hospitals?

No, I didn't. Of course I was in Sydney when the first one was born. He was born at George V, and actually I remember that with quite delight because I was upstairs, I had what they called a semi-private room - just the two - and you looked out the window, down across to the colleges, the University Colleges, and it was peaceful and beautiful. To give the army sisters a rest from nursing the sick men, they came in and took on nurses roles looking after the babies with a civilian sister as their superior. I said to one how did she like coming in. 'Oh, 'she said 'it's a great change after nursing men for years in the Middle East' and so forth, to have these babies, and she was cooing over a baby. You know I think they found they needed the return to the feminine duties. So they were delightful to be with.

5.07 And you went back there for your other children did you?

No. I had a doctor who happened to be a Catholic doctor, although he told me even so he didn't believe what the Bible said about '*children* should be brought forth in suffering and pain' - I don't know if I've got the quote just right - he didn't believe that and, knowing I knew that he was of the Catholic religion ... so he arranged that I went to St. Margaret's which I found was *very good too*.

5.40 In Sydney?

Yes, in Sydney. Penrith hospital was very inadequate in those days, just a little cottage hospital. It's now the Governor Phillip Hospital for mostly aged or long term illnesses and physiotherapy. I forget the year that they moved to the Nepean, but I did go to Sydney for all my babies. I remember in '55, my husband was ill then. He'd been wounded in the hip and the spine *during the War and* it was coming against him at the time, and I went off in the night by ambulance.

6.35 All the way to Sydney?

Yes, all the way to Sydney. Well I'd been all the way to Sydney for the other three and of course I was up there for the first. I know *one of the guests* came home from work about midnight, just before I went off, and he wouldn't believe that I'd had a baby by the morning when they told him. He said "Oh but I saw her last night at 12 o'clock - a few hours ago!" he said.

7.06 What about doctors for other emergencies?

We had local doctors. There weren't very many doctors then but I suppose you've got that detail elsewhere - four or five? Something like that.

7.25 How did you feel living here in those days? Did you have a feeling of isolation it being so rural?

Oh, no, no. Remember I grew up in a rural area and of course Sydney was very exciting for the young. It still is. There is so much going on and there was art which I was interested in, and being a student, but I don't know whether being a city person would make an attitude different. But I loved the area and I used to tease my husband that I saw how lovely it was and that's where I wanted to bring up my children. But, it does hurt to see what's happened to it, really, because here is this beautiful alluvial soil that should have been left for cultivation when you know how arid so much of Australia is. But we had the very, very wet years and the oranges got the mould in the root - root rot - and the *Councils* were making the rates too high for people to keep up with and I think some farmer must have approached the government, and suddenly it was zoned. It was actually zoned for a great many more factories all across this side where the high school is as well. But they had that changed, luckily, I think because another government department wanted to set up a high school in the early '60's there and they didn't put the factories there. But looking at the earlier map - which some people didn't do - and when they came down and found land was further subdivided they said "Oh, when we built it out here we could see rabbits hopping around" you know, and "we don't want the built up flats and we don't want this..." and I thought why didn't they ever look at the zoning plans if that's what they thought was going to happen. But I know my youngest son used to trudge home from school and say "I don't want this to happen, I don't want to be a city slicker!".

10.11 So it affected the younger generation as well?

Yes. It hurts them, because they had a wonderful life growing up. There was a creek there and of course they wouldn't go off the property - they didn't need to, mind you - and they'd slide down those banks. There were thousands of frogs and you'd hear the lovely little twinkling voices at night of the frogs. It's absolutely silent now. The frogs have gone, which rather makes your hair stand on end thinking of the poisons that must be coming down that creek that kills the frogs. I mean they are like the canaries in the mines. They are indicating that your creeks are dead, which is very sad I think. But of course somebody up in the city decides, "Yes, there's a railway line there - that's the commuting problem solved - we'll go on and build." But it's heartache as far as I'm concerned. There were only about 300 houses *in Emu Plains*. Sometimes after my husband's death I'd count houses in my mind *to get to sleep*. There were only about 300 there in the early '60's I think. The '68 bushfire is a good indicator. There was ... well I think it was the end of November, wasn't it. One day there was a fire along that range. Actually looking out this window here you could see the *mountain* range from Kurrajong right to the other side of the river.

12.16 What can you see now? Roofs!

You can see glimpses of the Mountains. That wretched house like an aeroplane hangar across there blocks out the beautiful gap in the Mountains that you could see just sitting there, and the sun would play on it and it'd go purple and blue and green - it was lovely, it was like an opal the way Well, I resented it very much. It's only recently he built this awful aeroplane hangar. The Heritage Officer from the Penrith Council now tells me that they've brought in, or are bringing in laws, that if an old heritage place has a particular aspect that belongs to that place that they will keep it clear. I said "Now you tell me!"

It's a bit late.

Yes, now that hideous place ... mind you we've planted trees and banana palms which he doesn't like, but my son said "Oh well, when he takes down that top we'll cut down the banana palms", which is a bit naughty, but there you are!

13.34 So did you have a sense of the encroaching suburbanisation?

Oh yes. We had actually had a letter from the Council saying 'now is the time to put in your subdivision plans'. So you know that you're not going to get any rural rating any more when that happens, and so you're forced to sell. It's not a case of wanting to, and I don't think many of the original owners - farmers - here had much of a deal. I know the price I got very soon

wouldn't buy one *house* block. And I thought I'd do up the place with the money. But by the time I've paid off mortgages and put some guttering around the roof which needs doing again, your money's gone! And it wouldn't buy one *house block* now. It wouldn't buy a quarter of it.

14.43 All these houses around Beach Street, they were all very recently built by the look of them?

The land was subdivided in the '70's but it took really until the end of the '70's for them to go, and all the way up to Hunter Street was the same. *I started* on the bushfires and then I've talked myself away. In '68 the bushfire started up and they stopped it and then they left embers smoking and the high wind was predicted for the next day. Well, it came and it was a most destructive bushfire. It burnt as far as your eye could see along the mountain there right to the river it went. And then it came down, you couldn't see what was happening because *the air* was so thick with smoke. I didn't know the drama that had taken place at the high school during the day, where people were evacuating from the Mountains and being put up at the high school, and much to one of my son's delight, they'd brought ducks and pets and the ducks were dirtying all over the school floor. But I couldn't really see what was happening and I felt quite safe because it was ploughed all around. I'd only that week had the man in and ploughed right around to put some crop in, and so I thought "Oh I've got all that ploughed ground - I felt safe. But then it burnt right down opposite, through the grasslands and the grass in the road and through the orchards, right opposite here almost to the back of the gallery. Do you know where the Lewer's Gallery is? Yes. Well to the back of the gallery. So that indicates that in late '68 there was no build up of houses. You really need those little milestones to remember just how clear it was of houses.

17.02 Did you do your shopping around this area or did you go in to Penrith to do it?

Well of course ...well, there wasn't a great deal of shopping available *in Emu Plains. Emu Plains included Leonay and Emu Heights*. There was a little shop up on Russell Street highway crossing there where the lights are now. There was a baker's shop there too. But from the time I remember, just before the '40's, the baker delivered all around Emu Plains - first of all a cart and horse and then a truck. I remember, one baker would leave the gate open and then we'd have cows out and that became a trouble when some of the subdivision started because the cows would wander into their gardens. There was a little fruit stall in front where the shopping centre is now, a little fruit stall there. They stretched out along the mile and a half or couple of miles from the mountain to the railway there. There was a little fruit stall and small goods at what they call Old Mortimer House, half way up between the garage and the station. And there was another one opposite the hotel, fruit stall, and then a little shop started up ... I think about the *'50's* in one of the older houses, and then they moved on and built that big shopping part there. That takes us into the '60's. But for the guest house, of course, they just rang up their order *and it was delivered*.

It was delivered?

Yes. There was Moran and Cato's used to supply here. As a matter of fact they said during the '40's that if it weren't for Lapstone Hotel and this guesthouse here, they wouldn't have much business at all - that this was the biggest business. We'd have the meat delivered and the vegetables delivered. But they'd sometimes go and buy extra little things from the stalls and although they had flowers in the garden, they'd buy flowers from Mrs. Chappel who had a lovely garden half way up the highway there, and they had flowers all through the house and on the tables in the guest house days. Well that's the 40's *and part of the '50s*.

20.15 So what do you do now for shopping? Do you go into Penrith or do you shop locally?

Well, for some business we have to go into Penrith, but now I avoid it as much as possible and go over here to the Emu Plains shopping. But there are some things which you can't get, unfortunately, this side ... or else I wouldn't go in there. It's so hot shopping - there's so much cement and buildings. Penrith is a very hot place. They're only just accepting now that the heat does build up here, although the ordinary lay person's been trying to tell them for years

that it's too hot a place for building up too much. But they never should have built at Emu Plains just below a dam. The dam was being built here in the '50's. We had some of the surveyors staying here, I think in 1950. Yes, in 1950 there were a lot of the surveyors that were surveying for a rope line across Emu Plains running right up to the dam.

2137 Warragamba?

Yes, to Warragamba Dam. You know it had tripods like the electricity tripods that are there now - not quite as tall of course - to hold the cables going right over to the far side of Emu Plains to McCann's Island where they had all the cobbles, and they'd load up these great buckets with cobbles which it moved. I suppose they had a big machine ... the flying fox they called it. It'd go across the river and right up to Warragamba Dam. That gave a lot of work at the time. People worked at the McCann's Island - lots of employment there then. A lot of New Australians, as they called them then, were coming in. I remember we had quite a lot of Italians here in the beginning of '52. There was sort of a recession then. They landed here and then there were no jobs, and there was an English-Italian in Penrith who rang up and asked if we could take them in '52.

As a cook or something?

No, if we could put them up, you know, at a cut price or something. And my husband would go out with them and try and find them jobs. I know the car had broken down and he went around - borrowed bicycles - and went round with them, although he was pressed for time - he didn't have that much time, and he *It was the beginning of 1953.* They were a nice lot of boys. Some of them had been school teachers at home. They were all very sorry for themselves though.

24.18 They'd come out as migrants?

Yes, and they couldn't get a job, but then that only lasted a short while and they all went off and got jobs. Some went up to Kandos and earned very big money and they'd come back after some time to see my husband and show him their gleaming cars and so forth. 'Cause he'd been very kind. I think a lot of these returned soldiers aren't given the credit for their kindness to their enemies really. It's harder - the Japanese are harder - I don't know how he felt there because ... well, he died from his war injuries by early '64, but I remember the Germans that came out to work with Utah, the American firm. They built the powerhouse there because Warragamba Dam hadn't opened then and they needed the extra power for the electric railway line that went *through*.

25.40 Where was Utah? In Penrith?

Yes. They built where the powerhouse *was*. *The* Fire Museum now. That was because they were electrifying the railway line and that provided a lot of work. I think they did start, after that, putting it up to Katoomba. I think it was '56 wasn't it - I've got it there somewhere in a book, but you've probably crossed that ...

Yes. The electrified railway came through in '55.

When they opened it - the electrification *I said* that gave jobs, but there were more jobs than there were people to work. The Snowy Scheme was big then and I do hear some migrants saying they went down to the Snowy because the Australians didn't want to do that work, but it was because there were *not enough* Australians to go around. A lot of the fellows weren't all that fit when they came back from the War either to take on those sort of jobs, and I suppose it was a case of the fittest. But to get back to the Utah and the power station, we had the Germans and the Austrians staying here and some of the women. They weren't migrants ...

27.24 How did having the European women in the area - how did that effect you or other women in the area?

Well we had airforce people here, you know. It was the people who were not staying for so long that would move on, or they were waiting for Housing Commission homes and so forth. The strange thing, there were some Australians - hadn't gone to War - they were the most critical of the Germans. I remember out at the clothes lines once one of the women swore at me, the German woman. Of course she came in to my husband and he just gave them a quiet ... he was very understanding of women and saw them as getting the worst end of the stick, as well as being a respected man with men, you know. Some of the Germans ... a German *ex-soldier* who had lost his eye. This was one working at Utah. He'd been an officer and he had the scar down the cheek, and still very defiant and declaring England had dropped the first bomb and so forth. He wasn't apologetic about the War, no way! But he would come to my husband and show him all the photographs of his home and so forth. He was a banker actually and even in those days he was saying how already Germany had paid off most of her overseas debt, already then in the '50's you know. He was going on to Argentina he thought after this. They weren't migrants as such, this particular lot. But some of the Germans were. But I remember the Austrian woman fell in love *with Emu Plains*. She said this is the nearest thing to the Rhine that she'd seen in all Australia and she thought it was the most beautiful spot she'd seen here, and it makes you feel more sad when you think of that and to think they (*the planners*) did - well to me - ruin the district. Apart from the fact that they settle on the wrong spots, the best agricultural land should have been kept as such. However that's particularly as the planners want to populate more.

30.24 And what about your children's education? Did they travel to the local school?

Yes, they went to the local school. There was about 110 pupils then in the primary school

At Emu Plains?

Yes, Emu Plains. The little stone building which is now the Family History building. It's a lovely little stone building, built in 1877. It was a very close community. There was a fire brigade and the progress association was very much into the fore. There was only two churches at the time, the Church of England and the Presbyterian, the little church in front of the Eden Glassie Retirement Village. And there were flower shows - they put on wonderful things and there was a lot of talent in this area, musicians and local actors and so forth.

31.51

END SIDE B

TAPE 2

SIDE A

0.04 What did you do for recreation in the '40's and early '50's, as compared to later on after the population increased in the area?

Well, as you might guess, I didn't have a great deal of time for recreation - it was all work, work work. We loved music and, any time we could get, we'd listen to the music. I know my husband would sometimes be up *late listening to it*. I think that the ABC would put forth classic music at 10 o'clock then, which is very late when you're tired, and he'd say "Come and listen to the music", and quite often I'd want to and be just too exhausted to do this, but he would sit and listen to the music. In the guest house days of course there were dances every night in the hall and there were tennis courts, but you didn't get to play on them, and I know my husband would be out at 12 o'clock at night after work watering the courts to roll the next day. There was a lot of hard work. I didn't socialise. I knew the folk in Penrith, but they had quite a good social life with all the usual things, the Rotary and the Inner Wheel and the CWA's ...

You probably didn't have time for those things?

I didn't have time for those things. We were great readers. We'd often read together, but it would be at night usually so it wouldn't be for long. *We sometimes went to Sydney for plays, musicals and the odd opera and ballet and to the Art Gallery. In the '50s we worked for the local scouts and put on Variety Concerts to raise money to build a hall. There were Parents and Citizens projects too.*

2.18 You were a painter too?

Well I didn't do much of that then either. I did start up again at the end of the '50's and go in and do a little bit of sculpture and before that screen printing at the evening school that had started up then - Penrith High - that's the end of the '50's and the beginning of the '60's. But illnesses took over. My only sister died of cancer and that was the end of my family. My brother had died about five years before. So I had a lot deaths - births and deaths - to contend with. I had become a member of the Historical Society. I don't know whether it was the end of the '40's or the beginning of the '50's. One of the members would drive me in, but I don't know now, thinking back, how I managed that. I had to drop out then with the illnesses. But then I took it up again in the beginning of the '70's. I did some courses up in Sydney after my husband died and I'd go up at night, and I also went out to work. I still had cattle here and fixing fences and so forth and I didn't have anybody *to help*. We gave up having people when my husband was ill, and he'd applied to the Public Service and he was going into the Repat to work - and live privately. We realised we couldn't take the stress of other people's *problems*, you know, you were becoming *an unofficial* welfare officer. There was a great deal of stories in there I suppose.

4.38 And you went out to work too did you?

Later I would work part time, yes.

4.40 What sort of work did you do?

Well, when I say part time, I'd work with the statistician and census - the three-monthly surveys. Mind you, I let my husband know I was going to do this because the job came up while he was with his illness, you see, and he always used to be a stickler for people's privacy. But, well ... I suppose, you know, you can't always do the things you believe in. And that fitted in with not neglecting the children. It would come up every three months and they all learned to get their breakfast and cook a very good omelette and took pride in it and could look after themselves, *such as ironing* their clothes. When they went to high school the boys always ironed their clothes. We had an Irish woman staying here *earlier* - a little battling Irish woman - and she had, I think, five sons and she'd be ironing 17 shirts, and I thought 'Not for me! Never for me!' The children had drip-dries and everything going to high school. My son here, he doesn't let his wife press his pants, he irons - he's a real sharing *person*. He takes his turn with putting the children to bed, etc. and I think well it's not so hard for them because they were used to looking after themselves as children to some extent.

6.37 Did they go to high school in Penrith?

Two of them went to Penrith high school and the other to Nepean when that started up.

6.49 Did they catch the bus, or ...?

No, they walked. They rode bikes into Penrith. The last two, for a period had a tandem and they'd both ride up on it - the frame of it's still out there - which excited the attention of the others of course. They felt rather good about it.

7.14 What about your grandchildren now? Do they go to school or they are not old enough?

Oh, no. The others next door - Ian's 13, he goes to St. Dominic's.

7.30 How do they get there now? By bus?

By bus. He picks a bus up and the other two of the family go up here to the local *school*.

7.50 The times have changed - from riding your bike to catching the bus!

Yes. But they used to walk to primary school.

Yes. No worries about traffic or being abducted?

No. Well, there's always the odd one at any time, I think, that could be around the lanes. I remember my mother warning us. We were four miles away from our school and we usually went in by sulky. But sometimes the horse perhaps was being shod, or something - we wouldn't have the sulky and we'd have to walk.

This would be in Victoria?

No. I was born in Victoria, but I grew up in the Riverina. It was only because my mother's mother lived in Ballarat and that's the area my parents *grew up*. *My mother* was saying to us, 'Never take lollies from a stranger!' - those days were safer days, it seemed so much safer then - and "Don't accept a ride!". And one day the minister asked us if we'd like a ride in his car and we said 'No thank you very much', my sister and I, and of course he told my mother that we'd said this. (Laughs) All very embarrassing, but that's the way you were. There's always been an element somewhere. But I remember one day when the airforce was up there and it had the savage dogs that were trained to kill - Alsatians up there, the guard dogs - and one escaped. The whole school was warned 'Don't let your children walk home, beware ...' you know, 'keep them in doors!' because they thought it was heading back to its previous airforce base in Sydney somewhere, and it would kill because that's how it was trained. So we kept the children in those days, but that was just a rare occasion, and the dog got safely back. It had headed back.

10.24 Well I think we've just about covered everything now.

10.26 I was just going to mention the clinics for the babies, I think I saw it there somewhere ... there was a clinic sister at the clinic and you could take your young baby in and have it weighed and see how it was gaining and get advice. I don't know when they died out, but you'll know that. But of course the more babies you've got the less need there was for the clinic.

10.58 Can I just ask you too, did you plan to have your four children or did they 'just happen'?

Well, they're about three to four years apart, these boys. I know the eldest one *at ten years* said "Oh, do babies come every four years?" because there's this interval. But, no, I've got to be honest and say we didn't plan. I planned the first one very much, because you kind of felt the odds were against you then and I felt I wanted at least a baby - something of my husband - when it got to that 'odds on' bit. But I loved them very much. I didn't have a girl, but by the fourth one I said I had a tennis team ... a tennis group, anyhow, four who could play each other. But of course the courts are gone now that were there.

12.07 And you didn't have much help with the children - bringing up the children - in one sense although there were always people around so you had support of a kind?

Yes, there was a grandmother here until 1950, but that was only for the two younger ones. No, it was difficult - it's hard to know how you did manage really. By the time I had the young one I could stop and cuddle him whenever I liked, but you couldn't always do that with the others when you had guests around. But I enjoyed my children and actually when the last one left high school it was with some regret for me. I always enjoyed school holidays.

13.00 What did you do in the school holidays? You were still here I suppose?

Oh, yes. We didn't have many holidays. I think we had a break of four days *once*, camping down at East Beach near Kiama before the Christmas rush, and the wind came and blew the tent down and one of the babies was frightened of the sea and it was a bit of a disaster. I did have a few breaks later on and I'd go and stay with my sister, but we both couldn't get away together. No, we didn't have many holidays then, but the parents had ... they always closed *the business* in July, when they were in the guest house and they took trips to New Zealand where my father-in-law had come from, and they'd have another break before Christmas. But

there was a lot of work ... a lot of painting went on. He always had some of the guests who would come up as friends and help him paint the place and then they'd go off on their trip. But they had some nice trips and they got that way that they'd have one day a week off and they'd catch the 10 o'clock train *to Sydney*. They had an old retainer here and he always had dainty sandwiches ready for them when they got back at night, I think, off a late train. That was their day off!

14.52 Your daily routine would have been cooking and doing the housework, changing the linen and all those things?

Yes. Well at first they'd wash. They had an old copper over in the old building there which pre-dates this building which was built in the 1850's, and that lovely old stone building was a wash-house - with the two props and the copper - and I had to boil up my nappies. All the sheets were done that way, until after the War - I think in about '48 - a fellow came around and collected the sheets and took them to Parramatta Laundry. *But before that* there was a big old-fashioned roller. They'd take the sheets off the line and put them through the rollers, and it did a wonderful job, ironing the sheets, pillow cases and towels. I think they'd pay a woman too to come and wash the linen once a week.

16.17 What did your husband mostly do around the place?

Well, he used to do the tennis courts, the lawns. In the heavy times if they needed a fourth waiter he would wait in the kitchen. He would *organise the entertainment* - while they had the parents and the other son - and he would be the entertainer at night and he would saddle up the horses and milk the cows and everything. He was a great reader. He loved his Latin and French actually, and he'd read in French and - he loved words - and I think the Latin also brought in the interest of the words, and that was more his relaxation I suppose. It was *because of* the Depression that they came here. The family had lost their home and business in Sydney and they started up here and it was a case of doing what you could, and strangely enough I read the other day that the guest houses had gone out because of the Depression - but that wasn't so. It was rather the reverse strangely enough, and there were people in Sydney who would come every year for holidays. There were always some people better off and others who were just getting wages who came down for the holiday weekends. And the trains were used. There was the great rush to get on the trains for the holiday weekend *they were so packed*. Well, I don't think they have that problem now very much, unless it's going down to the snow, but I think mostly people drive down to the snow.

18.29 So looking back over the period before the big changes took place here, before the War and during the War, to now or to, say, in the late 50's, what do you think the changes have meant to you? I mean you have really said that you don't think it was for the best, that you liked the way it was ... ?

Yes, it was beautiful and of course there were people who acquaint beauty with being very unpractical, but just the same I would say they had promised us - I was in the Army during the War, yes - and a lot of the kits were coming around showing how to build better cities - the green belts - and showing the Greater London with green belts and what could happen in Australia and how we had all this land and how we should use it properly. Well, instead of doing that, it's been a great subdividers push I think. You know, the so-called developers just get in and, whatever government it is, they just pressure them to do what they want and the idea of taking all the best... they've got the best land over there for factories now. Well I don't call that good planning. I don't think there has been good planning. There are some of the areas where you couldn't grow anything, like Cranebrook. Orchard Hills is another beautiful area which should not even have been given over to the small five-acre farms, because it's a particularly good soil there, it so happens. Volcanic - not a very common spot really - and it grew beautiful grapes and beautiful orchards, hence its name, and really is there anything like it around Sydney? No. As far as tourist things, they shouldn't *put houses there*. They're putting Housing Commissions on one side and of course other buildings ...

At Orchard Hills?

At Orchard Hills. And that's a lovely area that should be kept. Why plan ugliness?

Is that how you see it now - as ugliness?

- 21.28 There's always the Mountains and the river, even if it is deadly polluted. I think a lot of it is not thought out. I used to look across to those beautiful gums over there and they were as big as they are now. Now they've put a petrol station underneath and the hotel ... and I thought 'they are so lovely, there's no need to raise any cry - people will leave them - they will leave them because they're so lovely!' And do you know the second gum in Australia was *named Tereticornis*.

What name was that?

Tereticornis. It's an open forest gum that loves its feet to be in swampy areas some of the time. I was up the other day at Glenbrook and that has a lovely park there with lovely gums - not the same type of gum but a different one - and a couple of tourists got out to go to the tourist bureau and one stayed and was taking photographs of all the gums, and I thought there are these beautiful gums over there been ruined by petrol fumes and digging up around their roots which they can't stand, whereas they should have had a lovely park and left it there - something of the original trees. There are no original trees otherwise here in the area. I think there a lot of things that should be important, like some of the old Castlereagh on the left hand side there, those beautiful homes there. I know we're very short of cobbles in Australia for building, but I don't think they have to take the lot out. I think they should leave some of our roots - one of Macquarie's plantings. When you see how far-sighted some of the earlier people were - some of the government at the time was saying Emu Plains should never be taken out of government ownership then. Not that that necessarily saves an area, no - it depends on the government doesn't it? But I do feel very passionately about the destruction of things, the destruction of the old buildings, the destruction of the old house that was on the hill above where the shopping centre is, was built by convict labour. It was the Superintendent's Cottage and Governor Macquarie had rooms set aside there so that when he travelled through up to Bathurst, if he wanted to stay overnight, there was somewhere to stay. I don't know that he ever did stay there, but that was why it was called a Government House. Now that was ...

24.43 Has that been demolished?

It's been demolished, yes. In the '70's it was demolished, and two beautiful bunyah trees that flanked each side. I was told that they can live to a thousand year and they could have been planted at the same time you know, and then they had the lovely drive coming down the hill to the Western Highway. It would have been a beautiful place. The Historical Society wanted to save it and have it as a headquarters. People would come in and ask was this house for sale and I'd say "No". But that place - it had 40 acres of oranges around it was but maybe that was too much for them. But then a gentleman who had very little feeling for Australia at all - and a lot of them feel "Oh, that's not old. We've got things 500 years..." or something - and he let it go, just deteriorate. And vandals - so-called vandals - well, vandals come in. But that's the way they go about things, and the cedar doors were taken, the cedar staircases were taken. People - squatters - would get in and light camp fires in the middle of the floor and write all over the walls. Well then you could get it demolished! And there were convict bricks which came out of it. The beautiful underground cellar which they filled in and built a house on top of it.

26.28 As well as it being a part of history that's disappeared, I suppose for the people like you who've lived in the area they are familiar land marks that have gone?

Yes, well I could stand in the corner of this place and look across and see those trees, and it really looked like a botanical garden looking across. In the spring you'd see the fingers of white blossoms of the apricot trees and all these lovely trees - there were more bunya trees. You know the bunya-bunya?

Not really.

Oh, there's one up in Lewer's Gallery, a young one - I suppose it's only about 30 years - and it came from Queensland, from Bunya Mountains. The Aborigines loved the big seeds that come out of the cone. It's was a big cone. Cunningham, *the botanist*, went up when he was *exploring* the land and it's called ...

I do know what you mean.

Avaucaria bidwilli. It's the *Avaucaria bidwilli*, related to Norfolk Island Pines. You could see them from here, and from the hill that it was set on you could see all around Emu Plains. But historically it was something that was so valuable to Penrith - it shouldn't have gone! Well there are other places like that that have gone, unfortunately. You see how interesting Goulburn is, with all its old buildings. There have been some demolished, but there's a wealth still there and such an interest it is to go up to Goulburn, and Penrith could have been the same. Well, much the same.

18.37 The only thing that I haven't really asked you about was finances, and it was probably different for you having lived in a guest house, but I was going to ask you who was in charge of doing the accounts? Was that you or your husband - with the household accounts and the business accounts?

Actually he was a very good mathematician and he used to do the accounts, but when it came to paying the bills I think I would see the bills were paid, and do the bookings. When I had the babies a sister of mine came up for a while. She had two children and was on her own then and while my third one was coming she did all the bookings and meeting the guests when they come, and showing them to their rooms, and generally being charming to them - you know, the good will of it - and seeing them off again, and by that time they were old friends, and so forth. It was very pleasant relationships then. But as I say, interesting as it may have been later, it was more the problems of people you take on.

Finance you were asking about? You mean banking?

Yes. Did you bank locally?

Yes there were banks in Penrith, but nothing in Emu Plains, so the banking was done in *Penrith* when the National Bank started up. We went to the National Bank then. At first it was the Bank of New South Wales.

30.34 And did you use credit with your shopping for provisions and that sort of thing?

They were monthly accounts then. My husband wasn't one for credit because he'd seen an aunt through the depression lose all her refrigerators and so forth and he didn't like that very much at all. But I remember talking him into buying a big dish-washing machine - we've still got the big thing out there, it's a commercial dish-washing machine - on credit, and he very reluctantly gave in. And it was a wonderful thing. No longer did you have to have people washing up for their lives over a hot steamy sink. The waitresses would just come out and scrape the plates and in they'd go. It did cut down on work. But mostly it was monthly accounts. Of course I grew up in an area where it was after harvest - it was annual accounts.

We've just about run out of tape now so I think we might call it a day.

Yes, all right.

If you think of anything else Thank you very much it's been very interesting.

END OF TAPE.

