

INTERVIEW NO. 28

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 18th December, 1991

MRS EDITH MASON

11 MEMPHIS STREET

MT. DRUITT

0.46 My name is Edith Mason of 11 Memphis Street, Mt. Druitt. I was born on the 7th August 1920 at Western Districts of Dubbo. I am an Australian. I have one son and I am married.

1.14 First of all I'd just like to ask you a few background questions. What kind of work did your father do?

He was a ganger on the railway at Mt. Druitt.

And did your mother work at all?

No. No my mother never, ever worked. Many years ago she was sort of station mistress at a country town just out of Dubbo, a country place by the name of Mogriguy where there was only two trains a day, one out in the morning and one home at night. But my father has been on the railway most of his life. And he was a ganger here at Mt. Druitt when we came to live here.

2.11 So were you one of several children? Did you have brothers and sisters?

Yes. I have one brother and one sister, both older than myself.

So you're the youngest.

Yes.

2.25 So when did you come to live in Mt. Druitt?

We moved here in 1927 in April and have lived here ever since. We have, you know, seen many, many changes. The area was... well there was no houses to rent in those days. Before we could come to live here my father had to have the house built because there was absolutely no houses to rent whatsoever, and we had to sort of wait and just wait till the home was built ready for us to move into.

3.17 Is it a timber house or ...?

It was. It was a weatherboard home with two bedrooms, a lounge room, a breakfast room, kitchenette, laundry, back verandah and it cost my father 580 pounds!

Unbelievable isn't it?

Yes, it is. And my brother still lives in it today - he has had it bricked over - and it is still just as good as the day it was built.

And is that close by here?

Next door. We both live side by side to one another sort of thing. We built this home on his spare block of land, which they used to use for just gardening in the very early days because there was no greengrocer. Only the one that came around about once a fortnight, so you grew most of your own vegetables which was, you know, straight out of the garden and go and pick them as you sort of wanted them. And water was very scarce. There was a water hole out the front and we used to have to carry water in buckets in the very dry season and water the garden that way. There was no such thing as a hose. You just didn't have a hose because there was no outside taps, because all you had was two tanks on the house and that was kept for drinking and cooking and all those type of things, you know.

5.24 So you had to rely on rainwater for those things?

Yes. Definitely. Right up to approximately 1933! And no electricity. We had kerosene lamps and we never knew what a torch was! If we went out at night, which wasn't very often, but if you went to a neighbour's place for an evening or something you carried a hurricane lamp with you. And no made roads! This street we're living in now wasn't even formed.

Wasn't it?

No. It was just a ... well, just a track across the paddock to get to the railway stations.

6.17 And did you have neighbours close by?

No. We were the only house in this street. There was one right up on the corner of Mt. Druitt Road and Palmerston Road, which was naturally formed, and we were the next house sort of

down the paddock. And you know, there were a couple of houses across the creek - it's now a water channel - that we used to just walk across the creek on our way to school. No such thing as a bus. You walked there and back, sort of thing.

How long would that have taken you? Was it a distance?

Well it's Colyton, down on the highway, which is I'd say roughly ... oh, I suppose about three quarters of a mile, and there wasn't very many houses in between even that.

7.30 And you walked with your brother and sister did you?

Yes. We just all walked down there and, you know, you'd pick up a couple of mates along the track going to school and you'd all wander down together sort of thing, you know. But children of today - well, the buses pick them up at streets and, you know, there's no walking. But we had to walk both ways and you were very lucky if you had a push-bike to ride to school. Well my father just couldn't afford three push-bikes. So that was out of the question, you know, so it was just walk!

And did he have a car himself?

No, no. I think his wages - as far as I can remember - were about five pounds a week in those days, and that had to feed and clothe and also pay the house off for the five of us!

8.48 So what would your mother's daily routine have been when you were children?

Well, it would be just completely like a housewife's routine, sort of thing, making beds, sweeping floors. Mostly it was lino on the floors which had to be swept every day sort of thing, you know, to pick up any dust and that. Washing which was done by a fuel copper, and of course in those days there was no such thing as soap powders. You got the bar of soap and you sort of scraped it with a knife, you know, and boiled the clothes up. Then you had to get them out on to a sort of draining board which was a board with holes in it so the water would sort of run through and go back into the copper. Then you rinsed them and blued them and rung them out by hand - you were very lucky if you had a wringer - and then pegged them on a line which was strung across the backyard, you know, sort of thing. Push it up with a prop!

It's much harder work that it is now!

Oh, well by the time you did those sort of things, and then there was no such thing as - everything was like woollen or cotton - no such thing as nylon, and socks had to be darned, and you know, she made most of our clothes on a treadle machine, and this is what she would do ninety per cent of the day sort of thing.

10.49 And did she shop locally?

Well there was only one grocer's shop here and it was so expensive that she mostly shopped in Parramatta. And my father being on the railway could have his groceries sent up in a box sort of freight free to the station and she would go down, say once a fortnight, and order all her groceries and they would be sent up and then you'd take the old wheel-barrow over and sort of wheel the groceries home!

From the station?

From the station.

11.37 And there weren't any local shops here at all?

There was one and there was a wine bar, sort of thing. In the very early days there wasn't even a post office. You picked your mail up from the station from the Station Master's office, and your paper. But of course then as more people came to the district we got a post office.

When would that have been roughly, in the '40s or...?

Oh, no, no. There was a post office here when we came in '27. So it would be going back ... oh perhaps before the '20s - the 1920's - that there would be no post office.

12.27 And how did your family get around if you needed to go further afield. I suppose you had to go by train and then walk, did you?

Yes. Definitely.

And if you wanted to go somewhere across country you'd have to walk, or did you have a family bicycle?

No. Well again, my father being on the railway, he got a pass each year which took the whole family on the train free of charge, sort of thing. I think it used to be about a three week holiday, and we could go, like into Sydney or Parramatta, Penrith, or up the Mountains, you know, and it wouldn't cost us any fares, sort of thing. But other than those we just didn't have holidays because they just weren't affordable! And you know, it wasn't until very later that, you know, you could afford to sort of go for a holiday in those days.

13.55 And what did you do as a child? You went to school locally, and what did you do in the school holidays for recreation?

Oh, well just amused yourselves. We used to go for like picnics in the bush, and build cubby houses, and ... I don't know. We never seemed to get into any problems you know, with any trouble, but we just used to amuse ourselves. We'd probably play shops, you know, get all old tins and bottles and goodness knows what and pretend that they were things in a shop, you know, and sort of sell them to one another. But we just made our own fun. There was no wirelesses of course, even - until we got the electricity. And then we got that oh, we thought it was wonderful when we could at night time sit and listen to 'Dad and Dave' and 'Blue Hills' and all those sort of things.

But other than that, I don't know, we just ... we have always had a piano in the house. My mother played a little bit and friends used to come in and we'd just have a sing-song or, you know, a party where we'd play games and this is mostly how we had our entertainment, just through house to house, sort of thing.

15.56 And did your grandparents live close-by or were they in Dubbo?

No. My father's people were in Dubbo, but my mother's people were in Auburn.

Well they weren't too far away?

Oh, no. No. Well when we were living in Dubbo and out in the country, that was one great thing when Dad got his holidays we would come down to Auburn and stay with relatives and that, you know, and from there we could always sort of hop into Sydney and go to the parks and, you know, get on a tram and go out to Bondi or something like that, you know.

16.45 So when you were living here your mother didn't have any . . . like she didn't have her parents very close by to help if you were ill or she was ill or anything like that?

Our neighbours were very, very good. But I don't know. The only... we didn't seem to have that much sickness, you know, and there was no doctor in Mt. Druitt.

Wasn't there?

No. We had to go to St. Marys or Rooty Hill and they used to come round in the very early days in a horse and sulky sort of thing. It was really going ... it was a very countrified sort of a little place. People used to come out from Sydney and have holidays out at a guest house out at Colyton called 'Wattle Grove Farm'. Now that was, oh, that was a marvellous thing! And they thought they were going hundreds and hundreds of miles in those days. They would come up in the train to Mt. Druitt and go out in . . . we had one gentleman that had what they called a 'charabang' - sort of a bus, it was, a stretch limousine car with doors on, you know, into each compartment type of thing - and they would be picked up from the station and taken out to Wattle Grove Farm, and oh, they'd have a marvellous time you know. They could have tennis and swimming in the creek and horse riding and all that sort of thing, you know. And that was even advertised in the Sydney Morning Herald in those days.

19.08 All the city folk would enjoy the country life?

The country life, yes. And now I believe (laughs) you can't move over there for houses!

And Wattle Grove Farm's gone?

Yes, definitely, yes.

19.29 So you've seen a lot of changes take place in that time?

Oh yes. Yes, definitely.

19.37 Did you go to high school in the area?

Yes Penrith. That was the only high school, or there was like the Granville Technical College. There was one at Parramatta, but we were all sort of ... automatically went to Penrith, and we would have to catch a train at oh, about twenty past eight of a morning and go as far as Kingswood and then we had to walk from Kingswood because the high school was not right in Penrith, it was on the corner of Doonmore Street and the Great Western Highway and we

had to walk from Kingswood station - teachers and all – and then walk back in the afternoon and catch the steam train home.

20.46 And after high school did you go on to any tertiary education?

No.

So what did you do when you left school?

Well the first job that I ever had was a lady had her mother living with her who was very ill and she wanted somebody help her out, and so I went and worked over at her place and I eight shillings a week, plus like my food, and I stayed there of a night time. But I only did that for, oh, I suppose, three or four months while her mother was very ill just to give her a bit of a break, you know. Then I went to a factory in Parramatta - in Phillip Street, Parramatta - where they used to make trousers, and I worked there for two years and we used to put all the bands on the tops of the trousers and we used to get (laughs) one and eight pence a dozen.

My goodness!

And it was piece work. The more you did, the more you earned and I used to get roughly - some weeks would be a little more than others - but roughly I would make about thirty shillings a week and out of that I had to pay three and fourpence for a weekly ticket on the train and had to catch a train about ten to seven in the morning to be at work by eight o'clock and we would get home at night time about twenty past six.

23.11 And when would this have been? Roughly what year?

Now ... that would be roughly about 1936, sort of thing, before of course any ... it was all steam trains in those days, and the trains were sort of few and far between. This is why you had to go so early, because the next train - you would be late for work. And that didn't go over very well with your boss, because in those days, you know, you had to work. It wasn't heavy work but you had to keep going, you know, to make anything out of it. And from there then I left that and I went to work for a doctor in Burwood for about two years, and that was just before ... well, I left there to get married.

24.38 Right. So what year were you married?

1941.

And then you built this house did you, or...?

No. We were married in April in 1941. Cliff went into the Army in the October of that year. We were in a flat in Phillip Street, Parramatta, when we first got married. So that was sort of too lonely, so I moved back up and lived with Cliff's parents until he was out of the army which was about 18 months, I think he was in the army, and then he got out of the Army, like, medically through asthma. So then we lived up with his parents.

Where was that? In Mt. Druitt?

Yes. It used to be known as Blenheim Avenue, Mt. Druitt - but is now Meacher Street – and from there we started to build a home on his block of land that he had up there in the same street, when his mother - they thought she was going to go blind. So that's as far as we went with building a home because we knew she would never be able to cope, like without somebody in the house with her. So that's why we didn't build then. But this place - this house - was only built in 1974.

Oh right. So did you live in that house with his parents until you moved here?

Yes. We spent five years in Orange and that's where our son was born, in Orange, and it was then that we got the letter to say that his Mum, you know, she had glaucoma and that she would automatically go blind. So we automatically packed up and came back to live back in the area. So the only time we have been out of Mt. Druitt is for about five years round about the 19 ... oh, '45 Lawrence was born.

27.56 So when you came back here how old would he have been? He was just a toddler was he?

Yes. He was only three. Three when we came back here.

And he was born in '45 you said, so you were back here in '48?

Yes. We were back here in '48.

And where you were living then with your in-laws, was that a built up area or was it country-ish?

No. Country. Country. It was still rural, sort of thing. You know, because mostly all the people - their living was mostly poultry farming. And Cliff's father originally was ... he grew grapes and had connections with Minchinbury because the grapes they used to crush them and then Minchinbury would take the residue or whatever from the grapes, sort of thing, besides they used sell bunches of grapes, you know, to anybody. .A basket of grapes would probably be about ten cents of a shilling, you know, for a basket of grapes and that sort of thing. The boys found it - my brother and my husband now – found it very hard to get work in the Depression, you know, and they worked seasonally at the canning factory.

In Mt. Druitt?

Yes. Valgay Canning Factory in Colyton. And they both worked in what was classed as the 'tin shop', you know where they made the tins for the preserves and that sort of thing. But that was only, mostly seasonal. They would start a little bit before the season to get a stock of the tins ahead, but in between that there was nothing much unless you got an odd days work on a poultry farm or some such thing like that you know, because ... well there was nothing. There was absolutely no other industry around to get work at. They used to go out and they'd set traps for rabbits out where the new Housing Commission area is - which was all bush in those days - and they'd go out set their traps and then either go round late at night on their push bikes - they'd got a push bike by this time, each - and they'd check their traps. Or early in the morning they'd go round and collect whatever rabbits that they'd got, take them home, skin them and clean them, and take them round to anybody that wanted to buy a rabbit for sixpence - sixpence each! And the skins - they used to sell the skins. You know how they used to sort of put them on a wire frame and dry them - inside-out they put them - and dry them and then they'd send them away or take them somewhere and get a few pence for the skins. Collected bottlers and the Bottle-o used to come round and give you about tuppence a dozen for beer bottles and so much...

32.00 This was all during the Depression was it?

Yes. However you could make a few pence, you know, you did it in those days. And the boys - because they were living at home - could not get the dole and of course it wasn't money in those days, it was just food - vouchers for food and that - and you were not allowed to get

cigarettes on these vouchers. That was taboo. They wouldn't give you cigarettes on those vouchers. So...

END SIDE A

SIDE B.

0.06 So you couldn't get anything...

No. Well they couldn't get work or, you know - it was very, very hard - and they couldn't get the dole because they were living at home and they just sort of existed on what their parents could give them. And to go to a dance, you'd save up your pennies to get ... I think the boys had to pay one and six to get in to the dance and the ladies paid a shilling. But the ladies used to take a plate of supper like, you know, a plate of cake or a plate of sandwiches and the supper was served, like handed round and so you got a cup of tea and whatever, type of thing. And that was our main entertainment of a Saturday night. Then later on we formed a sort of a younger set and this is where we all sort of learned to dance and it was an outing. That -was on a Tuesday night. We sort of taught a lot of the boys to dance and...

1. 48 Was this connected with a Church group or anything I or just people in the area?

No. Just ... the Advancement Club built the Mt. Druitt Hall and I don't think we even paid anything for the use of the hall that night. And some kind lady would play the piano, and this is how we all sort of learned to dance and it was part of our entertainment which was just done through a group of friends, you know. It sort of cost you nothing. We'd have a raffle of probably a little tiny small box of chocolates and this would, you know, help to run things and that. But other than that there was ... you could get to the pictures at Penrith. The chappy - Mr. Cook with the taxi thing- he would take you up to Penrith and bring you home from the pictures, but then nine times out of ten you couldn't afford to go to the pictures so you sort of stayed home and either made your own fun and all your neighbours and teenagers would sort of get together and go to somebody's house and, you know, have a sing -a-long and this sort of thing. But we never, ever seemed to sort of get into any trouble. You know, it was just ... I don't know - we didn't think about it. Didn't think about trouble or being destructive, you know.

3.55 What about when your son was growing up? Did he go to the local school - the same one that you went to?

Yes. Cliff's father went to it, Cliff went to it, I went to it and Lawrence went to it. So the whole ... as a matter of fact Cliff's father went to the school that started down in Simpson Hill Road which was the slab, oh I suppose you'd call it a shed or something. Then it moved from there into what used to be Colyton Post Office, and then from there it came up to the Colyton Headmaster's Cottage which was two rooms on one side that was specially made for the two school rooms, and then eventually it got into a school being built, but still only two rooms.

So, what, even when your son went there it was still only two rooms?

Oh well they had, by the time Lawrence had got there, they had built an extra small room, sort of thing, so they had three rooms.

It still would have been a fairly small school?

Oh, yes. It was, sort of thing, but now it's...

5.27 And did he walk to school too?

No. At first, because we were living up in Blenheim Avenue and he had to cross the railway line, the then local taxi driver, Mr. Swords, used to pick up about five children from our street and take them to school and pick them up of an afternoon, and that used to cost us three and sixpence a week. And then, when he was about eight, he got a pushbike and then he used to ride his bike to school.

Was there a level crossing at the railway?

No there was still gates.

Gates?

Gates, yes. And then he went on to St. Marys High School. By this time there was a High School build at St. Marys and he went on to St. Marys High School and that's where he did his...

Intermediate?

Intermediate, in those days. That's right. And then when he'd finished, when he passed that, he went to Goodwins which was in the Industrial area at St. Marys and did his trade in boilermaking. He had to travel to Granville one day a week to go to tech. There was no Mt. Druitt Tech. or anything. So that's how ... it had changed that much from, like his father to him.

7.26 This would have been in the '50s I suppose?

Yes. Well he was 15, so it would have been ... oh, close on the '60s.

There was still no tech at Mt. Druitt?

There was still no tech at Mt. Druitt, no.

7.39 And by that time how had the area changed? Had it built up very much with houses or shops?

Well not a great deal. I think 1964 - I think - if I can remember rightly, was the beginning of the Housing Commission. I think that's when they turned the first sod. I'm not, you know, certain of that. But it was approximately around that time. So of course then, after that got on the way, the shopping centre started to sort of move and then, of course, we thought we were very lucky here. We were close to the old station, you see. But of course, then they shifted the station - up to the shopping centre area! Which we were all a bit mad about. But I suppose that's progress and, you know, you have to put up with it. But that's how things have changed and it has gradually grown, you know. Now his daughter...

You son's daughter?

Yes. My grand -daughter, they have bought a home out at Oakhurst. That's out towards Plumpton way, yes. So that's how things ... Lawrence has a home down here in Karin Place. Now there was no homes here, barring my original home...

Which is next door?

... which is next door, yes ... until after the war, a builder by the name of Thomas started to build the houses across the road as War Service houses, and this is when things started to grow here.

10.03 And how did you feel about that?

Oh, well ... I don't know. We still say 'the good old days' when you could walk out of your house and leave the front door wide open, and your neighbour could walk in and make themselves a cup of tea and that sort of thing. But then again we didn't have ... like, we knew everybody! You'd go on to the station 'Oh hullo Tom, hullo Dick' you know, sort of thing. You'd know everybody that was around and you had no thought of anybody robbing you or breaking in. If anybody wanted something, they'd say 'Oh can I borrow this' or 'Have you got a cup of sugar you can lend me until I go to the shop' or ... you know, it was just an absolutely different atmosphere altogether. But then we didn't have a mixed community either.

11.15 No after the War that changed too didn't it?

That changed too, yes.

So when you say a mixed community, do you mean migrants and... ?

Yes. See. We had a few Aboriginals or part Aboriginal people around - mostly towards Plumpton - but they were decent living people. You know, they used to come to the dances and all that sort of thing. And they just were part of the community.

So did you notice a difference when the European migrants started to come to live here?

Well, like everything else, like even Australians, there's good and bad in everybody sort of thing. We've had a lot of ... now we have, mostly in this street, is migrants, but – we have them over the back - but we find that m have no trouble with them, you know, they're always quite pleasant and we always say "Hi, how're you going' sort of thing. They don't worry us - we don't worry them! But you know it's...

12.50 Have you got to know any of them as good neighbours, you know, made friends with any of them or...?

Oh, well, as I say, the people over the road they've been there, oh, quite a long while. I mean their kiddies were only little when they came there and they're grown up and got little ones of their own now. And, you know, we don't visit them and they don't visit us, but if we're outside we'll always have a chat or say "Hullo" or "How're you going" sort of thing.

What nationalities live around here mostly? Would you know?

No. No I wouldn't. I wouldn't really know!

But they're from Europe mostly?

Yes. Mostly, yes. The chap that was in the house directly across the road, they were German. We made quite good friends with them. But they've both passed on now. But we used to go over every Christmas, you know, a couple of nights before Christmas and have a night with them and that sort of thing. My father helped the people out the back, Mr. Kurdiac, sort of thing. When they came here they couldn't speak English. They didn't understand, you know. They would get papers or things and they'd just look at them and sort of shrug and they didn't know what they were all about. So they'd come over to Dad and they'd say 'You explain please?' you know, and they helped them as best they could, you know. Now of course they've learned!

They have things printed in various languages now to help.

Yes. They do. But Peter and them, they are quite good now. They understand. You can say to them 'Oh, well you've got to do this or you've got to do this, you know, but they understand. Of course, it's just like us going to Germany. How would we cope with that, sort of thing.

Tape starts to quicken up here. [REFER TO TAPE 2]

15.23 And what about - how did you feel about the landscape changing. You know, more trees disappearing and the countryside becoming built on? Did that worry you, or not?

Well the one reason we built down here was, where we were up in Blenheim Avenue, they turned it into a high-rise area, sort of thing, and we thought 'Oh, we're going to be stuck between some high blocks of flats, you know, looking down our little old place sort of thing. So we decided "Right. Get out!" So, my brother having two blocks of land here, this was getting a bit much for him going to work and trying to do the garden and everything, so he sold us his block and this is how we come to build down here. But, yes it's... I suppose we feel a little bit sorry. Yes, but, then people have to have somewhere to live don't they?

16.40 And did you feel at all, when you were the only house in the street and that sort of thing, did you ever feel isolated?

No, not really, there was another big old home sort of across the paddock type of thing and we were quite friendly with them. They had cows and they used to give us milk and they had some chooks, and we'd buy our eggs from them, you know, sort of thing in those days. And, you know, we were all ... they used to come over and have a game of cards of a night time. I don't know, you never, ever seemed to feel isolated. I suppose it was because you sort of knew everybody around about, even if you were a long way apart.

And with the closer neighbours I don't suppose you'd know as many of them?

No. No. No, you don't sort of get to know them like you did in the older times, because now there is sort of so much entertainment and everything, that you're not looking to your neighbours for company. Where as in years gone by, you know, you'd look to your neighbours for company. We would ... there was another friend had a lorry and he used to deliver food, you know, to the poultry farmers and he'd get his truck and off we'd go for a picnic for the day, you know, four or five or half a dozen families But as far as we'd go would be out to Stoney Crossing which is about, what, seven or eight miles out sort of that-a-way, and oh, you'd have a great day, you know. Everybody would bring their food along and you'd put it all in together and you'd have a great day. But, see you can't do those things now. There's no bush to go out into! (laughs) You've got to go to a park area or something of that description.

**FROM THIS POINT TAPE CANNOT BE HEARD CLEARLY ENOUGH FOR
TRANSCRIPTION [REFER TAPE 2]**

**TAPE 2 - SECOND INTERVIEW RECORDED 26/2/92 TO COVER UNCLEAR PART OF
PREVIOUSLY TAPED INTERVIEW.**

**0.06 And what about the landscape changing - how did you feel about the changes in the
landscape with more trees disappearing and the countryside becoming more built up?
Did this worry you at all?**

Well not really worry, but it was sort of sad to see all the lovely old trees going because we were used to them and all the birds, and played in amongst the trees and the bush as kiddies, and you know, it's just so sad to see ... they don't seem to try and save as many trees as they can. They just seem to bulldoze the whole thing and it's just sad, I think, rather than worries you, because what's nicer than a bush setting?

1.13 That's right, yes. And did you move from Blenheim Avenue because of the build-up of high-rise building around here?

Yes. Definitely. Yes. Most of the people in an ordinary home were moving out and you were sort of sat up there, like a little bird on a bough of a tree, you know, with nobody around you and we did have quite a bit of land. I think there was about six blocks of land, we had, which were a hundred foot frontages and 264 feet deep, which are quite big blocks. And with the high rise coming, really you couldn't afford the price of your rates. And then we thought 'Oh, fancy two or three storey units and our poor little house sitting in the middle of it', sort of thing, and they're sort of looking down on you! So when my brother said he wanted to sell this block of ground we said "Right!" We would buy it off him and build down here, and this is how we come to be in Memphis Street.

2.54 And did you feel, when you were the only house in the street here - weren't you to begin with one of the first in the street?

Yes.

Did you ever feel isolated?

No. Not really, because everybody knew everybody, and well, you sort of walked across the paddock to catch the train which the station was down near the little shopping centre - the village shopping centre - and you know, we just made our own amusement and we used to walk to the dances over at the Mt. Druitt hall. Walk home - no problems, you know. You weren't afraid to go out or even go to the shop when it was getting dark, or ... you know, that was... and the neighbours, a lot of them had cows and things and you sort of half the time didn't buy your milk, the neighbours said 'Oh bring your can over, I'll give you some milk!' sort of thing. It was just like one big family type of thing. And it was, oh, it was real country type living.

And it was a nice community feeling?

Definitely, yes.

4.30 And with the closer neighbours now, with the houses being built closer to you, how did you feel about that when they started to be built?

Well when we moved here which is only about 17 years ago most of the houses that are here now, were here, type of thing and ... oh, it didn't really worry us, because when we lived in Orange, of course which is a big country town, we had neighbours all round us so . . . and when we were first married we lived on the corner of Church and Phillip Street, Parramatta! So we just accepted it!

Yes.

It wasn't a big deal, sort of thing, we just accepted it.

5.28 And how do you find it now, when you go shopping? Do you find it less friendly now that it's more populated than in the old days?

Oh, well, yes. Because you don't know - you might go over to the shopping centre – well you might know one or two people. Sometimes you go over and you don't see a soul that you know. Other times you might, you know, meet two or three of the different old residents and you might have a yarn and a talk or perhaps go and have a cup of coffee together. But, well I suppose this is progress, you know!

6.21 And did you belong to any social groups or community groups in the area?

What in the earlier days?

Yes.

Well we belonged to the CWA of which we had to go to St. Marys - there was no Mt. Druitt group, but we went to St. Marys and belonged to the Church of England Ladies' Guild which we worked for for many years. Our original church got blown down!

Really! In a storm?

Yes. Because a lot ... well I don't know who, but I believe - I'm told - that they took lot of the bricks from the foundations and this is why it became sort of unstable and blew down in a wind storm. But we worked hard with fetes and, oh, dances - which they don't have today - and raised money to build our Church which we went to at Rooty Hill.

Living in Blenheim Avenue you were half way between Mt. Druitt and Rooty Hill. So it seemed a little bit closer to walk, I might add to Rooty Hill to Church, you know. And that

was about the only thing, you know. There was no Senior Citizens Groups or anything like that.

8.17 And you belong to a Senior Citizens Group now don't you?

Yes. Rooty Hill Senior Citizens I belong to.

And were you involved with any other ...like the Hospital Auxiliary or anything like that in Mt. Drutt?

Only like...that is a more recent thing. It wasn't years and years ago, like say when I was in my twenties, there was no such thing. But once there was mention of a possibility of a hospital being built at Mt. Drutt, of course then we formed a group and worked hard for it, which we still do.

Do you? You're still involved in that?

Yes. I work in the gift shop every Friday.

9.15 So you'd have friends through that as well, I suppose?

Oh, yes. Definitely now. And we sort of belong to what we call a sort of a social group. There's no joining fees and that, but we just go out in a group - oh say round about 20 of us type of thing - and we just catch a train perhaps down to Kiama or up the Mountains or go and have morning tea and lunch and just have a walk round and ... it's just a complete social club, you know, just for outings!

Organised through the Auxiliary, though?

No. That's just what we've classed as a social club. One lady does all the bookings for the trains and that sort of thing. Oh, the Auxiliary - they run a bus trip every one or two months. In March we're going up to the Entrance and I believe go on a cruise on a boat and have lunch on a boat, sort of thing, which should be, you know, a very nice day. A coach up and a coach home, and this raises money for the Gift Shop. So that's one way we do raise money besides raffles and donations and that.

11.05 I'd just like to ask you about your family finances. Who managed the household money? Did you or your husband?

Me

This is back in the '50s I'm talking about really.

Yes. Yes. Well I have always sort of managed the household business. My husband...our cheque account is in his name for the simple reason that when he was in the Commonwealth Police his wages were paid directly into the bank and I have always managed the housekeeping and that sort of thing.

Yes. And he'd give you a certain amount each week, would he?

Well, when it was paid directly into the bank we would draw a cash cheque for so much each fortnight- he was paid fortnightly - and that's how we worked things out. Then when say an electricity bill or rates or water or something like that came in, well he would write a cheque to cover those type of things. We found that having it paid direct to the bank you only sort of drew what you needed for your fortnightly living, and what was left in, you know, balanced - sort of grew in another way - to pay for your electricity and those other bills that came in at the end of a quarter.

13.07 And you didn't buy anything on time payment or credit or anything those days, I suppose?

Very little. Very little since we've been married. When I was like a teenager we used to lay-by things because wages were so small that you would have to save up for perhaps two or three weeks. If you wanted to go to a dance or a special function, you didn't have enough money to just go to the shop and say 'Right, I'll buy a frock!'. We had to sort of either lay-by it or, you know, save for two or three weeks and then go and purchase what we wanted sort of thing. Or else purchase material and make your own.

14.05 Did you sew a lot yourself?

Yes. I've always done quite a bit of sewing. Like, Lawrence, the son - I made all his clothes and made them on a hand machine which was my mother-in-law's, and I suppose it would be perhaps now 150 years old! Which we still have!

Really! When you say 'a hand machine', did you turn the wheel by hand rather than a foot treadle?

Yes. On the table, you know, just on a table. I made myself- when I was up in Orange – made myself an overcoat on it, lined it and that, you know.

Did you ever do dressmaking to make money out of it?

No. Never. Never, ever took dressmaking lessons or anything. Just my mother always made our clothes and she was making me a frock when I was - oh, I suppose twelve- and she got sick and I wanted it for a special thing, so I thought 'Finish it yourself or you're not going to get it!' So, you know ... and this is how I started.

You taught yourself?

I bought the paper pattern and, you know ... go along. She helped me, you know, and advised me how to do this and what to do then, sort of thing, but that's how we did it.

15.52 And what sort of electrical appliances did you have, say when you were first married in the '40s? Did you have an electric stove or a refrigerator?

No. We didn't have a refrigerator. We had an ice-chest, for which the ice-man delivered ice I think it was about three times a week, but that's all we had as far as cooling for your food. We started off when we were first married in Parramatta we had a gas stove, and then we were only married about six months and Cliff went into the army. So I moved back up here and lived with his people. Well they had a fuel stove to start with and when the electricity came through in about '33 they got an electric stove. And from then on we had an electric stove. When he came out of the Army we got a refrigerator and, well of course we had an electric iron. We didn't have a washing machine, oh, for quite some time. I can't remember just ... the first washing machine I did have was a Pope with a wringer on the top, you know, and then of course we gradually up-graded. In about 1960 we got an air conditioner.

What about the vacuum cleaner?

Oh, yes we had a vacuum cleaner, yes. I forgot about the vacuum cleaner.

18.15 So your housework would have been much easier than the way your mother had to operate in her day?

Oh definitely, yes. That's right. Because in my Mum's day, sort of thing, it was all linos on the floor which had to be swept, washed and polished, down on your hands and knees of course! (Laughs) There was no electric polishers or anything. It really was, I suppose, hard work. But it was something . . . well there was no other way, so you just did it! It just had to be done!

19.05 And what about the churches in the area - did you find that they played a bigger role - perhaps a bigger social role - than they did in the old days?

Definitely. Yes. Because, as I say, at Rooty Hill we used to have like fetes and we had dances. Especially when the boys were in the Wallgrove Army Camp. They used to run a dance every Saturday night for somewhere for the boys to go and that, and we used to run little fancy dress balls for the kiddies - the Sunday School kiddies - and then we always had a Sunday School picnic which the kiddies used to look forward to, and at Christmas time they always put on a little concert for the parents, and were given prizes. But that just doesn't seem to happen now. I don't know. It seems to have lost that social community feeling. You go to church and walk out and come home!

20.43 So what do you think, when you reflect on your life during the '40s and '50s and think about what it's like now, how do you feel about the changes that have taken place with the coming of more population, and more traffic and the changing landscape? Do you think people these days have it easier and have a better life-style or was it better before?

Well they certainly have it easier, but I wouldn't say they have a better life-style, because we never had problems like break-ins or, you know, being sort of molested and all that sort of thing. It was just so different. You could go out and leave your house sort of unlocked, windows open and that sort of thing. If somebody popped in to say hullo and you weren't home, they'd go in and make themselves a cup of tea and perhaps leave a note on the table and say 'I called but you weren't home' or something like that. But there's no way now - you have to have all your windows and doors barred. It's next to being in a prison, sort of thing.

So that lack of security now is quite different to what it used to be?

Oh, yes. Definitely, yes.

22.30 And then the friendliness too of the area in a smaller community, you were saying, has changed too?

Oh, yes. Well, you knew everybody and now you have, say, perhaps half a dozen or a dozen friends and that's it! But, I mean, you knew the whole countryside. You know, you sort of went to school with all the kiddies, and even though they lived two or three miles away, you knew them because the parents were all involved with the schools. They had like picnic days at school and concerts and the parents used to come, and it was just a different thing altogether. I don't think that ... half the parents of today don't even know where their children are or what they're doing!

23.32 Most of them are working aren't they, now?

Yes. Well, see the mother never worked.

In the old days?

In the old days, no. No I think my son was about . . . well he was at school. He was at least five - could have been six - before I started to do casual work, and then I was lucky enough because when he came home his Grandma was home. So he was never, you know, to come home to an empty house. Otherwise I probably would never have gone to work.

24.15 And what about the transport systems? There was nothing but the train or walking if you didn't have a car?

No. That's right, yes.

And that's improved now, I suppose, with bus services?

Right, yes. Yes. Because, for one thing too, the area has spread out and it is much further away from all the facilities, type of thing. Well, if you couldn't afford the taxis, in years gone by, you walked to the station which, in Blenheim Avenue when we were up there, we used to... well, we never thought of getting a taxi! Because we didn't have a phone on, to start with, and we couldn't ring the taxi. But by the time you'd been out all day and that, we used to get a taxi home because, we used to think, 'Oh, fancy having to... ', you know, that walk home, that was the killer. So we'd always get a taxi home. But we always walked to the station, even when Lawrence and that was small, it was, you know, push a pram to the station.

25.45 And what other things do you think have changed with the coming of more population and suburbanisation of the area? The security and the traffic and the friendliness - and would there be anything else? What about the landscape itself? The feeling of more space around and the more countrified land as it used to be?

Yes. Well I think, not so much I suppose just around us here, type of thing, but when you get out into the housing area on the other side of the land, of course it's, you know, it's just a sea of houses! But here we don't notice so much here.

So that really hasn't affected you very much?

No. Not really. No.

26.49 And so do you think, comparing your mother's life say as a young mother herself, to your life when you were a young mother, and then looking at say your children today bringing up their children, there have been a lot of changes through that period. Do you think that the life they have now is for the better?

Well, I suppose, in a lot of ways. If you're lucky enough for the younger generation – say the third generation sort of thing - if they're lucky enough to get jobs, you know. But if they're not lucky enough to get jobs they are so much at a loose end, I think this is where a lot of them sort of get into little bits of trouble and, with the both parents away working, you know they've got nobody to turn to and they go looking for ... even company! Whereas, as I say, in my time when my son was younger he always had someone to come home to and he had about four little New Australian mates just up the end of the street and we used to encourage them to bring their mates home, so that we knew exactly where they were, what they were doing. And even as a teenager, he used to bring all his mates home you know. You'd have three or four young chaps there either pulling cars to pieces or doing something, you know, and that sort of thing. Most of them went sort of rolling skating or to the pictures or something like this on the Saturday night. But of course working, they didn't go out a great deal through the week because they had to get up reasonably early in the mornings - say about, oh I suppose half-past five- to catch trains to go to work, and he had to go to Granville to the Tech to do his trade one day a week. So you know - but I do really feel sorry for a lot of the young ones today that can't get work and sort of have no one. You know, it's hard!

END OF TAPE 2