

INTERVIEW NO. 30

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MRS. AMELIA VINCENT
7 THIRD AVENUE
BLACKTOWN. N.S.W. 2148.

0.28 My name is Amelia Vincent (nee Tester). I live at number 7, Third Avenue, Blacktown. I was born in Italy in 1914. My nationality of course is Italian. I've been naturalised of course and I married an Australian. I'm married, I have four children, four great grandchildren and nine grandchildren.

1.19 **First of all I'll just ask you a couple of background questions. You came out here in 1922, is that right.**

1922, yes.

And you migrated from Italy?

1922.

And you moved straight to Blacktown when you came out here?

No. We were in Sydney for about 12 months and then my father came out here to Blacktown and he was told that in Blacktown land was very cheap. Eighty-nine pounds for a block of land. And also how they sold that land was that Blacktown was going to be electrified. Well, that didn't happen for many, many years after but that's what they (*used for*) selling the land. And there was only one house in this street.

Was there?

Until my father built the house where we lived in. And then another friend of his who migrated out here too ... so he built across the road from us. The house is still standing there now.

He was Italian too was he?

Yes. They were friends actually, they came out together. And so that's how they built their homes.

2.45 **What sort of work did your father do?**

Bricklayer. He was a bricklayer, and luckily because there was plenty of work at that time. When they came here they went to see the Italian Consul and asked him could they tell them what was going on. They said 'Oh don't go any further! Don't go to Queensland!' 'Cause they thought they might have to go to Queensland to get jobs. He said 'Oh, no stay in Sydney because there's a lot of work'. So that's when they remained. So the first house we lived in was in Crown Street in Sydney and of course when my father saw, you know, the locality he said 'Oh, this is no place for my child to grow up in' and that's when he decided to come to Blacktown.

3.46 **And did your mother work at all?**

No. She worked in the vineyard. She grew our own vegetables and she had some chooks. I mean it was very, very primitive because he built half the house - half at a time - on account of his money. It wouldn't stretch out. She used to boil the clothes in a kerosene tin outside in the open with a stick, stir it around. But she didn't mind. She just said 'Well it's better than where we come from'.

Right. 'Cause that was just at the time of the outbreak of the First World War, or it was when you were born?

Yes. The outbreak finished. Yes well my father was in the army for about four years, so she took in real good stride because she thought it's better than where we were, you know.

But it wouldn't have been easy all the same?

Oh, no it wasn't.

4.43 Did she speak English at all?

Nothing.

What about your father? Did he speak English?

Well he went and had a few lessons. There was a place where they could go and get lessons those days. I don't know just where ...

What, locally, or in the City?

No, in Sydney. And he picked it up quite well. But my mother couldn't. Oh, look it was pathetic. I used to feel so sorry for her. She couldn't make a conversation. All those years you know.

5.09 It must have made her quite lonely.

And of course she was depending on me so much, 'cause I did all her messages and come to all the rescues, more or less. But it was very hard and when I think back, the women that come here now, they have every opportunity. Well women those days - they didn't want them to work though. You know, there was no jobs for them. Even when I was married in 1935 we had to keep it a secret, because you're not allowed to work.

Because you were married?

Married women weren't allowed to work! It was very hard. And then after 12 months I said well I can't keep the secret any longer! Anyway, as it was, my husband was working so I stayed home and reared children (laughs) of which I had four!

6.09 So when you first came here you were ten years old?

Yes.

And when you moved out to Blacktown, what are your first memories of what the area was like then?

Oh, well it was just like ... there was just bush tracks to the railway, bush tracks everywhere, and a house here and there. There was, as I say, one in this street and perhaps another one in Second Avenue, another one in First Avenue, and we had to cross creeks to get across, you know, to the station. 'Cause we were close here. And next door to us, down the bottom of Third Avenue was a great big dairy farm - there was cows running everywhere - which now is the RSL. They've built the RSL, you know, Blacktown. Oh we've seen a lot of progress. There's no doubt about it, you know. And then of course when the electric trains did arrive - I just can't remember the dates!

I think it was about 1955.

Yes. Well, now from 1924 when we came here there was supposed to have been electric trains then! So we had to wait all those years.

All that time!

But still, of course not knowing the language, my parents didn't go anywhere. My father had to go by train to work at first, but then he got a job at Seven Hills Tile Works which he used to ride his bike. So there was no need to go on the trains.

7.43 There was no other transport I suppose - only the trains?

Just the trains and a lot of people. A lot of families had horse and sulky.

Did they?

Well that's how they travelled around. But we didn't have a horse and sulky, but there was no reason, because I went to Blacktown school.

8.03 You walked to school did you?

Walked to school. And my mother, of course as I say, she didn't go anywhere at all.

Didn't she? She didn't do the shopping or anything?

No. We depended on the main street here and I used to go with her to do the shopping. We used to carry it home of course.

8.21 And you'd interpret for her?

Oh, in every way.

That must have been hard for you too?

Oh, and of course when you're young and silly, you know, you think 'Oh, ...' 'cause I didn't like talking in front of her in our language because all the children used to laugh at us, you know.

They weren't used to hearing foreign languages?

Oh no they didn't like foreigners whatsoever.

8.44 Did you find that you weren't very well accepted, or ...?

I found, well, even at school the girls used to make fun at me. And of course they even attacked me one day and pulled my hair and all that, you know. Oh, it was ... look you weren't wanted and that was all there was to it. But as years went by, you know, ...

It improved gradually, but it took a long time?

A long time. No we weren't wanted! Definitely! It was proved that foreigners weren't wanted.

And there was a lot of discrimination wasn't there?

My word!

Did your parents feel unhappy too because of that?

Of course. Oh, of course. But anyway they tried to make it the best way they can. And they had a few friends which they used to meet, you know, perhaps once every fortnight and they used to go to each other's place. And that was the only relaxation they'd have, and they'd talk about old times and ...

They were other Italian families?

Oh, yes. All Italians, yes. And my father happened to be in the band where we came from, and another chap, his friend, he used to play some other instrument. So we used to have a little sing-song and that was our relaxation.

That was their entertainment really?

And entertainment for me and my girlfriend. Her father played the cornet I think it was, yes. And that was their entertainment, you know.

10.19 And did you make friends with many Australian children in the area?

Not too many, not too many. Until during the Depression - I was the only one that worked because my father was out of work at this state, 1933 - and that's when he started to make the wine. When he got out of work he thought 'Oh, well I'll try and I'll make some and see if I succeed'. So he went into it - I just can't remember now how - but he got on to the Customs Department and they came out and saw what he had, because he build a cellar under the house.

And he had his own vineyard too?

Yes. He had to have the vineyard there, otherwise they wouldn't have given it (*the licence*) to him. And he started, as I say, he grew his grapes and then he used to put them in Blacktown Show, and of course he used to get first prize! There was no-one around here you see with grapes. And then when he got his licence, then he could only sell two gallons per time, per customer sort of thing. Nothing in bottles. Anyhow the Customs used to come out and put the ... what do they call them ... um, spirits ... fortified they called it. The fortified to keep the grapes from going sour. So that made the sweet wine. So he graduated from that and he had a few more brands. He had the red wine and the dry wine and the sweet wine. And he did very well during the Second World War, because people couldn't buy anything there. So all the soldiers - there used to be a camp in Blacktown Showground, it used to be a soldiers' camp - so all the soldiers used to come and buy their wine. So of course six bottles per gallon it used to be.

So six bottles per customer then?

That would be like six bottles. I can't remember what he sold it I think it was ten shillings a gallon. That's right, ten shillings a gallon! But those days it was a lot of money, you know, and he was quite happy to carry on with this wine business.

He gave up the bricklaying did he?

Well there was no work for that. And then eventually he ... what happened after that ... oh, he worked at the tile works for a while. They wanted a maintenance man, bricklaying, so he used to ride his bike to work. And in his spare time he used to just do the wine and sell them of a night time, not after six o'clock. He had his hours. From nine till six, but not later than that.

'Cause the hotels closed then.

Yes. Rules and regulations, you know, he had to stick strictly to the rules, otherwise he would have lost his licence, you know. Oh, and they used to come in, you know ... well he'd get home about four o'clock in the afternoon because they'd do so many hours and then he made this little shop affair downstairs, and you know ...

13.51 And did you every work in the shop, or I don't suppose you were allowed to?

No. I didn't come into it at all, you know. No. He did it all himself.

14.07 So when you were young and growing up there, what was your recreation? What did you do for school holidays?

No holidays!

No.

No. No talk about holidays. In my spare time I used to go down in the paddock where the cows were and I used to collect cow manure to put on the garden. My mother had a vegetable garden, she had fruit trees. My young days wasn't very good at all.

You worked hard!

In fact it was very sad. When I used to hear all the other girls, they'd do this and they'd do that, and I wasn't allowed! Wasn't even allowed to go out!

Weren't you?

No. He didn't seem to trust anybody, you know.

Italian families are notorious for being strict with their daughters aren't they?

Oh, yes.

In those days especially, I suppose?

And of course no mention of boyfriends! I used to see my boyfriend without him knowing.

And that's your husband is it?

Yes. I married him eventually. He had patience. Three years. And we used to ... all we used to see each other was going up and down in the train, because I worked in Parramatta as a machinist and he worked at Seven Hills Tile Works, which is only a stone's throw from here. But we just used to see each other on the train. Oh, it was sad!

15.35 Did you go to High School?

No we only went to what they called QC in Blacktown.

QC?

QC. I don't know what ... sixth class!

Sixth class. And what happened then? You went to work straight after that?

Yes. And I was 14 when I left. So, you know, as I say it wasn't very happy memories. I haven't got many happy memories.

Of your childhood?

Only when I got married and then that's when I ... oh, what a relief. I can do what I like!

Freedom!

And my husband was very good, you know. But let me tell you, when my father knew I was going to marry an Australian, oh, he wouldn't ... he didn't forgive me for seven years!

Really!

He did not forgive me.

So that wasn't easy either for you was it?

Because I chose to marry the person that I wanted. He had one already picked out for me of course, like they always do!

An Italian boy I suppose?

But I said 'Look' I said, 'I just don't like him' you know. He just would not forgive me.

16.48 And were you Catholic I suppose, were you?

Yes.

And was your husband Catholic too?

Yes.

Oh, well at least was one good thing I suppose from your father's point of view. And was your mother happy about it?

She was very happy. She used to say 'Look you're marrying him, you've got to live with him and I'm not going ...'. But although she couldn't communicate with him very much, but he had such a nice manner with her. He used to just put his arm around her and, you know, try to sort of console her because he knew that she had no co-operation with my father. And if I happened to go to the house when he was home, he'd walk out the back. Oh, it was terrible. It was shocking.

17.30 So what year would you have been married?

1935.

And did you build your own house then?

No we rented a little house in the same street. As a matter of fact my father built that. He used to do all the business with my husband - nothing to do with me - so we eventually ... I said to him 'Look we may as well buy it' I said, 'I'm so independent, why pay him rent?' It was ten shillings a week by the way rent. I said 'We may as well save up and we'll buy it on our own'. So we saved up 50 pounds and we bought our first house.

How much did it cost you? Fifty pounds deposit was it?

Deposit. And I paid my father two pound a week of the house and we bought it for 400 pounds.

So that took you a while to pay it off?

Yes, and in the meantime we had the children you see. So the house got a bit too small so we sold that one. We made a profit it on it, and with that money we bought this one. This one was 1,200 pounds.

18.52 And what year did you buy this house?

Forty years ago. My son's forty so he was just ...

So about 1952.

Yes. So we've been here 40 years.

19.05 And so when you built ... did you build this house or was it already here?

No, no. It was already built. As I say this house was built in 1922 I believe, and so there was this house and our own place down there and that's about the only ones that I can remember. Oh, and the one opposite after the other Italian man built his place.

So there were only the three houses in the street when you first came?

Yes. That's right. And then we didn't get electricity for many, many years. Like, you know, when we first came.

19.37 And the house that your father built to live in, that's the one in the photograph here, what was that made of? It's stone is it?

It's bricks and a lot of it was plastered over, you know.

It's very ornate isn't it? Very Italian looking.

And it was solid brick. It nearly broke my heart the other week when they pulled it down.

Just recently!

They had a lot of trouble trying to get it down because it was all concrete. And of course the cellar was right down deep. You know, I thought 'Oh, gee, sentimental reasons - what can you do?' All this in front of here was all knocked down. You know, they didn't care. And most of the bricks up here they were all falling out too. No-one cared, you know, oh ...

And what are they going to build there now?

Now the Council bought it off the last owner and the Council had it demolished. So I think they've got something in view. And they've also bought the house next to it. See they buy these properties cheap and then they know what they're going to do with them. And see, like this man, he was desperate. He couldn't get the people out. Couldn't get rooms for them, so he decided to offer the Council the sale of the house. And so now, I think eventually they'll build villas or something like that.

Oh, retirement villages or something?

Something like that, you know.

21.05 And so when you moved here to this house, what sort of house is this?

This is weatherboard.

This is a weatherboard house. And has it got a lot of land around it? It looks fairly big.

Yes. It's 60 by 180.

Oh it's a big block. And so your father's house would have been on even more land I suppose.

Yes. His was 72 by 180 and then of course he had the block at the back. We had to sell all that because we couldn't look after it.

That was the vineyard was it?

Yes. We couldn't look after it, you know.

21.40 So when you moved here with your husband, did you grow vegetables here too?

Oh yes. He had vegetables, yes. We had to see, because having a family and well it saved a lot you know. We had chooks and one thing and the other, you know.

Did you? So you had your own eggs and your own fruit and vegetables.

Yes. And of course all the ... you had to do it because ... all the peelings used to go to the chickens and all that and we used to make do that way. And we made our own pickles.

22.18 How many ... you had four children did you say?

Four children, yes. Four boys and a girl.

Were they all close together or ...?

The girl was three years, and then I had the other one. There was five years between that one and six years between the other one.

Did you plan that to have them nicely spaced?

No. I just took pot luck actually. Not like these days!

You didn't have much choice in those days did you?

No choice. And you couldn't go ... you had to have four children before you even thought of a hysterectomy or anything like that. They wouldn't do it. Just wouldn't do it.

And is that the way people ...

They just had children!

23.01 They had hysterectomies to stop having children did they?

Well according to how the stories go, they could tie their tubes, but they wouldn't do it. They wouldn't even hear of it.

And economically it must have been pretty hard with four children?

Oh, well, I mean to say, you try to give them an education. As time went on they went to high school. They did very well. As far as children are concerned ... and of course we had a private hospital many years after.

23.41 Were your children all born in the local hospital?

In Blacktown, yes. One was born at home. Not this one, the other place. The other two was born in Blacktown Hospital and the other one at St. Margaret's.

Right, in the City?

We had to go all the way to the City because we had no hospital here. The private hospital eventually, you know, she just eventually ...

Oh, when you said Blacktown Hospital that was just a private hospital?

A private hospital. The nearest hospital was Parramatta.

It's a long way.

Yes. And the sister that had the private hospital, of course she got old, you know and she had to get rid of the hospital. And well, the nearest one was Parramatta, and if you had to go there well you had to go by train, of course. But luckily the last one was at St. Margaret's. 'Cause there was no maternity in Parramatta either. So I don't know how they ... I suppose the women had them at home, like I did, you know.

What, you had the mid-wife come in?

Yes you had a sister come in, you know.

24.53 And what about ordinary medical services.

Nothing.

If there was an emergency or something. What did you do?

Well there was one doctor. He was a family doctor, and to get him - we didn't have the phone on of course - I used to have to go over to his place and tell him ... well particularly when my mother was having my brother, I had to go over and tell him that she had a show and that she was expecting the baby and so on. And so he had a little bit of a bomb car. He was able to get around in that. And then to get the sister I had to go to her house.

Was it far to the doctor and the sister?

Oh, well the doctor lived practically near the hotel here. He just lived around there. What was his name ... Dr. Donellan ... and she lived right on top of the hill here in Blacktown. So we just had to walk. My father was the only one that had the bike. I mean if I had been able to ride the bike I probably would have gone on the bike, but I walked everywhere.

26.01 You didn't learn to ride the bike?

No. He wouldn't let me have it! (Laughs)

Wouldn't he? So you must have done a lot of walking.

Oh yes. We had to walk everywhere you know. There used to be a lot of orchards around here.

Were there?

And we used to ... Lalor Park was all orchards, what they call Lalor Park.

Citrus fruit?

Citrus oranges and of course we used to go there to get all our fruit, you know, buy all our fruit by the bucket, you know, and we used to have to carry it home of course.

26.35 When your mother did shopping did she get deliveries from the shops?

Oh, no. No, no. You had to carry it all on your own. Yes. She used to make little crocheted bags, you know, crochet them with string?

String bags, yes.

String bags, and that's how we used to get the groceries home.

What about when you had your family, did you have to do the same thing, or ...?

Now we ... well of course we had a pram. I used to take the pram and put it in the pram and bring it home that way. We had no car till ... oh, gosh, 19 ... oh, our first car ... now what happened? We bought a block of land for 50 pounds after we were paying our house off and we sold it for the 100 pounds. So that was our first car and we thought we were rich!

27.31 What sort of car was it?

It was a Rugby. One of those open ones. It used to flap like this! Oh ... gosh and we thought we were rich! We really thought we were just made! You know ...

It would make a big difference to you having a car wouldn't it?

Oh yes. Well we used to pile them all in sort of thing, you know.

So you'd do your shopping by car too then would you?

Well then we were able to do our shopping. And then eventually when my last one was born. I was 38 when he was born. I was pregnant to have him and anyway I thought 'If I don't get my licence now, I'll never get it!' So I got my licence and I've had it ever since. Luckily I can still drive it. Only around here. I don't go any further. I used to, you know, years ago.

Too much traffic if you go too far?

Oh there's too much now. I just couldn't, you know.

28.24 And what are the transport services like here now? Have they improved very much since those old days, like the bus services and ...?

Oh, much. Oh a hundred per cent. We've even got a free bus from Blacktown Station now to Parklea Markets. We had nothing like that! Nothing at all.

So it's a lot easier now for people?

Oh, they've got it made. And I get really upset when people are grizzling, you know. They're never satisfied. If they only knew, you know, what a lot of people ...

How hard it was?

You know, they'd be thankful what they've got.

29.00 Yes. What about the Churches in the area when you first came here?

We had a Catholic Church here, yes - St. Pat's.

And did your parents go to Church regularly?

Oh, not very much.

No. Because of the language I suppose?

And then of course ... is that little light anything to do with anything?

Yes.

END OF SIDE A

SIDE B

3.28 So do you think ... did the Churches play a very big role in the community when you were a child do you think?

I went to the Catholic school. And all my children went to the Catholic school as a matter of fact.

The same school that you went to?

No. No, one went to the Marist Brothers and then Patrician Brothers and my daughter went, after she finished here, she went to Parramatta. Our Lady of Mercy College.

Parramatta.

Yes.

That's a big school isn't it?

Yes.

And so did your children go to Church?

Yes.

Did you have to go to Sunday School as a child or not?

No. We used to go to Church. And of course then after they grow up, well they please themselves, you know, what happens.

4.39 And did you get involved in any social activity with the Church as a child?

I used to ... you know how the mother's go and help in the tuck shop? I used to go and help there.

When you were a mother yourself?

Yes. When I was able to help, you know. And then as they grew up I had to interest myself in something, so I played bowls!

Oh yes.

Which to think ... if my father was alive! Oh my God!

5.12 He wouldn't approve?

Oh, God, no! Oh, God, no! Not even tennis! Nothing, you know. You had to make, you know... . It was dreadful. You've got no idea! They were so narrow-minded, you know. They didn't seem to trust anybody or something. I don't know. Being the only child perhaps for so many years perhaps made them like that, I don't know.

Made them over-protective?

But too much.

And then your brother wasn't born until you were 18, so that didn't help you much?

And of course he was pretty strict with him too. But he got away with it quite a lot. Oh, well, being a boy is different to a girl, you see. Anyway I got involved with the bowls and I thought well, I had to do something. So I was a Foundation Member of Blacktown Bowling Club, of which they've made me a Life Member.

6.01 Do you still play bowls?

I don't now. No, I can't be bothered! I play Bingo every day now! (Laughs)

Do you? Every day?

They've got Bingo every day! So ... look, if we didn't have that to go to, what would we do? I mean you get bored to tears at home. We may as well occupy our mind, also it keeps your brains working, you know. (Laughs)

And it's a social get-together too isn't it?

Yes. That's right. Yes. Look they've got it really ... I think, gosh, you know, how lucky we are to have all these facilities too, you know.

6.37 So what else did you do, you know, say in the '50s? You were involved with the school tuck shop and playing bowls. Was that in the '50s too?

1959 I think we started off at Riverstone, and then we came to Blacktown - Riverstone Bowling Club - and then 30 years ago I joined the Hospital Auxiliary - formed the Hospital Auxiliary - and we had to raise 15,000 pounds before the Health Commission would build a hospital.

Really. So you were fund-raising?

Yes. We were fund-raising. We started off going to each house and asked for donations.

What - knocking on the doors?

Yes. Knocked on the door. And of course we had a lot of snobs too you know. 'What do we want to give you money for the hospital when there's no hospital there?' You see, it was very hard. So eventually we had street stalls, house parties, raffles. Anyway, as I say, we got this 15,000. So with this money they built the Kiosk in Blacktown Hospital grounds, but they found out later on that it was a mistake, because it wasn't anywhere near the hospital! So now they're using it as a kidney analysis - you know, go there for their treatment - so they've utilised it in that way. So when they built the Hospital after ... we were in it for many years ... and then the Hospital's been built 27 years, I think, if I've got that correctly. Something in that vicinity. And I know we had it going five years before they even started. And then they built the Kiosk, of course, in the hospital.

8.38 And how many women would have been involved in that Auxiliary?

We started off ... we had about ... oh, I'd say about 25 or 30, but it dwindled down. We've got about 20 active members now.

Oh that's very good!

And there's only two of us left that were Foundation Members. All the others ... some of them have passed on, and some of them came in later, but that's about all we've got now, so we're still in it.

Well that's a great achievement isn't it?

Oh, yes.

Because it would make life so much easier to have it close.

Well then I was a Pink Lady - you've heard of the Pink Ladies?

Yes.

At the Hospital. I did that for about ten years.

9.19 What did you do as a Pink Lady?

We ... well, I personally used to go round to all the wards and do the flowers and talk to the patients if they wanted anything doing, write a letter, or do messages for them. And a lot of the patients love you to sit there and talk to them, and they used to tell you all their history, you know. And then other ladies used to do the babies nappies, you know, fold them up. Because we used to have the Maternity and all there.

This was all voluntary work I suppose?

All voluntary, yes. And anyhow, I done that for ten years.

Did you wear pink or something?

Yes. Pink uniform and you had a badge, you know. So then my mother got very ill and she was in hospital for three months up in Blacktown Hospital. They were marvellous to her and of course I used to go there every day, and after she passed on I thought I couldn't stand it any longer. It was just too much. Then my husband retired and I thought, well, he comes first! So now I still go once a month. We have a Baby Shop in Maternity, and we work for that. We do crocheting. I'm doing crocheting and we've got ladies doing knitting and crocheting, and we all take a turn, once a week.

And where do these funds go to?

That goes back to the Hospital. We buy a lot of equipment. We did a lot for Maternity and our last project was something to do with the heart. Some heart ... oh, something to do with the heart.

Equipment of some sort?

Yes. And then last year we bought new lockers, because they said the lockers wanted renewing. So everything that we make goes back to the Hospital again.

Oh, that's very good.

So, Mr. Cordell know all what we do, you know. Because he's been there quite a while.

11.36 So when you were living here before, during say the '50s, what would you have done then - or what would your children have done - for recreation?

Well now my son joined Apex. They're a very good ... oh well of course the children had their own sport. My daughter played tennis, and one of them played football, but not for long because he hurt himself, so that was the end of that. My other son played in the Blacktown Band - Brass Band.

So they were allowed to do all the things you weren't allowed to do?

Oh, I said 'Look I won't interfere with anything they do!' because I felt that I ... now I shouldn't say that I hated my father - what word I should say? I resented him! Your children resent you if you sort of ...

Restrict them really?

Whatever they do, you must go along with it, to a certain extent. You can only give them advice. But then you can't just stop them from doing anything. And I think they resent you otherwise. I mean that's how I felt.

12.53 So your four had all the opportunities to do what they wanted to do?

Exactly. You know, you've got to trust them and you can advise them. And home life makes all the different. We would never cross words in front of the children. We'd wait until they went to bed and then if we had anything to say, then we'd say it. You just can't row in front of them.

Did you parents do that too, or did you hear them?

Oh, no my father was ... he was very cruel. Many a time he'd give me a belting.

Really.

Oh, yes. I was supposed to be home from school at a certain time, and if I wasn't there at a certain time, well the strap would come out. Now I absolutely resented him, eventually. And as I say I had my work to do, collecting manure. Oh it was dreadful, and all the kids used to laugh at me.

13.53 So you didn't have any leisure time at all as a child?

Oh, not a thing! It was dreadful!

Did you read or anything like that?

Oh, well to a certain extent. We had to do homework of course. You know, we had the homework. But in all my spare time ... and then of course I used to help in the garden. And then when it was the grape season we used to this orchard near Penrith and we used to go and cut grapes and they used to organise a truck for the grapes so we could bring them home.

So you were picking grapes then?

Picking grapes in your spare time - oh, no!

It was certainly a hard life wasn't it?

Oh, well I mean for a young girl! Can you imagine the girls these days?

I can't imagine them doing that and sticking at that for very long at all.

Well there you are, so I mean I'm not telling lies.

They'd rebel wouldn't they?

Oh, no they've got no idea!

14.51 So your children went on to High School did they?

Yes. Yes.

Oh, yes you were saying they went to various High Schools.

Yes.

15.00 Did any of them go on to University or ... ?

No. There was no University those days. There was no University - never even heard of them! They went to the ... now what do they call that?

TAFE was it?

No. They went till they were 16. My son left at 15 because he had a job to go to. What do they call that? Intermediate? Yes. Intermediate.

Oh yes. Right.

And that's as high as they could go.

They went to their Intermediate. And that's as high as they could go.

15.33 And did any of them do courses after school, like typing courses or anything like that?

No. There was nothing like that. There was nothing. No techs. They're very, very lucky these days. They've got every opportunity.

A lot more opportunity.

That's how I feel about it. You know.

15.54 And how do you feel about the changes that have taken place out here with the population increase and more housing and all that - do you think it's a good thing, or how do you feel about it?

Well, when I was growing up, everybody knew everybody! We were all friends, but now they're all strangers.

So that's not so good?

No. No. You probably won't see anybody that you know, you know, because it's just all new people and ...

It's become so big?

Oh, too big. Too big altogether. It just grew out of bounds, you know. Blacktown just grew all of a sudden.

16.35 And how did you feel about the shopping centre changing from the smaller shops to what it is today?

Well they were more friendly even then. We used to go into Woolworths, you know, and we used to walk around. It was lovely and you could, you know, have a little chat. But you can't chat now, and you're not game to leave your bag anywhere of course. There was nothing ... we never locked our doors!

Didn't you?

No way! We wouldn't think about it.

17.01 You'd leave the house open?

Well you could go out and just close it, but you didn't have to lock it and lock all your windows. No. Oh, it's dreadful!

And now you do, I suppose?

Oh, you have to. And we could walk of a night time, perhaps. Well we used to get the manure of a night. I used to make it all in a heap and my father used to come with the bags, and I used to help him with the bags and he'd fill them in and he'd carry them home. But even of a night, you know, you could walk around the streets and there was nobody around, you know.

You wouldn't do that these days would you? You wouldn't feel secure?

Oh, no way. You'd have to be ... oh, well I just wouldn't. I couldn't. And even for the young people it's dangerous for them! I mean even if they're young people you know. Oh I think it's dreadful.

17.57 And so that's the security has changed.

Absolutely!

And the friendliness has changed. They'd be the two things you've mentioned first. And what else do you think has changed?

Well do you know, we went for a trip to Italy in 1980, and when we got there we were astounded. We got to Rome ...

Was this your first trip back to Italy?

Yes. Yes. The first thing we saw when we got to Rome was all these policemen with these guns, you know, on their shoulders. And I thought 'My God what have we come to?' Of course that was security, but we didn't realise. 'Cause that's ten years ago, twelve years ago. Apparently that had been going on for I don't know for how long. But it gave me a very bad impression - what had we come to?

This was at the airport, was it?

Yes. In Rome airport. And then I wanted to go and see where I was born in the home town, and everybody had bars on their windows and you couldn't get in their gates - you had to press a button - and I thought 'What have we come to?' So, I mean it must have been there many, many years before.

The same, yes.

So it's coming like that now.

Yes. In the city now there are lots of bars on windows and that sort of thing.

You know, so it's all over the world apparently. You have to take precautions?

19.34 And what about the landscape? How has that changed since you first came here before the War?

Well to start with the houses were all fibro? A few weatherboards, mostly fibro because they were cheaper, and then they started building ... well I think since all these immigrants came out they started to build all these lovely brick homes.

What, since the ... after the War you mean?

After the War - the Second World War. Yes. And these beautiful big homes, and two storey homes. And I said 'Now we were the first ones with a storey home in Blacktown', and they never ever saw that we would succeed.

That was unusual in those days?

Oh, yes. But anyway they have built some beautiful homes and it's gone from leaps and bounds, you know.

20.32 And do you think that ... you know, would you rather have it as it was before the population expanded?

As it was - only for the hard times that I had. You know what I mean.

But do you think that for young people growing up here now that they have a better life in some ways?

I don't know. I don't know. Oh, well they've got it made really. I mean they've got everything they need. If they want to study well they've got opportunities. And ... I don't know. Personally I wouldn't like to be rearing young children. That's just what I've come to.

21.15 And did you feel, when you were a child and growing up with only the three houses in the street, there must have been a lot of space around you?

Yes.

And did you feel that space disappearing as people starting building?

Oh ... 'Look at the lovely house' ... 'Oh, did you see that lovely house going up' ... you know. Oh it was all ...

So you thought it was rather nice in a way?

Oh, my word - growing slowly - but it's got out of bounds. Particularly Blacktown, you know.

21.46 And do you feel that it's too crowded now?

It is a bit. Everywhere we go now ... 'Oh my goodness, look at all the houses' ... you know. Well I mean you've got to give way to progress. I realise that.

People have got to live somewhere?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. It's wonderful the way they've built it, you know.

Do you think it was well planned?

Oh, well ... in some places.

There's a lot of Housing Commission isn't there?

A lot of Housing Commissions, yes. But you know the Housing Commission don't look after their people so much. There's Housing Commission homes going to rack and ruin. They won't do anything about it!

They don't maintain them?

They should maintain them better than what they do, because a lot of people are looking for homes, and they've got every opportunity, I mean to pay them off or a lot of them get cheap rent, you know.

22.39 And talking of finances, when you were first married, how did you and your husband manage your finances? Who was the manager of the household money?

I was the manager! (Laughs)

Were you?

Yes. He let me do all that.

What, did he give you his pay packet to work it out?

Yes he used to say 'Here's my pay packet' and I used to just ... well of course he used to smoke those days and he used to have pocket money for his cigarettes. That's all he worried about. And I had to pay all the bills!

And you worked out the rest!

Yes. We had to. We had to work it that way. Someone has to do it.

23.10 And did you use time payment or anything like that?

No that was a thing we never did, you know. We always saved up. I thought well if we can't afford it we'll just wait until we ... you know, we... no, it was a bad thing.

You saved up for everything and paid cash?

Yes. Because I think it can get beyond you at times. You know, you run up bills and that. Anyway, those days if you did - I believe, I never utilised it - but if you did had a credit union credit to somebody they wouldn't let you buy anything, so I believe.

Oh, right. You needed references?

Yes. So I thought 'Oh well I'm not going to worry about it' because I did without, you know.

23.59 And what about when you were living at home with your parents. Did you mother have any ... you said she used to wash in the copper ... did she have any electrical appliances at all?

Not those days. We used to have an open chimney with a saucepan hanging up, you know, until a few years later.

A fuel stove was it?

And then she got a fuel stove, and then from there she got the electric stove. She thought she was lucky - she was made! Oh, yes.

I suppose she cooked a lot of jams and preserves and things did she?

No. Mostly all home cooking, plain food. Just plain food, you know. But a lot of the women that I know used to make ... well I used to make all my own jams and pickles.

Did you?

Oh, yes. Jams and pickles.

24.43 And I presume you had all the electrical appliances?

That's right. Yes.

And did you have a vacuum cleaner and a jug and ... ?

Well for many years we only had lino.

Oh, right.

And then we got Feltex. Feltex was in - I've still got one room with Feltex. And then from there of course we went to carpet. But we lived very, very primitive at the start, you know.

Did you?

Yes. Well even when I was married we only had lino on the floor, you know.

And it was hard to get things after the War too wasn't it?

Oh, yes. And some of the rooms we never even had lino on them when we first got married. We only had polished floors. We just painted it, made it polished. Well that was quite nice, you know.

25.33 What would your daily routine have been like when you were married? You didn't work after you were married did you?

After 12 months. They wouldn't employ me because I was married. Oh and I did a little bit of dress-making.

Paid work?

Being a machinist ... no, from word of mouth. My friends started to bring me a piece of material ... 'Would you make me a frock?' ... 'All right!'. So, while the children were playing around I used to do a bit of dress-making and used to charge them two pounds.

It's not much is it?

No, one pound - it would have been two dollars wouldn't it? One pound, yes that's right. So then, from one to another they used to, you know, it used to keep me in pocket money.

26.23 And did you make clothes for your children as well?

Oh, yes. The little pants. There was nothing bought. We used to make ...

Did you mother sew?

Yes. She sewed, yes, she sewed. She used to ...

So you learned really from her?

She had an old-fashioned machine, but she used to sew, you know. Used to make my dresses, although ... oh, and material was five cents - it would be sixpence - a yard for crepe.

When you were married or when you were a young girl?

No. No. When I was about ten, 12, 14 - up to 15. Crepe material, and she used to make me dresses. Oh ...

They were beautiful I suppose?

So two yards would cost one shilling - oh, sixpence a yard, you know.

Yes. That would be a shilling, yes. That's very cheap isn't it for a lovely dress?

Oh, goodness me, yes.

27.24 So your mother's daily routine, what would that have been like when you were a little girl? She mostly just did housework and cooking?

Housework. Gardening, milked the cow - we used to have a cow - did a bit of sewing, and that's about it, you know. And grow the vegetables. My father didn't grow vegetable. He didn't know anything about vegetables, but he knew about the grapes. She did the vegetables.

Oh right.

And then of course she used to ... oh and then of course when they had the wine, she'd have to wash the bottles, and label them.

That would keep her busy then!

Yes. She'd be shaking like this you know. Oh God. Poor little thing. She worked very, very hard. And she was an angel!

Was she?

She was an angel!

28.23 And she didn't have a great social life either then?

No, only for these few friends that she had. It was just ... you know ...

A very hard life.

And also they used to have a stove, you see, so her and this other friend of hers that used to live opposite, they used to walk across the paddock on to the railway line and collect coal.

Oh, yes.

And they'd fill the bag up and bring it home for the stove.

Did the coal come from the trains?

Coal from the trains. See they had steam trains and the goods train, and the coal used to spill out. And they used to go all along the railway line. They used to do miles to collect this coal and carry it on their heads, you know, like you see in the olden days?

Oh, yes. For the fuel stove?

For the fuel stove.

Goodness.

Oh, I tell you. And sticks. Down the paddock where these cows were and the trees used to fall, you know, the branches used to fall down. So they'd pick up a lot of sticks and tie them up and put them on their heads.

29.31 So your life compared to your mothers was a lot easier, but it was still a hard life?

Oh, it was much ... it was hard but it was much easier from what she had to put up with, you know. That light's going on again.

OK. Well I think we've just about covered everything.

Well that's my life story, I tell you.

Unless you can think of anything else you'd particularly like to tell me, I'll just stop it.

END OF TAPE.

