

INTERVIEW NO.20

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 25/11/91

MISS OLIVE PRICE,
11 BROCKAMIN DRIVE
PENRITH PARK.

**** This copy has been edited
by Miss Price
[Edited changes are added
in *bold italic* script.]**

1.00 My name is Olive Price and I live in 11 Brockamin Drive, Penrith Park and I was born on the 8th February, 1918, at Hornsby. I have not married. Nationality, British/Australian, and I haven't any children.

1.38 How long have you lived in the Penrith area?

Sixty-five years.

1.45 Right and I'll just ask you some questions about your family background. What kind of work did your father do?

My father was an engine driver on the railway.

And your mother? Did she work?

No. She was a housewife.

And did you have brothers and sisters?

Yes I had three sisters and one brother.

2.16 Right, so you were born in this area and you were living in Penrith as a child were you?

No I was born at Hornsby.

Oh, you were born at Hornsby. Right. So how old were you when you moved to this area?

I was about seven or eight.

And that was when you lived down in the centre of Penrith?

That's right. In Higgins Street.

2.45 And what was the house like that you lived in there, was it a timber house or what materials was it built from?

Yes. Weatherboard, with a galvanised iron roof. Rather a large property.

With a lot of land around it? How many acres would it have been? More than the normal building block?

Well, it wouldn't amount to acres I don't think. It was a double block and it was very deep.

3.17 And you had a garden around the house?

Oh, yes. We had a lovely garden.

And what was your first memory of the house and the area there? How would you describe it - the surroundings? Was it built up or not? Did you have close neighbours?

I just realised that we moved into Derby Street first.

Oh, did you?

And we lived there for about 12 months and this home in Higgins Street was where two of Dad's brothers and sister lived, and when my aunty died, Dad had to buy the property to give my uncles a home.

4.10 And so you spent most of your childhood in that house in Higgins Street?

Yes.

4.20 So how would you describe the area around the house, in the close vicinity? Was it bush or was it ... you know, was there a tarred road, or ...?

No it wasn't bush, not there. I think ... I can remember them concreting High Street. I think that would have been about 1927 and the old Roman Catholic Church was standing in those days. But they have since pulled that down of course and built a new one - it's a circular one - which you'd see if you drove down High Street. No. There wasn't ... I think originally there were only two other homes of which one was a dentist, a practising dentist. Up in the main street was Dr. Higgins. He had his home and surgery facing High Street, and further up on the opposite corner to the fire station was Dr. Barrow and they were the only two doctors in Penrith then.

5.54 There was no hospital either was there, or only the small one?

Yes there was a small hospital, but that was on the other side of the town over the railway line, which has since been turned into the Governor Phillip special hospital. And the new one was built up the top of the town. Mr. Fred Jones donated the land and they built the new hospital way up there on the hill on the way to Kingswood.

6.31 Were all your mother's children born before you moved to Penrith or would she have had some of her children when she was living here?

Yes.

I was really wondering if she had them at the local hospital or if she had to travel further afield?

No, well in those days they more or less had babies at home! No, four were born at Croydon and I was born at Hornsby.

Before you moved here?

Yes.

7.15 So what was the house like that you lived in? Was it - how many bedrooms would it have had?

Oh, there were three bedrooms and a lounge, dining room, kitchen, bathroom. It was a good old house to live in actually - a lot cooler than what this place is.

Was it? Higher ceilings?

Higher ceilings, yes. Very good.

7.53 Did it have a verandah around it?

Yes. A verandah at the front and a verandah at the back. And it used to have the old-fashioned - or what people call old-fashioned now - shutters on all the windows.

That would keep the heat out.

The heat out, yes. But I can remember the time when we pulled them off!

Fashion!

Fashions change, now they are back again. So the old people weren't as silly as people thought they were! And I really think, it's a shame, you know, that we're getting away from verandahs because they definitely make the place cooler. Definitely, and you've got somewhere to sit, you know. I notice when you're driving out in the country anywhere a terrible lot of places have got verandahs on them now.

8.58 And did you have an indoor toilet as well as bathroom?

Yes. When we first went there we didn't have any ... Dad had to get a sink put in the kitchen, and he also had to have the electricity installed. 'Cause my aunt used to have electric lamps.

9.31 I don't suppose you had any electrical appliances of any sort in the early days?

Yes.

Did you? An electric iron?

But before that we had a fuel stove and had flat irons.

Oh, yes a flat iron. And you'd heat it on the fuel stove.

Yes we had a flat iron.

So you use that as a door stop now do you?

I bought that. (Laughs) Cost me ten dollars. They are very fashionable now.

Yes.

Yes we had a fuel stove and mother went away for a holiday one time so we had the fuel stove and the chimney removed. Incidentally, the chimney was a double one, because it served a purpose out in the laundry too. Yes. I really think that my aunt made jam out in the laundry. And also there was a fuel copper.

Did you have to collect the firewood for it?

No we used to buy firewood for that, and Dad used to cut it up. And that's another thing, when we went there the river water was very, very dirty and say you put sheets in the copper off the bed, they'd come out dirtier than when they went in. You know, the river water was dreadful, and so Dad got the local - oh, what do they call him - tank-maker to make a tank and he built a stand outside the laundry. And we had clean water then for washing the clothes. And we also had a well outside the house and the overflow from the tank went into the well. It was beautiful water and used to make lovely tea.

12.13 So you drank that water as well?

Mmm. Beautiful!

So the river wasn't actually polluted like it would be today, but it was more just muddy, I guess, was it?

Muddy, and particularly after rain or flood times, you know. But we never had to worry about that any more. The water was really beautiful. Rain water does make lovely tea.

12.41 Yes. And did your mother make jams too? Did she cook a lot?

Oh, yes. She cooked a lot, yes. We had a lot of fruit trees. Dad had a lot of fruit trees in the back yard and she used to make all sorts of jam and jelly, and we used to love it when the rih's were ready to come in because then we'd have rih pie.

What are rih's?

Oh, some people call them grammas I think. It's an orangey thing about that long. Make a lovely pie out of that.

Like a pumpkin?

Yes. You don't have to put much in it. Just lemon juice. Some people put sultanas and a dash of cinnamon. You'd make a lovely pie with it.

13.54 And so your mother did all the cooking on the fuel stove?

Mm. Until we got rid of it. (Laughs)

And you replaced it with a ...?

A small electric cooker, yes.

And how did your mother manage with that? Was that a lot easier than the fuel stove?

Well she liked it, but really I don't know, as I say, I don't know how she kept her sanity. You just imagine trying to do for a number of people on a small cooker like that, and warm the plates, and it wasn't very big. Oh, incidentally too, we only got that cooker during the War. I can't remember now whether we had to have coupons for it. I knew there was some special reason why ... how we came to get it. I'd forgotten about that!

They were hard to get were they during the War?

Oh, yes, very.

15.18 And what about other electrical appliances. Did your mother have any?

Well we eventually got a new electric iron ... no, I don't think that we ever used those flat irons for ironing. She had an electric Hotpoint which lasted her for years and years. It was marvellous!

And what about a refrigerator? Did she have one of those?

No. When we first went there, there used to be a safe used to hang out on the back verandah and you put the meat and different things in that. When I look back now I don't know why the meat didn't go bad! (Laughs). And the cooling was. oh, they used to call it ... it had hessian sides. Four sides were made of hessian, and you had a drip-tray on the top, and you had flannel strips and the moisture came through the flannel strip and dripped down on the hessian and that's how you kept your butter and milk cool.

And it gets quite hot out here in the summer!

So we got rid of that, needless to say, and bought our first ice chest. You wouldn't believe this, but the big store that we bought it off down in Penrith, one of the sons of the owner came up and thanked Mother for buying that chest.

When would that have been? Would that have been during the War or after?

No, before the War.

And why did he thank you for buying it? That was just polite business in those days was it?

So grateful I suppose.

Really!

That was Fletcher's. They were subsequently taken over or sold out I think to Farmer's and it's now Grace Brothers down in the Mall.

17.46 So I suppose the shopping area's changed a lot since you grew up here?

Oh, yes.

There wouldn't have been very many shops in those days before the War?

There was a fair few. The northern side of the street seemed to be the right side for business - I don't know why.

18.23 Did your mother go shopping often or did she have most things delivered?

I'm just trying to think. Oh we used to get a lot of things delivered. I can remember her, when she paid the grocery bill, she always got a bag of boiled lollies!

For free?

Yes.

And she would have paid him cash once a month or something like that?

Oh, yes. Dad used to mend all our shoes. Mother used to make our clothes. Don't know how she found the time really, but she did. School uniforms and blazers.

19.22 The lot! And where did you go to school? Just to the local primary?

Penrith Intermediate High School.

19.30 And did you walk to school?

Yes, we walked to school. And we came home every day for lunch.

Did you?

Which was good.

So your mother prepared lunch for you too did she? She was very busy!

Yes. She was a wonderful mother.

And then after you went for your Intermediate - did your Intermediate Certificate did you?

Yes. I got my Intermediate Certificate and then after I left school I had a couple of jobs locally and then mother sent me to business college.

20.13 In the city or here?

Parramatta.

And you learned shorthand and typing or ...?

Yes. Shorthand and typing and bookkeeping.

20.29 And did many people go on to do their Leaving Certificate in those days, or did most people leave at the Intermediate?

Oh, they either had to go to Katoomba or go to Parramatta High School.

Oh, there was no - it finished at the Intermediate?

Yes. Intermediate was the highest grade in Penrith at that stage.

20.59 And your parents wanted you to do a business course did they, or did you choose to do that yourself?

No, I think I just chose. I think I might have learned a bit of bookkeeping at school, I can't remember.

21.28 And then did you work in Penrith after you finished your course or did you have to travel further?

I can't remember. I should remember the first job I had shouldn't I? I have worked in Sydney and I have worked locally on and off over the years, you know, which has been very good.

22.03 And you had to travel by train into Sydney I suppose to work?

Yes. But the train travelling didn't worry me because you can read, or you can write or you can sew. Some people don't like it but it didn't worry me. It never worried me, actually.

It gives you time to think!

Whether I've got railway blood in me because my father was on the railway or not, I don't know. But, you know, and people used to say 'Oh, don't know how you stand it' 'Don't know how you put up with it'. I said 'It doesn't worry me!' and neither it does. They've got a much better train service now than we used to have.

What was it like then?

Well, not so many. And it used to take longer. It was all right if you could catch a train that came down from mountains. There was always a little bit of rivalry. I don't think the mountain people liked us travelling on their trains. You know, in those days, there wasn't that many people lived on the mountains and they didn't realise that we practically subsidised their trip because the majority of people travelled to Penrith. But anyway that's altered now, very much so.

23.42 And your father was a driver of the steam train engine?

Yes.

What happened when the electrification happened here, did it make much difference to the travel? And did your father continue to be a train driver?

Oh, no he retired. He retired when we came to Penrith. Oh, I didn't mind the old days at all because, as I say, we used to catch the mountain trains and they were fast. Now they've got the electrics.

24.26 What did you do for recreation as a young woman? Did you go to theatre or play sport?

Oh, I played sport. **During the War there were local dances and that sort of thing?**

No I didn't do much because, you know, I always seemed to be at home helping mother. The girls used to go off to the dances.

You were the eldest child so you helped out a bit more?

Yes. I seemed to be helping out a lot. Always helping out.

Were you? Helping with the housework and the cooking and that sort of thing?

Mainly the housework, and the flower garden.

You were working full time, so I don't suppose you had all that much time for leisure activities?

No.

25.45 Did you belong to any organisations - community organisations or church groups?

Yes. We used to go to something up at the church. I can't remember what it was.

They probably had a Ladies' Guild or a Youth Group?

Yes. There was a Ladies' Guild. Girls' Friendly Society.

26.40 And did you make friends through that sort of activity or did you mostly make friends through work or through neighbours?

Yes. Well in, you know, the old days you knew everybody. And you were on good terms with all your school mates and, you know, you visited one another. The pictures were the main thing in those days. We used to go to the pictures quite a bit. Or we'd go hiking or down to the river.

Did you have picnics too, family picnics perhaps?

Well we used to go on a lot of hikes. Mum and Dad used to come with us.

Did they? So you had family activities jointly.

27.41 And did you have grandparents living in the district too?

No.

So you didn't have any extended family just close by?

No. See, there were some relations down the north coast on Mother's side, but you see my father married twice. Consequently all the relations on his side of the family were a lot older than mother's side, you know, and they were ... apart from these two brothers that were living with us originally, the others were all dead.

28.28 So did your mother have help with looking after the children when you were small?

No, she managed.

You were probably helping out as much as anyone?

Yes.

28.43 So when did you start to notice the change in the area with the population growing and more houses being built? Would you have become aware of that in the '50s after the War?

Oh, yes. The housing slowly increased. Most of the housing was out as far as Derby Street in those days and then we had friends in the next street and they used to call them 'Bush Messers'!

"Bush Messers"?

Yes. Their name was Messer.

Oh I see.

'Bush Messers'. Now housing is way over the other side of the freeway on the southern side and all out Jamiesontown and Regentville and on the northern side towards Cranebrook and Castlereagh the housing's immense now, and that was all bush apart from half a dozen houses.

30.18 And I suppose there were market gardens and ...?

Yes. Down Castlereagh. Yes there were a lot of market gardens. A lot of the people down there have done very well because of the gravel companies. Their properties fronted the river. They've been very well reimbursed by the gravel companies, you know.

They were bought out were they?

I think some of them were, yes.

30.57 And how did you feel about the industry moving into that area?

Well it's a shame really because it was pretty, you know, down there - the river flats and looking towards the mountains. I thought it was very pretty you know. But it's gradually being sold. Particularly out at Cranebrook. I haven't seen it but I know from what I hear there's a terrible lot of houses out there now. Oh, I did see part of it one day. Some friends drove me around from the Kingswood end. But oh, in one way I think it's a shame because Penrith was quiet and it was more of a rural atmosphere when we came here. Now, it's so commercialised - it's really spoilt. But that's progress I guess! There's nothing you can do about it.

32.08 And what's the price you pay for progress do you think? What do you think you remember as being better in the old days than it is now?

Well it was lovely and quiet and, as I say, it was more of a rural atmosphere and there was no rush and bustle like there is now. It was really great.

And did you have more of a sense of space and freedom?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. All that space, as I say, all that space has been built on now.

32.54 And did that make you feel more secure having people close around you, or less secure?
END SIDE A

SIDE B

0.06 Yes, well security was good. By that I mean I can remember sleeping out on the old verandah, but by the time we left down there, the old home, I wouldn't have done that for quids, you know! (Laughs) Because up on High Street it had become so busy and nightclubs and cafes and things up there, the traffic increase immensely along Higgins Street. In fact it's ruined it. When I talk to people down there now, you know, they really don't like it at all.

People who are still living there?

But now, I mean, I'm quite happy living here. But I still think you need to lock your doors all the same.

1.15 And that sort of lack of security has come with the population explosion, I suppose?

Yes. And change in people's attitudes about things. It's supposed to be the Aquarian age isn't it! (Laughs).

1.34 And how do you think people's attitudes have changed since the old days, what would you say?

Well I don't think they're as caring or as sincere as they used to be. Which is a shame. Everybody's out for themselves aren't they?

2.05 And after the War, did you come in contact very much with any of the migrants from Europe that came to live here as displaced people? Quite a lot of migrants moved out to live in western Sydney. I don't know whether you actually came in contact with them?

Well at one stage I was working with a firm in Penrith and we supplied building materials and things like that and during the War we couldn't buy fibro and things like that without a permit - that's because the War was on.

Materials were short.

Mm. And we noticed that the migrants were very good at helping one another. This man would come in today and he would buy all his materials and come in week by week, and all his mates would help him and they'd get their house up. And when his house was finished, then they'd move along and help another chap get his house up. But we also noticed that when they'd come into the shop week after week they'd come in daggy old clothes, and then once the house was finished and everything was right, they'd come in dressed up. So you have to admire them for that.

So they supported each other and worked hard..

Whereas the Aussies - they've got to have good clothes no matter what, haven't they. They're not prepared to go without. But I was amazed at that attitude, which was a very good thing really because, I mean, when you're trying to build a home you don't need expensive clothes and things do you to get the house up.

Maybe they set a good examples for some of the Aussies!

Well they do help one and other. I don't think the Aussies do! They're in a minority anyway. I made some very nice friends of the migrants that used to come into the shop.

Did you. What nationalities would they have been mostly?

Oh, all sorts, all sorts. One chap in particular, he used to work at the Water Board and he also had a big market garden out at Warragamba. You know, they weren't lazy by any means.

A lot of the market gardeners seemed to come from Italy didn't they?

Yes. I really don't know. I think he might have been an Italian, but I don't know what the others were. You know, you didn't ask.

5.38 And they were accepted well here, were they, in the community as far as you know?

I think so. They don't mix much do they. They really keep to their own nationality don't they, like they do in the present day.

Yes, they do seem to.

6.10 And what sort of work did you do most of working life? Were you doing secretarial work?

Yes, nearly always shorthand, typing, bookkeeping. Bookkeeping, mainly.
And did you earn good money? Were you happy with it?

Well, you had to be in those days. Before I went to business college I was working in an office and my salary was ten shillings a week! (Laughs) Ten shillings a week!

That's not much is it?

That's when Mother decided that I should go to business college.

So you earn a bit more?

Oh well, it was no good, you know. Well you don't get anywhere. You've got to go and be qualified haven't you? You've got to be trained and qualified.

That's right. And did you enjoy the work you were doing?

Oh, yes. Yes.

7.28 Most of the time you worked in Sydney did you, the majority of your working life?

The majority of it, yes.

7.48 So you didn't belong to anything like the Country Women's Association or any of those sort of auxiliary groups?

No, I belonged to the Business and Professional Women's Club.

Oh did you.

I was Secretary of that for a number of years.

Was that in Penrith?

Yes.

And what sort of activities did they have? Monthly meetings?

Oh, yes. Monthly meetings and they used to have social functions. I'm just trying to think. Their aim mainly was working for equal pay for equal value as far as the work was concerned. That was very active and it is internationally run. I don't know whether they still do.

They had a hard fight didn't they - getting equal pay for equal value?

Yes.

And you were active in that group for quite a while were you?

Oh, yes. Quite a number of years.

9.27 And most of those women were professional women from the area?

Yes.

Were there a lot of working women in those days before the War?

Oh, I don't know about before the War, because I was only going to school then.

Right. And after the War when you belonged to this organisation, were there a lot of members?

Yes.

So women were active then in trying to improve their lot in the workforce?

Yes.

10.24 Did you keep any animals, apart from the chooks and the cow? Did you have any pet animals?

Oh, at one stage we had a dog. Somebody poisoned him. So Dad said 'No more animals!' We used to have some nice canaries. That was all in the animal kingdom.

11.02 And just talking about household finances, who managed the household finances in your house? Did your father or your mother?

Mother, mostly.

Did she?

Yes. Dad used to go down to the railway and get his superannuation and come home and hand it over to Mother.

And she'd organise the payments and so forth?

Mm. If he wanted anything, you know, he'd just say to her 'I'd like so much to buy something' and she'd just give it to him. They never had any problems with finance like that.

Did you pay your Mother some board, towards the household?

Oh yes. I paid board, yes. Yes and I used to buy things for the home because, you know, Dad ... superannuation was very small in those days. Very small.

And so you'd help out. And what about your brother and your sisters, did they live at home too or did they marry?

Yes. They all married eventually.

And when they were living at home did they help with the family finances too - did they all pay board?

Oh I would think so. I never worried about that.

12.27 So, after reflecting on your life during that, you know, before the War period - during the late '40s and into the '50s - how do you feel about the rapid growth that's taken place out here in western Sydney generally? Do you feel it's for the better or the worse - the changing landscape and ...?

Oh, some aspects of it tend to be exciting I think.

What's exciting about it? Which aspects?

Oh well the growth and, you know, the big Leagues Club down there and all the entertainment that they bring, plus all the other clubs that have sprung up around. But I think you find you still long for some of the old peace and quiet. You've got to drive miles

somewhere to get it now, you know. In one way I think it's a shame, but then, it's not for us to say is it! Progress they call it! (Laughs) Oh, dear.

14.00 Do you feel any sadness when you see the way old landmarks - old buildings - have been demolished and replaced with parking stations and things like that?

Oh yes. It is a shame really. It isn't until somebody passes a remark or you see an old photo that you suddenly remember, 'Oh, that used to be there!' you know. Just around the corner from the Fire Station used to be the Methodist Parsonage and they pulled that down, and the Methodist Church round in Henry Street was bought by a firm of accountants. And then they turned around and built a new church just around the corner from the Fire Station in Evans Street. The Presbyterian Church, they shifted their church from the main road and they built a new one round the corner in Doonmore Street which is adjacent to the High School. They pulled down the old Court House and built a new one there, or at least a Police Station it is. The Court House is around the corner now. Neale's which was an original store on the hill there near the Police Station, that's been pulled down. They were there for many, many years, Neales. And they've built a new store out on the Northern Road.

Yes. I've seen it.

And a lot of the shops - a lot of the businesses that were in High Street and thereabouts - a lot of them have moved out to York Road. You know, they sort of saw the light long ago, or the trend that was taking place which we weren't aware of apparently and it's surprising the number of people who have come out here. Even the Transport Department's moved from the inner city out to York Road.

17.07 So do you think that the changes that have taken place have been better for women now - I mean for younger people living in the area now - do you think they have an easier life or a better life because of the changes that have taken place here or not?

Well, I mean, they should have a better life shouldn't they? Because we've got everything.

More shops and more availability of child care and that sort of thing?

Oh, yes. The Council has supplied any number of child day care centres and neighbourhood centres.. I was recently doing - well, for the past three years - I was doing voluntary office work at the South Penrith Neighbourhood Centre. Then they've got lots more amenities that ever existed when we were growing up. I think they're very well off myself, but then you always get people who complain don't you..

18.39 Well I think we've just about covered everything now, unless there's anything else you think you'd like to tell me about how you feel about the changes, how the suburbanisation of the area has affected you or other women in the area.

There was one drawback years ago. Entertainment was at a minimum. We only had one theatre - picture theatre - and if there was anything good on in town well, you know, it meant you were home late in the train. You'd get home about one o'clock in the morning. But now it doesn't seem to be such a chore trying to get to town or trying to ... well we've got the new Performing Arts Centre here named after Joan Sutherland and all the clubs and everything have sprung up and they've all got oodles of entertainment. And free films over at the Leagues Club, dancing. I think there's everything here that anybody could ever want.

You'd hardly need to go to the city anymore?

That's right. Unless there's something special, you know, an opera or something like Jose Carreras that's coming on this week. I'd love to see him. Yes. I don't know. I think we're very well catered for here. Trains, buses. A very good bus service - run in all directions.

20.5 So that's all in improvement since the old days really, since the late '40s.

Yes.

And health services have improved too, I suppose.

Well see if there's a new area going to open up - like Glenmore Park which has just opened up along the Mulgoa Road, just about at Regentville - the Council, they co-operate with the Neighbourhood Centre and all the other essential services and they get things organised for the people that are going to live in a new area. And there are lovely homes going up out there and already they've got a bus service. Not that it's very well catered for at the moment, but, you know, that's the sort of thing the Council is doing and they're going to build a new Neighbourhood Centre out there. They welcome new residents in other words. They welcome new residents to an area and they try to help them to settle in and supply everything for them.

Provide services and think ahead and plan a little bit.

Very much so. No. I don't think the modern generation's got anything to complain about really. The main thing is to cultivate a contented mind isn't it?

22.50 That's right. O.K. Well I'll think we'll leave it at that. Thank you very much for your time.

Oh I hope that'll be some good.

END OF TAPE