

INTERVIEW NO.23

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 6/12/91

MISS MARY PIKE

46 LEMONGROVE ROAD

PENRITH.

0.35 My name is Mary Pike and I live at 46 Lemongrove Road, Penrith which is in the Lemongrove area on the north side of Penrith, and the date of my birth is the 13th December, 1924. Myself and my four sisters were born over in North Sydney and we came over to Windsor when I was only six weeks old. On both sides of my family Irish and English ancestry, and I'm not married and I have no children.

1.08 **Right. So how long have you actually lived in the Penrith area?**

Oh we came here in the beginning of 1936 and we lived over in Stafford Street and then we came here in this house here - 50 years this year – was 1941.

Really.

Yes.

So you've lived in this house fifty years, so you will have seen a lot of changes around here?

Oh, yes. Well when we came here you'd know almost all the people in the houses. You'd know them by name and you'd say hello to them, but now, with the flats and that that are down the other end of Lemongrove Road, you hardly know anybody here at all. It's sad really in a way... but that's the state of affairs. There's no friendliness and that. The people now in units or flats and that - you don't know them. It's just a different way of life.

2.07 **And when did you notice that starting to happen? Was that... when were the flats built?**

Oh, they'd be about 15 years ago, at least. Yes. And then having the flats across the road there, you used w be able to see right across over to the Mountains. I think that shouldn't be allowed when you've been living here for so many years, that your lovely scenery is all cut out like that. There's two storeys of the units.

Just completely blocked out your view!

Yes. You can't see over the Mountains. Later on I'll show you when you go towards the front way there. I think it's a pity. And I think it's a pity too that there's no - that friendliness - and you'd know everybody and if you went down the street you'd know so many people. But now with Penrith becoming a City, you just don't know. You can go down the street and you know nobody. It's just that difference in the population here - with the increase of population it loses that friendly atmosphere somehow. It's a big city now.

3.07 And so what was your immediate neighbourhood like when you were a child living here - you would have been a young teenager?

Oh yes. Well you could go to the pictures then. We used to go ... I used to like the ballet and I've been to the ballet with another girlfriend and - you wouldn't come home here off the train until one o'clock, but you were quite safe in getting off the train and walking home. But now you wouldn't dare to do that! I wouldn't go on the street at night time by yourself - even with another person! No, it's changed a lot and I would say not for the better.

3.41 That sense of security has gone?

Yes. Well the whole morality of this generation now is not like ... and you could leave your - in the hot days and nights - you could leave the doors open back and front and you were quite safe. But now you have to close all the windows. Oh, I still keep the door open in my bedroom at night. I can't sleep without fresh air. But you have to be security minded now. Being in the Neighbourhood Watch they stress that thing and the police always tell you 'Make sure even if you're gardening, to go out in the garden, to have the key with you and lock the door...'

Before you go.

Yes.

4.22 So was there... did you have neighbours close by when you were first living here?

Oh, yes. Mrs. Richardson lived next door. She had a spastic daughter. Nothing wrong with her brain. She was very, very good. And Mr. Stoneham was the magistrate. He lived ... when we came here we owned the other block of land there and after about twenty years Dad sold it, so our next door neighbour was Mr. Stoneham - that was the magistrate there - so we got to know him. Oh, and Mrs. Tipping was on the corner there and you used to know all the

neighbours. The Snells lived across the road and Mr. and Mrs. Smith lived there, and you used to know all the neighbours.

Were there any vacant blocks of land?

No. There weren't any there.

But I suppose they were bigger blocks? Yours certainly is a fairly big block isn't it?

Yes. Well it goes into a funny - I don't know whether you noticed - like a wedge shape and this, our one here, goes through here and when you go to the other one that's the point and where this other bigger part here on the crescent there's about five homes there, five or six homes there. But I don't know whether you notice there when you came over the Lemongrove Bridge - but the flats each side of it - they used to be just private homes and they pulled them down.

5.42 How did you feel about that when the old homes were pulled down?

No. Didn't like that at all. 'Cause a lot of the Lemongrove Road and Macquarie Avenue are both on the Heritage List now. You can't change the outside of the house without the permission of the Council. You might be able to change it inside. 'Cause these are all over a hundred years old they say.

This would be on the Heritage List wouldn't it?

Yes. It's about 106 years old at least, this is. It's had a very interesting history to it. In this century there's only been our family and then the Jones had it before. But then last century it went to about three different people. Yes. And with a land grant to a John McKendrie from the very early days in the 18 ... 1820 he arrived in Australia and he was promised this grant of land by Governor Macquarie, but he died in 1832 and then his wife got it. She was the daughter of the Reverend Henry Fulton out at Castlereagh. So there's a lot of history in it.

And so this is protected by Heritage then as far as it couldn't be bulldozed?

Well I hope not, but at one time there with the Council they had a walkway and it was going to come right through our house and we had to really to fight to save this house, and it was going to go from Lemongrove Road through to Macquarie Avenue- that was Evans Street

then. In those days Evans Street came right from Jamieson Road right across the Lemongrove Bridge and then it went as far down the bottom hill there. But now once it comes over Lemongrove Bridge it's renamed Macquarie Avenue. And about half-way down they have the lane there, and then people were complaining that there were men and that waiting for children and so they wouldn't allow their children ... no-one started to walk there, so the Council ... we protested so much against it.

So they didn't do it!

No. They didn't go ... and the letter that Eileen wrote to the Council – when they had a Lemongrove Heritage that they put forth, we bought the book, it was about three dollars - it was almost word for word from the letter that she wrote to the Council protesting against it, that they should be preserving the old houses - there was too few in Penrith as it was - and then setting forth all the disadvantages of pulling down old homes - that was about, oh more than twenty years ago - that was what the future generations were going to appreciate, not the modern homes, the old homes.

Oh well that's good. At least the Council thought along those lines thanks to your help!

Yes. Well my sister, she typed the letter, she'd the one with the typing ability.

Well it's just as well you won isn't it? Because this is a lovely old home.

Yes. It's a lovely old place.

Big old doorways, all cedar doorways...

Yes. We painted it all ourselves recently, on the outside, my sister and I, and then we've had to get the front verandah restored to what it should have been. And we have the rising damp a bit and we've had to have it fumigated underneath, and he was saying 'Fort Knox' he said this place is. Four bricks thick underneath it is and three bricks thick on the side all around on the outside walls.

So it's really well built!

Oh, yes. He said he doesn't know why they had the four bricks thick in the foundation. It goes through the same as this room right down. It's not just an open space. It goes right through

with the bricks like a room down there as well. And it wasn't ventilated properly and he cut big holes through there to get cross-currents of air coming through. He said it should improve it a lot.

It should last for another hundred years!

Yes, well we hope so. Not that I'll be here.

10.02 So it would have been built in the 1890's?

Oh, no. Before that. I know that the Lemongrove Estate was opened up in the ... 1886, I think it was or 1885, from John McKendrie's estate after his wife and the children inherited it and they decided that they'd break it up into building blocks. So at least from the documents that we have - there are about six documents there are to this land, it's very interesting - and my mind isn't made up for details and that, like how they word them in legal documents. It could mean that there was a house here, or it could have been that ... I wouldn't know what they had - sheds- but how they worded it I suppose they mean that if there had have been a house there, that's included in the sale of the land. I wouldn't know. But at least it's 106 years old anyway.

11.09 So you lived here with your parents during your later teenage years and so what did you - did your father use the garden to grow vegetables?

Yes. We had a ... there was a very old pear tree there when we came here, and we had a mulberry tree and we had fig trees and my father liked gardening and he won the Sydney Morning Herald Garden Competition three times in the '60s, and he used to grow our tomatoes and beetroots and lettuce and our beans and peas and that and carrots and a lot of things that we used to eat. Not to save money but because it was so nice and fresh. And then with the Council rates going up it was coming up too high to keep the land there just for growing things, so we sold that. We knew the people that moved in there when they built the house there.

And they built there.

Yes. They're nice neighbours there too.

12.12 And what did your father do? What was his occupation?

Oh he was a produce merchant. Yes. He had a ... him and his two brothers over in North Sydney, they had three shops between them and then when we were starting to get a little bit older he didn't think it was right for the children to be around with the produce merchant with the men and that around there, so he bought a shop over in Windsor. That's how we happened to go over there. And 1929 there was a burglary over there. It was in the Telegraph Pictorial - about these people, burglars, that came in there and they tried to get in and when they couldn't get in to the safe they blew it up and then it set fire to the building. But he was very lucky - he was able to... he had in some kind of an oil skin thing that he had all the account books, and even then the dishonesty of people- really it's terrible! They threw their hats in the air 'Now you won't be able to know what we owe you Mr. Pike- we don't owe you anything!' And with the water and that - Eileen will tell you and my other sister, I don't remember about it - but here Dad comes in the next morning with the account books and he saying to them then 'How much is that?' 'What's his name?' 'How much is he owing me?' And with their younger eyes they were able to tell. So the next afternoon or a couple of days later they said 'Oh, well we don't owe you anything!' and he said 'Oh, yes you owe so-and-so! From the account book I was able to decipher how much was owing!' But even in those days there was a lot of - over in Windsor - I don't know if you remember, there was the Pyjama Girl Case?

Oh, yes.

It was a big case there then. And there's the Denzel girl - there were a lot of murders for the small population!

Oh, we had a lovely childhood.

14.12 Did you go to school in the local primary school?

Yes. In St. Joseph's Catholic School.

Right. That's at Penrith?

Yes. It was down there on the corner of Evans Street and High Street. Where the Half Case is there now - where it was, it's closed now - and that was St. Joseph's. The convent was facing the High Street and then the School was at the back in Evans Street.

And that's all gone now?

Oh. It's all gone, yes. And the Sisters have a Convent down Evans Street only there. They have the Caroline Chisolm School further round, that goes up there, but ... no. Yes, it's all gone there. It's sad seeing really go. Some of the old memories you have of your childhood like that.

A lot of the old memories are contained in old buildings aren't they- they're familiar landmarks?

Yes. You think of when you see a building, 'Oh, that's where I went to school'. And then I finished off down at Our Lady of Mercy College at Parramatta then. But it didn't mean the same, because all.... I think you make the friendships and that when you're younger, that when you go to a strange school when you're sixteen or so, it doesn't mean the same somehow - you just go through high school and that together.

And you've kept friendly with the people that you knew in your earlier schooldays?

No. A lot of them have gone - have left Penrith now. I don't think there'd be anybody in Penrith now that went to school with me. They've moved out of the area.

15.51 And did you walk to school from here when you were young?

Yes. Well we lived over in Stafford Street then. See that photo over there?

Oh, yes.

We used to live in that house there. And that house there was very interesting. It went right through from in Stafford Street there to Castlereagh Street. Do you know Castlereagh Street?

Yes.

Well how it's built now they've made in front of that house there there's another whole block of houses that's built on that land.

Oh, really! And that home still stands?

Oh, yes. That's how it is today.

16.27 Oh I thought when you came to this area you came straight to this house?

No, no.

But you lived there first?

Yes. Because we came in '36 and we didn't come here until '41.

Oh, right. That's why I picked this one because that's the period we're really looking at - the '40s.

Oh. Yes. Well when we came in this house there was no Lemongrove Bridge there. The Army Camp Base - that was a speedway there before the War – the Army took it over in about 1939 as soon as the War started in September. And they used to have a man on duty there from the railway - a 24-hour service it was - and they'd just open it up as you wanted to go across in the car. But you can imagine there wasn't the number of cars like there are today.

No. It would be a full time job today wouldn't it!

Oh... yes. And there also used to be one up in King Street too. There were two gates there that they used to open there. Oh and there used to be a little shop there, further on in Belmore Street there, a little shop there. They used to have ... you'd get to know the people in there and you know the people coming in - their customers. She used to have very good high quality fruit and vegetables. Oh, and she'd have most of the things you'd get at a little corner shop. And she'd make lovely ice blocks out of the fruit.

You remember those?

Yes. Well she married - Smedley's their name was - she married a man much older than herself. She used to teach music. And then she married again and she married a man much younger than herself and - Mrs. Crosier- she lives across the road here.

She's still there?

Yes. She might be an interesting lady for you to ... 'cause she's lived there for many years.

Yes.

18.44 So did you - you all walked to school together I suppose - all the children - your parents didn't have to take you to school?

Oh, well by the time we got here.

Oh you were older?

See my sister was married in 1943 - she was 22, Gladys at Eastwood – and Eileen had left school, so I was the only one. And by 1941 I'd left school. I think it was '42.

Oh had you?

Yes. So there was no walking to school then. It was quite safe in those days at any rate. Little children five and six - oh well they didn't go to school that much at five - seven or eight they'd walk by themselves.

19.19 No worries. Not much traffic and nothing much else to worry about?

Oh, no. It was very safe. Going over to Stafford Street there, you'd have one market garden there. Old Mr. McGrath, his name was. I can still see that old man. And you'd go on a Saturday afternoon and you'd buy beetroot from him and cook it for Sunday. Oh, it was lovely.

It sounds wonderful!

Oh he'd sell beans, potatoes, but we mainly got the beetroot off him. They were lovely beetroot. And we used to have ... when we were here with all the fruit trees here, my parents used to love preserving them.

Did they?

Yes. Dad went in with Mum and help her preserve them?

He'd do it too?

Yes. Because sometimes they used to be given any fruit that somebody else had, some fruit and we'd give them - we had a big plum tree there at the back- and we might give them plums.

And then you'd have such a surplus that the only way to preserve them would be to bottle them. And Dad used to like doing it.

20.28 And did you give them to other people as gifts? Did you exchange things with neighbours?

Oh, no. Just that you'd give them if you had too much fruit, a surplus of it at a particular time and you couldn't use it, well you'd give it around the neighbours and that.

And they'd do the same, I suppose?

Yes. If they had it.

20.48 And did you have chooks here too?

Yes. We had fowls there. We had up to about 30 at one time there. Yes it's only really since Dad's died ... he died ... it'll be just over 17 years ago, and he had them until he got very ill. He used to like the fowls, Mum having the fresh eggs and that. You'd hardly credit it, but when we were over in Stafford Street we had a cow over there.

Did you? Your own milk?

Yes, and cream. .And we had the fowls over there. You'd have quite a lot of produce and that, that you'd be able to have for eating and that.

21.27 And how did your mother get on for shopping? Did she get things delivered mostly?

Yes. Yes, that was ... we were only talking about that a few weeks ago, about how hard it is, really, it is harder now for women for shopping than it was then, because I remember the butcher used to come around. He'd come around and write down what you'd want and then he'd deliver in a couple of days. And then the baker would come around with the bread. The milkman - not like today with the bottles - you'd take your jug out and then he'd have a big container and then he'd take, usually it was on the side it would say 'a pint' it would have on the jug, so you'd know how much milk you were getting - your own jug. And the grocer used to come and not only that, but with their order most weeks, having five people - my sister had married by then - you did get a big container of boiled lollies. Because, with some people - that was the same as now, there was dishonesty - they'd let their accounts run and they just

wouldn't pay them. But Mum was always very honest and so was Dad. He had a very good name in business.

So they got boiled lollies as a reward for their order?

Yes, for being a good customer.

That's a lovely touch isn't it?

Yes. Well most of the things were delivered, or if you were down the street and you didn't feel as though you could carry the things home, you'd put your order in or you might go round the shop. But it wasn't like the modern day shop where you'd go on aisles. You'd go on a counter and then you'd see ... oh, yes ... 'Now, what would you like today, Mr. Smith?' "Would you have that brand that I like?" and he'd bring it over. 'Oh, yes I'll have that.' So you'd just run over the amount of things that you were going to order and then he'd bring it in a day or two. Oh, it was different. .And they'd give you a seat. You'd sit down when you ordered things in those days. And there'd be a big ... like a shelf thing where you'd sit down and you were a treated customer to them. And they treated you with respect, but now when you go through the aisles you see people spending two hundred dollars and just going through like a...

Like as if they were spending sixpence - it doesn't make any difference! Yes.

It's just a different ... the whole aspect of life has changed so much. But it made it easy in those days. Now, you really have to have a car to do your shopping because you've got to bring them home yourself. But in those days they'd had the courtesy to have everything delivered to you.

24.24 And I suppose while your mother was alive the supermarkets had come and she would have seen that change too in shopping facilities?

Oh, yes. Well she often said all the ... once when she was watching, I think, something on television she said 'I remember when they went off to the ... in the early 19... - before the First World War and the Second World War but she also remembered them going off to the War over in Africa.

Oh, the Boer War!

Yes. Over there, and that. Because she was nearly 94 when she died. It's only just three years ago last week it was since she died. And her mind was very good. She'd had strokes, but she couldn't talk very much, and she had the Parkinson's disease which is a terrible disease really. When we think back, it was hard for her. We were working. I had my own business and Eileen was working at the Camp. But she still liked to go down shopping. She'd walk, because she never drove a car. But just to be able to go out and see people down the street that she knew - 'cause at that time she still knew a fair number of people there. To illustrate the point, when we were growing up we had another cousin that used to come for holidays with us. Every holiday she'd come from over in North Sydney - Mum's sister's eldest daughter. And one day one of the travellers - they used to be ... I don't know whether your mother used to tell you about them? There used to be a lot of travellers in those days in the '30s and '20s. They'd come around with a little bag like this - oh, the cotton and thread and scissors and all these haberdashery items that they sell. They mustn't have made very much money on them. And whenever anybody rang on the door we all - the five of us - used to come to the door with Mum. And this Mr. Brodner... his name was ... no it was somebody who didn't know Mum and he said 'All these are yours?' She said 'No, four and he said 'Oh .. Well that one's yours!' and this is my cousin! And she used to come to stay with us even when she was engaged and that she used to love coming up here. And she used to go down the street with Mum and 'Good morning Mrs. Pike' or 'Good afternoon Mrs. Pike'. 'Auntie Lizzie,' she said 'does everybody in Penrith know you?' 'Oh, no' but she said 'having Dad in business and that they know who I am and it's just the courtesy of saying good afternoon or good morning. "Oh", she said 'No-one knows us like that in North Sydney'. (Laughs)

The difference between city and country in those days.

Yes in those days there you'd know so many people. It was always funny of a Friday night you'd go down in the car and that was the important night of the week... that was... and you'd do your shopping. You'd do your shopping on Friday night. And then Dad went to meet somebody he knew and they'd talk, like a lot of men do. They like to talk about whatever's happening at the time. And you'd do your shopping at night and that there.

Community activity really!

Yes. It was. .And there used to be dances quite often of a Friday and Saturday night too.

27.55 Did you go to those?

Oh, Mum wouldn't allow me until I was about 18. And then we'd go in – not by myself - I'd go with Eileen or my other sister. We used to go to dances at the Dungowan Hotel, they used to have dances there... or out at the Castlereagh Hall there right on the top of the Hill there. They used to have good dances there. And where else did they have them... They were the two main things. And they'd have balls down at the Dungowan too. They used to have the Catholic Balls down there. And they were quite good. They'd have about 200 or more at the balls then.

28.36 And what else did you do for recreation?

Oh, well I always used to like ... I've always liked reading. And doing sewing. For over thirty years now I've been in the Historical Society and I'm very interested in local history or Australian history or my own family history. And that takes up a lot of your time. Well that would have been in the 1950's that was when I first joined up with the Historical Society. They used to have the meetings there. You know where the Library is at the bottom of the hill?

Yes.

There used to be a little engineer's hut- corrugated iron - there and we used to have - not when we had a public speaker, we used to have it at the Arms Hotel opposite the Catholic Church - but when we had just an ordinary meeting we'd have it in this funny little engineer's hut there. That was before the...

Part of the Council was it?

Yes they owned that yes. So that was where we had the meetings there. But all along there near the school there in Henry Street that was all little cottages and that along there. Our next door neighbour, her mother Mrs. Parks, lived in one of those. And where the Police Station is now they had cottages there. The Plunketts lived there and Mrs. Plunkett's sister, Miss Coffey, she lived there and I don't know whether you've heard of Mrs. Price - she was on the Council at one time - she lived just along there as well. They were all private homes there.

And they've all been demolished?

Yes. All gone now. Yes. And they were quite nice cottages along there.

30.27 The people who lived there must have felt a sense of loss when they were all demolished?

Oh, yes. It's changed so much from what it was, and where 2KA is there, that was ... I forget the name now ... that was a nice private home and she used to have a couple of horses. That must have been some relation - and they had two horses just there, and that was very far from High Street there. It just changed there when the Hardicans ... that's the only house that's remaining there now, closer down towards Belmore Street. The Hardicans had a two-storey place there that's still standing. Just this side of if going towards High Street is the little shop that I was telling you about where the Smedleys had it. So it's all gone, all along there. And there was a Nurse Jones just around the corner. And all those houses have gone. Where the Motor Registry is - down there they've gone. Further down towards the Technical College there were two two-storey places there too. We were only just saying this week, all that empty land there - there when you come over from the railway station, you look straight across. The Red Cow's that side and all that empty land just recently ... my shop was in one of those.

Oh was it?

Yes. And it's gone now? And the Flannerys had a milk-bar and that right on the corner for the railway passengers.

Oh yes. Refreshments!

Yes. In those days they stopped about a quarter of an hour before going up Mount Victoria and it used to give them enough time to...

END SIDE A.

SIDE B.

0.04 Yes it just gave them enough time into Flannery's shop to go over from the railway station and to have a milkshake or buy some lollies or whatever they wanted to over there. They did have the refreshments shop at the railway station as well, but with the number of passengers that were going then they wouldn't have time for everybody to be served, so it would be quicker to go over to the Flannery's shop. That's gone too with those shops.

0.31 **Was that with the steam trains was it, or...?**

Yes. Yes. When I used to travel down to Sydney for 12 years...

To work?

Yes. To work there. I was in the clothing trade. Cutting and designing. And you'd get so dirty you'd have to wash your hair every day or every second day and your clothes - everything would have to be washed every day – with all the soot that would come on your clothes. And in the summertime ... oh, dear oh dear, it was terrible - so hot! But it didn't take very much more in travelling time than it does now, so they haven't improved it a lot.

1.12 So when you left school, did you go straight into dressmaking?

No. I went to McCabe Academy down in Sydney for a year and they told me there that I'd be better at cutting and designing, so...

What were you doing there at McCabe?

It was like a ... you're learning how to make patterns and grade them and sewing and illustration. I did illustration work. And things like that. In most of it I was better at cutting and that, which I am. I love cutting! I still love doing sewing!

Do you still make clothes?

Oh, yes. I don't do it for anybody else, only the family now, because I just haven't got time. I've been trying to make Betty a dress there. I made her three blouses the week before. We do Meals on Wheels and I visit some of the sick people and then I have an aunty down at Rooty Hill that I like to visit. Two aunts - Mum's brother's widow - and I don't know, the time ... I'm on duty with the family history once a month and with the Historical Society once a month. So, I don't know. The time goes by and you don't get the things done that you'd like to. Maybe getting old and you're a bit slower! (Laughs).

I think maybe the days have shrunk!

Yes. I don't know what it is. Oh, and with the garden too. When Dad was alive he liked to keep control of the garden, but now, I mean we have a lot of garden here, back and front and cutting the lawns and that.

2 .44 You do all that yourself? You and your sister?

Yes. So the time goes by. And looking after ourselves and shopping and things like that. I don't know where the time goes, but they go one day after the other.

2.58 It flies doesn't it. And did you belong to any other - you or your mother - belong to any organisations like the CWA or...?

Mum did for a little while. But I belonged to what they call The Legion of Mary in the Catholic Church here and you go and visit the hospitals and you used to visit sick people in their homes, or if people wanted - even non-Catholics - if they wanted visiting, we'd go and visit them. Because some people are lonely and even more so these days. And that was it. I've always been a very practising Catholic person and go to Mass every Sunday which I think is very important. People now they just don't go to - whatever church you are - they just don't seem to have the same religious beliefs that they used to have.

3.53 Do you think that the Church used to play a bigger role in society in this community in the old days, say in the '40s and '50s than it does now?

Oh yes definitely. They used to have tennis clubs and I belonged to the '21 and Over Club' and you'd go on outings and you might go to a theatre party or you might go on an outing for a day bushwalking or sometimes we'd go away for weekends in a bus. But yes. I think so. I think they did. They seem to go their own way more, the younger people now. They don't want to be restricted in any way.

Do you find that most of the people at Church now are older people?

No. Well I go to the Latin Mass. I still attend the Latin Mass - I haven't been to Church down here for 15 years. I go to the Latin Mass and I go down to Castle Hill and that's where it is there. And no, there are as many young people with children than there are older people.

That's interesting.

Yes, it is. Some of them are realising now after being away from Church ... I don't know what it is, but they say that it means something in their life to have God in their life now.

The pendulum's starting to swing back?

Yes. Whether or not they're growing more mature or whether were they were kicking over the traces as they used to say years ago, and they wanted to go their own way, but these would have been young people in their late 20s or early '30s - with children from about two years of age up until about eight or nine, that age group. But there'd be as many of those, I'd say, and babies as there are mature people. So I don't believe when they say it's only the old people that go to Church - I don't believe that.

6.00 And what about health services in the area? What was it like when you were growing up here as compared to now?

Well they had the Governor Phillip Hospital. That was the only one there. Near the end of the War in 1945 I was walking along the verandah there – it wasn't built in then - and I fell over and had a very bad break. The foot went right around there - it was turned right around. The bone went right through the skin there. It was a very bad break. But in those days, that was the end of '45, there was only Governor Phillip Hospital and that wasn't Governor Phillip then. That was just the Nepean Cottage Hospital then.

And that's where you went to have it dressed?

Yes. And Doctor Barrow was the doctor. He had his surgery and that on the corner of High Street and Evans Street on the other side. That would be on the south-east corner. And he'd been in the First World War and he had a particular interest in drugs because he had done a lot in the First World War and I think he did a marvellous job, because I know at the same time there was another fellow that broke his ankle and he was a cripple afterwards.

Really! He didn't have the good doctor!

No. And he was a very caring doctor. We're lucky to have a doctor now that will come out to us at night time. He's a very good doctor. But in those days the doctors - it was part of their being a doctor - if you were called out at night well you went. But now, a lot of them won't. When my sister wanted a doctor the other night - the doctor for my brother-in law - they couldn't get a doctor.

Really!

No. They couldn't get a doctor for him. So they had to ring up the specialist that they have down there and they had to get him into the St. Vincent's.

In Sydney! Goodness.

And then the ambulance didn't want to take him because that was out of the area. And he was in so much pain and he had to go to Auburn and then they had to get him out of one ambulance and into the other to get him down to St. Vincents.

Goodness, when someone's so ill!

Yes. He was in terrible pain. But, health wise there I wasn't covered for insurance and so you'd have to pay all the accounts yourself at the hospital and for the doctor. Not like now with private insurance you're covered for anything that might come up. The same with the chemist you'd have to pay - nothing for the age pensioners or anything. No reduction in the price of things from the chemist shop or anything. You just had to make sure that you had the money to pay for it.

Or that you didn't get ill!

Yes. That's right. Although I think the prices in those days ... thinking back they didn't seem to be as high in comparison to your wages, but maybe they were because the wages when I first started working were only three guineas a week in those days. That was just after the War ... and you didn't get any holiday, only just Christmas and New Year and things like that. You didn't get paid for your holidays. Only for those days or Good Friday. And then after a while then that came then you got a month off at Christmas time.

9.11 When you first were working in the city after you finished at that College, where did you work then?

Oh, well see that was near the end of War when I broke my ankle so I couldn't do any travelling. I couldn't walk for, oh, it might have been 18 months and then I did dressmaking 'cause I'd have done that course. And then after about three years I started to travel down to Sydney there with cutting, down there in Oxford Street and then in Pitt Street. I did all different types. I did lingerie - high-class lingerie. That Dorothy Unger...

Oh yes. She's still going - or the store is!

... used to have some of the J & J Breton that I worked for. They had beautiful lingerie. So I had experience in almost any type of sewing that you had. There was underwear and then I had blouses and skirts, and they also made overcoats and then I went into dresses and that and then in children's-wear. I didn't like children's-wear very much. And then it was just a chance remark, one of the ladies from down in the workroom, she said 'Oh, you shouldn't be here, you should have your own business!' And I had never thought of it before. And I only had about five hundred pounds but I started up ... I was manufacturing for a year but it was too hard to get into. They had troubles and that, but you just couldn't make a living out of it. And then someone said 'Oh if you had have stuck to it you might have!' But then I went into a shop down at, as I told you, down there at the other end of Station Street and I was there for eleven years. And they were very good years there.

11.28 You made things to order for people or did you sew for the shop?

Yes. And stock too. Then I had a lot of millinery and gloves and handbags and a bit of jewellery and jumpers and things like that, so if they wanted a jumper there, if they wanted a skirt made they could buy material or I had materials also.

And what did you call your shop?

Gay-Marie Fashions.

Gay-Marie?

Yes. And then the rents went up so high then. When I first went in there it was three guineas a week, that was 1960/61, and then he wanted, about '73, they wanted about 60 dollars which was a lot of money then. And you just couldn't make it.

So is that why you sold the shop?

No I didn't own it. I was just renting it. And then I went into Parker Arcade on the first floor there where Fletcher's used to have the shop there and they have the fruit shop there now. So I went upstairs there and I was there for about 12 years I was. And mother was getting very sick by that time so I decided at Easter in 1974, I think it was, no – 1984 - that I'd have to be at home with her. So I decided then that I couldn't sell very much of it there. So, I took most of the materials home. I've got like a workroom out here.

Oh have you? So you probably do just as much at home?

Oh I do a lot of sewing. I don't make for other people. Oh, I made a couple of – wedding gowns and that. I used to love wedding gowns and bridal frocks. I still do a lot of costumes and that. I've got three costumes of my own from 1854. One the bustle style in the 1870s and I've got a crinoline from the 1860s.

Are they originals that you have, or they're copies that you've made?

No. I made them myself. Yes. I've got a lot of fashion books there and I make them from there. But I always love wedding dresses and when I was making - young girls used to make their debut and they used to have lovely white frock and that they'd have for it -and all the frocks then were long frocks for evening wear. Mostly now they're mid-calf that they have now. They were all long frocks there. And it was very lovely seeing young girls and they'd have their pinched in frocks and that made with gathered skirts and things. I think the styles now for young people are not the same.

No. They're all very short and skimpy aren't they?

Yes there just doesn't seem to be any style in them. There used to be a lot of designing and for evening wear - I remember after the War, they still used to have frocks and they'd have a bit of beading and that on top of it for day wear. It wasn't out of place to wear beading on frocks then, on black frocks.

I think beading's coming back a little bit - more for evening I suppose?

Yes. More for evening wear. Down at Grace Brothers the other day Eileen and I - oh, there's some beautiful gowns down there - over a thousand dollars for beading and sequins and they're beautiful things they are. All lined with silk underneath. Lovely things. But I just love fashion. I just love to look at frocks and how they're constructed and the making – how they make them and that. I've always ... not that I'm mad on clothes or anything. I've got a lot of clothes, but it's not that I'm mad on clothes, it's just that I like to see how they're constructed and how they're made. I find it very interesting.

That creative talent that you've got, you've put it to good use.

Yes. I've had a happy life. A lot of people say 'Oh you're not married and got children?' I don't think ... with some people you don't need children. I really don't think you need children to make a full life. You should be able to ... I know my sister at Eastwood, she had to get married and have children. That was her. She would have died. And my father - oh, if he hadn't have had children! It's just the different...

It's different isn't it? But I mean you can make a full life. You've obviously had a happy full life with your friends and activities.

Yes. I don't regret anything. Oh, you say things and do things you shouldn't say, but speaking of life generally, no there's nothing ... I've had a happy life. I know with a lot of women they ... you're made up really to have children. Most women are.

16.55 Yes. And have you found it at all difficult, you know, that you were unaccepted because you weren't married and hadn't children?

I think so yes. Forty years or so back they used to think there was something with you if you didn't marry. I know. 'When are you going to get married Mary?' And one friend of Betty's he said 'What's going to happen to you when you get older and you won't have anybody to look after you?' He died when he was about 40 and his wife's been a widow by herself for the last 35 years and she had a lot of children. She had seven children to bring up by herself. So you can't tell.

No. You can't plan these things can you?

It's just the way that life is. God plays a very important part in my life. I'm a religious person. I believe that if you pray to God he'll help you through life with all the decisions that you have to make.

So you've got a strength there to rely on?

Oh yes. I don't know how anybody goes through life without – whether you're Catholic or Church of England, whatever religion - if you pray to God to help you through the day ... I don't know how people get on without God.

18.15 And do you think that these days women who decide to be single are more accepted? I mean there are a lot more people who are career women aren't there, these days, and decide they don't want to marry? But I think attitudes have changed perhaps a bit?

I think they would have. But I think it's gone too much the other way. Single women having children. I don't think a child can be brought up without a father and a mother. They need the strength of the father and the softness and that of a mother. They need both parents. No I think that women now - well they're more independent - women now are. But I've never...

So you were fairly independent by the sounds of it?

Oh, yes. I was a very independent person, yes. I think that's the Irish coming out in me! Because, Mum was a very extraordinary person in a way. She had ideas well beyond any for her age there. She always said that whatever you want to do in life, if you think you have the ability to do it, you do it. She said there shouldn't be any restrictions on what a woman can do or what they can't do. She never tried to stop us ... I mean she stopped us from going out if she thought company was bad, but for doing work and for what we wanted to do in life - you do it! I think that's why Betty ... the good foundation that mother gave her ... helping people. 'Cause Mum used to help people in the Depression years and that. I don't know whether you've heard it but the tramps used to go around looking for work in those days, and when we used to live over at Stafford Street there, they used to have a sign – the tramps did - if they'd get food at a place. So they used to have a chalk and they'd put - we never was able to find it - but they'd always come to Mum for sandwiches and tea and hot water and things like that and she'd give it to them.

They knew she was a good place to provide for them.

Yes. And the same when we lived up at Orange there - the same way there. They had some kind of a sign - we could never find it - but they found their way there.

20.38 Were they people out of work because of the Depression?

Yes. Yes. It was very hard.

Some of them wouldn't have normally been tramps then? It was because of the hard times?

Oh, no. Some of them were educated people and that and some of them - you'd get to talk to them, Mum said - and they felt they were more of a hindrance to the family being at home and they couldn't work, with them having to find something to eat, than if they were on the roads and they'd just go from one ... like some of them would go out west and try to find work on the stations and that. But it was the same everywhere. It was so hard and there was no unemployment benefits like there is today.

So they went out 'humping their blueys' they used to call it, didn't they?

Yes. So it was very hard days. Well as Mr. Barr - he's an author here in Penrith that writes poetry - he wrote a little story of his life. He said that 'I'd never thought that I'd see people going in queues for food', he said, as he saw them in the '30s . He said 'I'd never thought I'd see it again in my lifetime'. He said 'Here it is back again in the 1980's and 1990.'

22.00 Yes. It's like a repetition of history, isn't it, a bit?

Yes. One advantage is that they do have unemployment and you can go into hospital if you get sick now. There is that advantage to it. But it does something to young people if they can't get jobs. Psychologically it's a terrible thing.

Bad for their self-esteem and confidence.

Oh, yes. They feel as if they've been put onto the rubbish tip or something like that.

22.34 After the War, you know, there were a lot of migrants came out from Europe, the displaced people and so forth. Did you have many people like that coming to live near here or did you come in to contact with them at all?

Yes. Well down at the Army Camp here they had a lot of migrants down there after the War and about 1947 - around those years - for a few years there. And you'd see them, the Polish and some of the French and some of the other ones - they were Catholics - and you'd see them come in. You knew that they didn't belong to the district and then you'd hear that they were from the Army Camp over here - migrant camp - they put a certain section of it for it. And they came from there.

They came to Church?

Yes. On a Sunday you'd see them. And also - not so much in Penrith - but out at Mulgoa and Wallacia with the building of the Warragamba Dam there was a lot there - hundreds out there.

And did you make friends with any of them. They weren't your actual neighbours here were they?

No they didn't live around here for a while. After the 1950's that was when you notice foreign faces around Penrith. There's a couple of families further down near Robert Street there. Yes, it would be in the 1950's. But you didn't notice a lot of them, but I think most of the migrants came out in the late 1950's I think, a lot of them.

Yes. They started coming in the early '50s but they probably didn't - I think there were a lot more out Blacktown area maybe more than Penrith.

Yes. I think they did go there. Because it was hard enough getting housing after the War. The housing situation was very acute, it was, around the Penrith area and it was still hard to get building materials. And I know that some of the builders and that ... I was talking to an older man not long ago and he said oh, for him to try - and he was in the trade - to get the building materials it was so hard to get, he said. But the Government was taking a lot of it for Housing Commission homes and things like that. They hadn't got into the stride then of big business and that. They hadn't started up again.

And then it boomed a bit later.

Yes. And it was hard. Around our area here at Lemongrove it didn't affect us in any way because most of the homes had already been built, they were built years ago.

It was established.

Yes. So the whole Lemongrove area was ... it was only in the 1960's or early 1970's that the flats and units started to be built. And that was when the changes came.

25.36 Right. Well talking about - you know, reflecting back on your life in the earlier days here in the late '40s and '50s and then looking at the changes that have taken place, how do you feel about what has happened as far as the landscape is concerned? Do you feel a sense of a loss of space around you? Or what is mostly that you dislike or like about what has happened?

Oh well it hasn't changed a lot, only what I - as I said to you previously - with the units across the road from there that has blocked out our view of the Mountains, but it hasn't made any difference to the atmosphere around Lemongrove. But I think with the dumping of the rubbish that we read about so much in the local paper, and the Nepean River, something will just have to be done about it. The contamination! And even the - there are some market gardeners still out there at Castlereagh on the Nepean River- and they're telling them not to water their vegetables with the water that they have irrigated from the river! And they're growing the vegetables for the markets!

Really!

So, I mean there's something very wrong when they're telling them one way, and yet they have to do it because that's their livelihood. So, with the Lakes Scheme, I think that's a terrible thing, that is myself. All Castlereagh Road will be under water. You've got to right around Cranebrook right up to the top almost to where the hall is right on the hill there. That is just going to be all covered over with water, that will be.

Are there some natural lakes there at the moment? Small natural lakes there at the moment and they're going to enlarge them?

Yes. It'll be all covered over. There'll be no Castlereagh Road.

Really!

No. One of the Managers of the Lakes Scheme came up to the Historical Society and it made me quite ill to think that that would happen. There'll be a couple of little islands. There'll be ... near the Methodist Church there is as you go round the corner there and the school's opposite, in Castlereagh Road, well where - it's the Uniting Church is there - that'll be like a little island and where the Dixons have their very old house further on down in Castlereagh Street that'll be like an island, but the rest of that is going to be covered over.

28.13 And why is that house being left there? Because it's a Heritage house or ...?

Oh, yes it's about 1817.

They've fought to keep it there or something have they?

Well I don't know. MacArthur's Farm that they had there - that's all gone – that was in the ... maybe late 1790's or very early 1800's. That's gone, but the cemetery's still there.

Will that be flooded, the cemetery?

I don't know about that. They said that ... I don't know what's going to happen to the old one in Church Lane- the old one they call the Macquarie cemetery - what's going to happen to that I don't know.

28.58 I don't know very much about this Lakes Scheme, but their idea is to improve the environment by putting in some, you know, environmental lakes? Is that the idea? After having ruined it in other area!

Well in the beginning - I was talking to one of the aldermen - and he said in the beginning they were going to mine out there for the gravel and that and then they were supposed to put all those mounds of earth back after they were finished. After a while they didn't do anything about it and then they got to the Council - which I still say they got to them - and then they decided amongst themselves that they'd have this Lakes Scheme. And by this time a lot of the farms had been bought and they ... I think there are only about two farms right over Castlereagh now. They were doing a lot of dairying. My father had a dairy there in the '30s and early '40s. And all of those have gone now, and the same with the milk factory - the milk factory that was on the Castlereagh Road - we were lucky that we had some shares in that! And most of the milk is bottled down at Parramatta in their big factory and all they do is distribute it here. So it's deteriorated in that respect because it's lost jobs for people.

30.23 And that would have been fertile land out that way?

Oh, beautiful. Beautiful land out there and all the lovely very high quality milk they produced here, and then they had orchards - oranges they produced out there. Oranges more - I don't think they had much in the way of stone fruits. But in the very early days they had wheat out here, but they had that rust that got into it. So it's been citrus fruit or the dairying out there a lot, or wheat and barley and things like that.

And so all that's gone?

Yes. All gone.

31.06 So how do you feel about the changes that have taken place as far as you're concerned personally?

Well I'm not a forward going person, so I think it's been deterioration really in the environment. I think that, as an uncle of mine said, the Government's allowing all this beautiful land to be used for housing and things like that and all this fertile arable land. They've got to go out further from the coast line and it's going to cost so much more for transport just for them to produce it so the cost of living must go up. And not only that but the land's being lost.

31.50 And what about your life as a woman living in the area? How do you feel it's changed for you? Are there any aspects of living here now that have changed to your disadvantage?

That's a hard one, that one there. I hadn't thought about that.

Well you mentioned before that you think it's harder to shop now than it was.

Oh, yes you really have to have a car to do shopping, and most of it you have to pay cash. So I think for shopping purposes it's a deterioration.

END TAPE 1

TAPE 2

SIDE A

0.05 On your feelings about the changes that have taken places here after the War, how do you feel it's affected you personally?

Well as I said previously, with the lovely view that we used to have over the Mountains, looking out west there, with the building of the units opposite it has taken away that lovely sight that we used to have. But as people say that it's progress- which I deny that that's right. And also with the shopping... shopping wise it's not as good as it used to be. You really have to have a car to go shopping now, and the service that you used to have in those days is not as good. So shopping wise I think it's deterioration in service. And there are so many big businesses in Penrith, with the increase of population, that you lose a lot of your identity here with the number of people living here. It was just like a little town in the 1930s and '40s and you used to know so many people here. But you lose that identity - with the increase of population here. And also I mentioned the Lemongrove crossing that you used to have

opposite the Army Camp, that was quite a good thing really for people walking, because it was a very short route down to the shopping centre. Whereas now you've got to come up to the Lemongrove Bridge and then walk up, so if anything happens to your car, it's hard on you. I feel sometimes it makes my heart palpitate, if I have anything wrong with the car and I have to go shopping down there. And also for walking and feeling secure at night. You just couldn't go out by yourself or go down to the theatre as I used to go, or the ballet. I used to like it when I was younger. And my mother used to like the ballet too and we used to go to Sydney and we wouldn't arrive here until the early hours of the morning, and you felt quite safe coming home. But that's changed too. You just haven't got that sense of being safe, which is the same with security wise in your house. You've got to lock all your doors and window up. It's just a different world really!

How's that?

That's great. Thank you very much for your time.

END TAPE