

INTERVIEW NO. 8

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 8th October,1991.

**MRS. MAVIS LAMROCK
"YONDER"
74 RIVER ROAD
EMU PLAINS NSW**

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

0.21 My name is Mavis Gibson Lamrock, formerly Hunter. I live at "Yonder", 74 River Road, Emu Plains. The date of my birth was the 11th January, 1913, in Wauchope. Yes, I am married, for 54 years - we hope we can make some more years. I am an Australian, sixth generation on my mother's side, fifth on my father's, and we have four children all married, and nine grandchildren.

1.08 First of all I'll ask you about your period of residence in the area. When did you actually come to live in the Penrith area?

We came back from Wauchope in May, 1914, when I was about 18 months old, so I've been here a long time.

And you lived on this property?

Yes, I lived in "Yodalla", Emu Plains, which was well known in the district because my parents used to have so many functions there, so that when father sold the property I insisted the name be taken off it. I didn't want anyone else to use it because it had such an identity.

1.54 And was that near here?

On the other end of the property.

1.57 And how big was the property altogether?

Twenty-five acres.

2.05 And then you lived here as a young child and what was it like then in those days?

It was lovely. We didn't have any electricity but we had what was called a Gloria light system which you lit a mantle for, and there wasn't any water laid on. It was all pumped from the river with a windmill. We grew practically everything we ate - even dried fruits.

Really?

2.35 Yes. And the baker used to come with the cart and deliver the bread, and the butcher would bring the meat around in his cart without any ice, and strangely enough there were no flies! It's always stuck in my memory.

There are flies now!

2.53 We had an ice chest, but if we wanted anything to get really cold quickly, it was let down the big well in a bucket on a rope..

Really!

So ... I loved it!

And this would have been ... how old would you have been at this time you're talking about?

Oh, I suppose I'd remember all this from about the time I was six. There was a sort of servants' wing at the back and the cellar which kept all the preserves and all the salted meat.

3.25 Did your parents build the house?

Oh, no - it's old.

An old house?

Yes.

3.32 So you went to school from there?

Yes. We all went to the primary school. My parents were great believers in going to school because you all lived on the same level because, as I might have said earlier, I felt very privileged because we always everything. But then we all went on other schools. But we used to walk across through the park. That park had ... I don't know if you've been through Emu that way have you?

No.

A park on each side of the road - most parks had grazing rights, but there was never a bull in them, and I think that's why (laughs) we were allowed to walk always across the park.

4.20 How far did you have to walk to school?

Oh, just across this park up here.

So it wasn't far?

No. But it was a very big thing in my time when I was eventually allowed to take my lunch. I used to go home.

Every day?

Yes, and I didn't like that. I wanted to be like all the others.

4.40 And were there many other houses here at that time?

No. There was our house, one, the Shepherd's - it's at the end of the park - called "Westbank", and then there wouldn't be any other houses until down near the railway. And on the southern - I suppose you'd call it the southern side - there was one called "The Melrose" - now the Lewer's Gallery, and the next one was a house who had an orchard - it was Catell's house - and then the Huntington Hall guest house which I think was the home of a former premier, Sir George Dibbs. And Mr. Shepherd, one of our friends, always wondered why he always received a bottle of whisky from this man every year - I forget his name - and when the house was sold they discovered a still under the staircase. We thought that was great fun!

5.47 What did your parents do? What sort of occupation did your father have?

Well my father came down because he was having a nervous breakdown where he had a lot of business interests at Wauchope, and decided to plant this with citrus which he did. The property included - it was called Factory Lane - which came across from Penrith, but it was called Factory because Rainers had their tweed factory on that particular five acres and in my memory I can remember ... but father put that all into lemons which were sold completely to Tooths for lemonade.

In 1924 my father went to a meeting of a company in Sydney that he had shares in, and it was very much in debt, and he asked so many questions that someone said 'Who is this Mr. Hunter?' and he became the Managing Director, and in three years he'd paid every debt! And he was there until he was about 73, so it was a long time. So we sort of had both lives - orchardist and company manager.

And did he travel to Sydney every day?

Yes. Every day.

7.14 And you went to school in this area?

Yes, in Penrith. There was a private school, St. Stephen's Private School with the church.

The old church?

Yes. We had a wonderful headmistress and I loved her dearly. She had been - which was a long time ago - she was dux of Sydney Girls' High, which in those days was really something. I used to ride into school. I don't think anyone had raincoats in those days - they weren't sort of "in" - or an umbrella - and I'd just ride through the rain with my blazer and hat on and come home and get changed and ...

And you used to ride your bike all that way?

Yes. And in my time of riding the road was sealed. And on the area that is now Woodruffe Gardens, just across the river bridge from here, my grandmother had a lovely big home which they took down to build the Captain Cook tennis place, and on the very corner was a Chinaman who grew all kinds of vegetables and anything you really didn't grow at home, my mother would get into the sulky - and I would probably be with her - and he'd just pick the things as you wanted them. I thought it was a great life!

8.35 Different to shopping today!

Yes. Well shopping was different then. You'd go into one store in Penrith - Emu had a very small store - and attached to it was an assembly hall made of stone. It's still there - it's now a photographic shop - but everything was held in that place from weddings to all the school concerts. I was angry when I was about four; the primary school teacher asked if I could go in the concert as a baby because I had very curly short hair. And to think I was a baby! I went in it, but I've never got over it!

You felt very grown up at four?

Yes, I didn't want to have that at four - not the baby!

9.24 And what was the feeling like driving on a bicycle to school? I suppose it was just open fields?

Yes, well you weren't at all afraid of anything. I suppose there wasn't anything to be afraid of. I loved the life. I'm sorry that the young people don't have it now. We made all our own fun and we ... my sister and I slept upstairs in a very big attic - it was about 20 feet long and three windows - but we only had candles and mosquito nets, and why they didn't go up in flames I'll never know!

10.03 You had electricity but you didn't have it upstairs?

No there was no electricity. We had this light - the Gloria light. Later on my parents bought an engine and it was put in the cellar and we had electricity of our own, but it wouldn't take anything more than say, an electric iron. I don't think we could use an electric jug, but we had lights and if they were going dim my father would say "Norman go and start the pump up!". And of course this didn't make us very popular with the local people, because they didn't have it! And then when my father fought the electricity coming here they said it was just because he had it. But it wasn't. He wanted it in a better way at a cheaper rate, and we eventually got it. They lived to thank him, but still ...

10.54 You had electricity in the middle of Penrith earlier didn't they, but ...

Yes, but it used to go off at 12 o'clock. And when the radio came on - father had a big one built. It was about a 40 foot cord which meant he could take it out on to our front verandah. We had a very big lawn, and people could come and sit and listen - the opera started about that time, coming out here. But ordinarily there was an interval from nine to nine fifteen whilst the announcers had a spell!

11.28 As a child what sort of recreation did you have here apart from listening the radio?

Well, I suppose we were always playing some sort of game. I had a brother who was three years older than I, and cousins who lived close by, and ... it was always fun. I was very happy when ploughing was on to go out sometimes (and my mother didn't know about it). We used to take our shoes and socks off and follow where the earth was turned back. It was beautifully cool - but we'd get them on again before we'd go in. (Laughs)

12.06 And living near the river, did you go swimming in the river?

Not a great deal because we had seen too many tragedies in it. It has very bad currents - it still has - warm, cold and so on, and I can remember sitting on the fence which was the other side of the road because in those days the property title went to the middle of the river. And I can still remember one occasion sitting there watching the police grapple - you know, they'd use big irons - there were no divers for the body.

12.38 After you finished primary school...?

I went to Miss Lennox's St. Stephen's school and I was - even at primary - I was allowed away one day a week to go to the Conservatorium of Music in Sydney.

Oh, so you are musical too?

No, I didn't like it. My sister was such a wonderful pianist that I think it put me off. (Laughs). Anyhow ...

13.02 And did you go to high school there?

Well, I went as far ... no I didn't. I don't think they had the high school then. It was a very long time ago. I think I left when I was about 17. That's a long time ago. But we couldn't ... the CWA started here and I was a foundation member, but I wasn't old enough to join, so they didn't know what to charge me, so I paid two shillings a year. We young people got a bit tired of this and we formed what was called a "Jollity Club" and we worked exclusively for the hospital and the poor.

And that was as a teenager?

Yes, and it was still going after I was married, because I was President of it. Then we just ... we were married in 1937 and one of the local people asked my father if he would have a light put outside the old St. Paul's Church. It was the first evening wedding! It was at a quarter to seven and people wanted to be outside, 'cause only the guests could get in, it was such a little church.

So they didn't have evening weddings before that?

14.22 So, when did you actually come to live here? It was after you were married?

Yes. We were married in '37, September '37, and we lived with my parents while this house was built which was about six months and then we came down to live here.

And this was part of your parent's property?

Yes, subsequently my father divided the property up and he gave us a strip from one road to the other so that we had two frontages.

14.51 So how many acres would you have had, or what size would this plot have been?

Well, I couldn't say exactly because father had to alter it because I'd built here and it wasn't exactly in the middle of a strip and we had to get a bit either side, so they had to build the house in the orchard.

15.08 Then it's a fairly large block?

Well it was, I suppose. Well we have two daughters living that side and one daughter that side. We kept the frontages when the land was subdivided, and our son lives at Leonay.

That's close by?

Yes.

15.29 So this house is built of brick is it, or ... ?

Yes, it's double brick. It's not veneer, and when we came in here we had the first all-electric home in the district. Other people - my parents and I think Brian's parents - had stoves, but we had the first hot-water service and first, eventually, electric pump and so it was written in the local paper - we didn't realise this - but we still didn't have a refrigerator. My parent did, but we still had ice delivered until 1940 when we got our first fridge.

16.13 Did you? What about vacuum cleaners?

No. Wait a minute - I can't remember ... I think mostly in those days we had carpet sweepers which were very effective.

16.29 And when you came to live here - when you built your own house - was it still very much in the middle of the orchard?

Oh, yes. River Road was only being built when the house was and so our access was through the orchard from Nepean Street. We didn't take any trees out until they died. That's why nothing is planned in this garden. But it was an interesting time. I think we had to work harder. I know here - I didn't have a washing machine but my sister did so we'd take the washing up and do it at her place. Otherwise we had a copper.

Where did your sister live, close by?

On the corner opposite the corner of this property. And that land is called Hunter Street because of my father.

17.17 Oh, right. So you had family all around you in your early married days?

Yes, and no neighbours, and that's what we've found very hard to get used to. Because as times went on the developers bought up all the properties. The rates became too high and we were not producing from them at that stage.

17.41 When you say you found it hard to get used to, you mean to get used to having neighbours after ...?

Yes, we were used to just being along the river ourselves.

And how did that make you feel when people moved in?

Well, I didn't like it! And when my brother came down and looked at all these roofs between our house and our old home, "Yodalla" - which we could see from upstairs - he said "I don't like it" and I said "Neither do I!" But it was a lovely place to grow up in and other people are finding the same thing. When our children grew up ... our first child was born after war was

declared and we had the three girls ... they wouldn't take my husband at all because, I think it wasn't health wise, I think it was because they didn't have any other solicitors resident anywhere and he fought, he even went to the Prime Minister to try and get into the airforce, but they wouldn't take him.

18.50 So you had your three children fairly close together did you?

Yes. Three years and then two and a half. And our second daughter has often said to us "Why aren't there any songs and things that you remember from when I was young" and I said to her - this one [indicates daughter] - I said "It is because it was the darkest time of the War, the Coral Sea Battle, my husband had to get petrol from the police to drive me down to George V Hospital.

To Sydney?

... and leave the car there and everything was blacked out. We had to go down with hooded lights, and then he had to get petrol to come home.

19.44 So there was no hospital close by?

No there wasn't, not until after our third daughter was born. By then my husband, as a Board member, managed to talk the very old Board members into having a maternity section added to the old hospital, and then as time went on of course he, against their wishes, bought a very big tract of land where the new hospital is and he was the Chairman at the time, so we had the transition from one hospital to the other.

20.19 So you had your son much later on at that hospital did you?

No, I had him at the old hospital in the new maternity section which means that always tells everyone he was born in a geriatric hospital, because that's what it is now.

**20.35 And did you - you planned your family, did you - the three girls?
And ...**

And then Adrian was a special gift!

... a special gift later.

Yes, he was a special gift because at two weeks he very nearly died and he was taken to Crown Street and he had Professor Lorimer Dodds - he was later knighted - looking after him. He was baptised the day he went in because the Archbishop was a friend of my parents and he always said "Mrs. Lamrock, when your baby is born I would like to baptise the baby!" So we phoned him from Crown Street and he was in his way home in a flying boat from Lord Howe Island and he went home, had a cup of tea, and then came and, fully robed, he went into this ward where we couldn't go and he baptised the baby or christened the baby out of a medicine glass and we didn't hear what he said and we couldn't see the baby. But when he came out he said "Mrs. Lamrock, my brother had a similar thing in his family. Now when your baby is better, when he is better, I will come up and receive him into the Church." He didn't say "if" he just said "when" and that carried me like that. And he did, he came up.

That was a nice positive outlook - and he did.

Yes, a nice positive feeling.

22.02 So you must have felt a bit isolated here from the medical point of view too, did you?

No, we had good doctors in Penrith, very good doctors. There were only two until after the War, and of course now we have so many, I wouldn't know.

22.21 When you didn't have any close neighbours at all, that didn't give you a feeling of isolation? Or you enjoyed it ...

Not at all, no. Not when you're a member of a big family. And it makes you pretty selfish I think.

22.37 And after the War, I suppose a lot of people moving into the area were - some of them - would have been people from Europe too?

Not so many. No, they were mostly young couples, coming out to live and have their families here. We called it the population explosion because there are 14,000 here.

When would that have been? That would be at the end of the War about '45?

No, it would have been later. I can't remember quite when the developers came. They would get one property and develop that and then develop another one, but they gradually got all the properties.

23.20 And did you feel that encroaching suburbanisation?

Yes. I didn't like it, but then I realised it's a lovely area and we now have I think three primary schools, a Catholic school and a high school where we just had this little one.

23.35 And did you have a lot of pupils at that school?

When I was there?

When you were there.

No, there were not many, and when our three girls were there we couldn't get a third teacher and we had to go round asking people to send their youngest children to get a hundred pupils.

And did your three girls go to the same primary school that you went to?

Yes, and my son.

And your son. And when your son was ... how many years between your son and the last girl?

Ten.

24.06 Ten years. So when he was growing up it would have quite a bit different in the area?

Very different. Different in various ways because there were more people there. We were able I suppose to do more for him, but we also realised that there were so many women in the house that he had to go to boarding school. So he went to Kings. He went there for a year - day boarder - 'cause his father had been there, and then he boarded for five years.

But we had quite a number of service things in the district. I suppose the most active women's thing was the Country Women's Association, and it took in everything. If there was a baby born anywhere and didn't have clothes, we drove mother - my sister and I - drove mother ... we almost didn't like the name Country Women's, because it so dominated our life for a while, but there was a lot of good done. A hall was bought, mother was one of the guarantors, and they established a health - that's where the health clinic started - and my husband and I didn't have any children. We weren't even married, but we had to go down and buy the scales, and it was gradually assembled, and now of course, it's quite an asset. We were able to go to it when our children came.

25.38 And that clinic still runs today, does it?

Yes.

And what about dental services? Did you have dentists here?

Yes, we always had dentists - in Penrith, not here. This was very much a village.

This here in Emu Plains?

Emu Plain was a village.

25.58 So for any shopping of any magnitude you'd have to go in to Penrith?

Yes, we'd have to go there. And then as time went on and the road was put in, one of the big grocery firms from Penrith used to send around every week and you had your order ready and you gave it to the man and it was delivered. That was great, that really was wonderful. And we had a manual exchange, of course, for the phone. And our eldest daughter had a great habit - it was low down - of going in and picking it up and talking to the telephonist, and we had to move the phone. (Laughs).

26.39 And did you have the sewer on here too?

No, we had a septic tank ... we didn't even have the septic tank when my daughter was born. We had the outside toilet, but we were having it done. The sister who was here - 'cause I had her at home - she used to help my husband wheel the bricks.

And that was the sister who ... your sister or the nursing sister?

No, the nursing sister, yes. That was 1940.

27.09 1940? So you had her here to help you with the baby?

Oh, yes.

So having the family all around you, you had plenty of support?

Yes, and in those days you could have a live-in maid, uniform and all! Bell at the table, bell beside the bed - but those days have gone for ever.

So you had plenty of help in the house?

Yes. There were periods between maids that you had to do things, but then we managed.

27.44 So what would your daily routine have been when the children small? They got themselves to school?

Oh, no. No, we took them to school.

Did you?

Until they got old enough.

Until they were old enough to ride their bikes!

And I suppose it was a normal routine in the country. How we had time I think now - I don't know - because we usually had something for breakfast - porridge and eggs, whatever. Even when the children went to PLC and travelled and left at half past seven, we managed all these things, and there were no cut loaves and freezers, and we cut their lunches every day. So we'd have to get up a six when they were catching trains. But as soon as Wendy, the eldest, was seventeen we had another car so she could take the old car and drive down to the railway station and drive back at night.

28.49 You need a car in this area?

Yes. Well we had to have two as time went on because my husband took it to the office every morning. Otherwise, until we had a second car, I used my parents.

29.03 And did you do your shopping yourself in Penrith or most things were delivered, I suppose?

Oh, no. That was only a period, then we 'd have to go in to Penrith to buy things ... but I can't remember when. In my early memory of Penrith it was ... it had the awnings all over it and hitching posts.

For the horses?

So, it's really been a lot of change in my time.

29.35 And how did you feel when all those old shops were demolished and replaced by the buildings that are there today?

Well it was very gradual. The awnings went first - it would have been a Council decree, I suppose. Then they turned Penrith Primary School into an Intermediate High School. After that anyone who wanted to go to high school would have to go at least to Parramatta to Parramatta High School or some private school.

30.11 And the shopping area, when did that start to become more like what it is today? That would be more in the '60's?

Yes I think so ... the Plaza ...

30.25 Do you find it ... how does it affect you now? Do you find it easier to shop now or ...?

Yes, I don't go to Sydney unless I have to. I think it's because of walking. I walk with a stick outside. I also have a wheelchair which I won't take. But you can get most things here.

30.56 And do you find going into Penrith not as pleasant as it was in the old days when it was less crowded?

No, I think it's more interesting because there's more selection. I can even get shoes there now which is, to me, very good.

You couldn't before?

No, not really. Although we did have one, a shoe shop in Penrith. It was opposite where ... oh, where would it be now? Nearly everything's gone! It would be on the eastern side of the Post Office anyhow, perhaps it's up a bit. And opposite - you would get a lot of shoes, school shoes and things - but opposite was - first of all it was an open-air picture theatre and then it was a picture theatre, but I think ... they had to have an interval too.

31.59 Would that have been the old Avon theatre?

No, the Nepean Theatre. That was before the Avon which was called the Dungowan, and it was built by a man called Horsteman who had lived in Manly and the Dungowan there had been built, and he came up here and built the Dungowan here. The Nepean Theatre was owned by I. I. Price and later to Lisle Spence.

32.19 And did you do a lot of cooking and make preserves and that sort of thing, like country women are supposed to?

Yes, well I suppose I didn't do the preserves and things. As I got older I might have helped cut up figs or something for jam, but everything was preserved in those days and ...

END SIDE A

SIDE B

0.06 ... things were preserved. I can remember that if we had a tin of peaches it was the most terrific treat!

Tinned peaches!

Tinned peaches! And with the summer fruit, big trays of wire netting were made and the fruit put on and they were put out on all the sunny days and turned over and brought it. It sounds like a lot of work, but it was also a lot of fun, until the day there was the most terrific crash and the shelves in the cellar had fallen down. All the jars were broken, oh it was such a mess! To go down to the cellar it was a big trapdoor and you pushed the trapdoor up and walked down these stairs without any bannisters. It was pretty dicey actually, but nobody ever got hurt.

A wonderful storage area, and it'd be cool there too!

Yes.

1.03 So when your children were growing up in the area did you have a lot of contact with neighbours as the neighbours started to come in?

Not a great deal. I think you were still friendly with the people that you were friendly with and your children were friendly with them. Our children went to Sunday School and the highlights, I suppose, of the year in those days were the Empire Day School Picnic and the Sunday School Picnic which was held in the rotunda in the other park, and it hadn't any light and if you had a function there it had to finish by dark. And the mothers used to go down and cut up the sandwiches, while we had a visiting speaker on Empire Day. I little thought that as I got older I'd be the visiting speaker.

You were?

Yes. But one of the things I was thrilled about, and I'd forgotten it until we went to a school concert about a fortnight ago, that I had concocted, or whatever you'd call it, the motto for the Emu Primary School. They were getting a badge and the headmaster rang me and said "We have one of the ex-students holding an emu on a plain background, but we want a motto. Could you suggest anything?" And I think that just straight off I said, "Yes, 'Advance with Honour!'" And my husband said "Why did you say 'Advance with Honour'? Why didn't you say 'Up' or something?" and I said "Well, you don't know which way the advance is, it could be down!" It might want to go down because that's how you're advancing. But as long as you're advancing, it is honourable, and to me that's all that matters. I'd forgotten until my son said the other day "Mum, I was telling the education man down at the concert tonight that that was your Motto'.

Motto?

Yes. They probably could have come up with a much better one, but that was one they just accepted I suppose.

3.19 And what about - you mentioned the Sunday School - did the churches play a fairly big role in your life?

Yes - the biggest in the district. There was only the Anglican Church in Emu which is nearly 140 years old, and the Methodist Church is the very tiny little church - and now the Uniting Village is built around it. Presbyterians and Catholics had to go to Penrith, which meant that

most Presbyterians went to the Anglican Church. But in my time it wasn't big enough to have a confirmation service here. We had to go to St. Stephen's in Penrith.

3.58 And did you have a Ladies' Guild there at the Church?

Yes. I was only sixteen when it was formed here, but the first meeting I went to - I can't remember when it was - it must have been an annual meeting and I became the Secretary, and on and off I think it was 27 years I was Secretary. And the Flower Show was the highlight of the district - Emu Plains - and those things were looked forward to. And then I was asked if I'd be Commissioner for the Guides and thought "Yes, that's a good idea" because I had three daughters and there are a lot of girls in this area, and I was Commissioner for eleven years. The children hated it when they were Guides because they said everyone expected them to do so well. But the two elder ones subsequently became Warranted Guiders themselves, Captains of the Emu Guides ... and then I saw a need to have a Hospital Auxiliary so I started that, and I was President of that.

That's the Emu Plains Hospital Auxiliary?

No. The Nepean Hospital but it was the Emu Plains Auxiliary, and I started that and I was President of that and Secretary of the Guild, and at one stage I think I was President of Inner Wheel and the girls used to say "What are you today Mum?" and I'd say "I'll have a look which badge I have out!" (Laughs). And my husband was just the same because you were absolutely in everything and we thought it was magnificent to go to any sort of function from a dinner to speeches or prize-giving if either of us didn't have to make a speech - that was wonderful! And it really was.

5.42 So that would really have taken up a lot of your time ...

Yes, a great deal of time.

... with the various organisations that you belonged to. And I suppose you got to know a lot of people in the area through these?

Yes, you do. I don't know. I got to the stage - before they started where the Plaza building is now and there were quite a lot of shops coming into High Street in Penrith - I came home once and said "You know I walked down the street today and I didn't know anyone!" And my husband said "No, and I suppose nobody knew you", which was quite right.

And in the old days it was quite different?

Yes, you'd know everybody. I loved coming through all that period. I think it was wonderful. I didn't like World War I. I didn't like World War II. And we still had the orchard behind us, and if I saw my mother and my sister - I had one sister and two brothers - if I saw them coming down through the orchard I'd think "Who's been killed?" Because I was pregnant the three times - they tried not to worry me - and they'd come down and until they got here I'd think "Who is it now?" That was a very grim time.

7.00 So, you had all your children during that period of the War then, you had the three girls?

Yes, and we had them with a great deal of thought and I guess prayer, that that was a thing we should do. But I remember going up to the Guild one day - I didn't have any help at the time, and I had the three children - Patsy, the youngest was in a carry basket and I got half-way through the meeting and up I looked and I said "I can't do this any longer until the children are older!" So someone took it over, temporarily.

It was too much for you!

7.34 By the time you get two toddlers and feed the baby and get them all dressed ...

Yes, that and all your activities, must have kept you very busy, yes.

Yes, but still I don't - although I'm still in a lot of things - I don't go to a lot of meetings. Jennifer, the girl you was just here, said "No, Mum, but you've got a great ministry on the phone!" because I ring people up to see how that are and that sort of thing. Because you can't be exactly idle.

No.

I could be lazier if I let myself, but I was brought up not to sit down idly. You see there's my tapestry and my knitting and ...

You were brought up to make the most of every moment?

Yes.

8.23 And in those days before television, I suppose you had to find things to do?

Yes, well you said how did we entertain ourselves - my sister played the piano. We used to sing around the piano and things like that.

And did you go out to theatre and concerts?

No, not a lot of theatre. We used to go to the pictures, I suppose, sometimes. Anything special we'd go to in the City. I suppose we saw the musicals and things like that, even if we went to a matinee. But when I was - before I was married and my sister was married - my mother and sister and I used to go every Friday. We'd shop and then we'd go to a picture theatre somewhere, and then we'd come home. I often thought of my poor father getting the bills!

9.22 And did your mother help with your children and baby-sit for you occasionally?

Often. If they were sick, yes, she'd come down or I'd take them there. But she was such an accomplished person. She made all their layettes and, I can't really make good pastry now or scones, because she'd do it. Or if you - we learnt dress making and music and so on - and my mother would say "Oh, give that to me. I'll put the sleeve in, I'll do it in half the time". But you have to gradually learn.

And did you make your children's clothes?

Yes, quite a lot of them. You have to with three children. And I didn't realise for a long time that they hated being dressed alike! I used to get three - or occasionally if I bought good dresses or had them made, they'd be the same, and then once they went out and they were in different clothes and I heard one say to the other "No-one will know we're sisters!" (laughs) which I thought was lovely.

10.29 And what about sport? Did the children play sport, and did you?

Yes. They didn't play a lot. We played a lot of tennis, and we decided that the best ... my husband loved golf, I didn't like it much, but ... we decided that as we had children, were having a young family, that we should have a tennis court. So I went up to my father and I said "Father I think we'll put in a tennis court" and he said "That's interesting" because my brother had said the same thing. I said "I know what we can do! We can have it between our two houses!" and we did. And we - I found yesterday in the Guild notices - that we played here every Thursday afternoon for a sum of two shillings. But other than that I had a lot of tournaments here for the church and charity - all day ones - and also before I was married, my family with two other people, won the B-grade tennis competition. We played a lot of tennis.

11.29 Do you think the children these days play as much sport?

No. They don't play nearly enough. I feel - even with our grandsons - I feel they don't play enough. But one of my pet things - there are too many arm-chair sports people.

Yes. Watching the television!

Oh, they're active. I wouldn't say our grandsons are not active. One of them is very sport minded. But ... I'd better not get on to my grandchildren. (They're such a varied lot.) I am biased.

Do they come to visit you often?

Oh yes.

12.19 Talking about finance - the family housekeeping - who took care of the family accounts and so forth?

You mean since I was married?

Yes.

Well, I don't think we had a housekeeping allowance. What had to be paid was paid and I suppose we started like that, and then my husband thought it might be a good idea if I had a housekeeping allowance, but as I didn't often do the shopping - he did it because he was out - he found that he was giving me the housekeeping and doing the shopping! So I think we left it off for a while, but then we started off again on a housekeeping allowance which meant I paid anyone who was working and that sort of thing. He didn't worry about that.

And I suppose you paid most things with cash - you didn't have credit cards and then did you?

No, we didn't. But I think all things in my pre-wedding era and, I think, afterwards, we paid a lot of bills by the month.

Monthly accounts.

13.33 And what about the animals? Did you keep any cows or chooks?

Yes, at 'Yodalla' we had our own chooks and cows and horses and pigs. I was awful. Every time they were going to kill a pig I used go down and watch. I must have been very blood-thirsty when I was little - I'm not now! But we had an abundance of all food and I think that was wonderful, every through both Wars. And when father had the grazing rights - had the title to it on this bank - we could walk across the banks without shoes on. But once the road was put through and nobody looked after it, it was dreadful. They've now cleaned it up within the last six months I suppose.

14.27 When was this road put through? River Road?

About 1939. Now when we were here we only had water from the windmill until ...

That was river water was it?

Yes, and we had a rain-water tank also, we still have. But then my father and my husband put a pump down on the river bank. Well we had plenty of water then. But if a flood was coming, you'd get some sort of warning, someone would ring you up along the river and tell you, and even in the middle of the night my husband would have to go down and bring the pump up because if it was covered with water it took a very long time to dry out - to get it working again.

15.24 And the water was clean enough to drink in those days? Which it isn't today?

Yes it was. Oh, well we didn't drink it then and we didn't up at 'Yodalla'. We always had rain water - the tank and the well. We didn't have a well here but we had the tank, and when it rusted we got another one because we were accustomed to rain water, and I used to loathe going to Sydney and having to drink Sydney water. It was dreadful.

15.52 It's still dreadful! And did you have any pet animals, like dogs or cats?

Father always had a dog. We always had a cat. I once had a dog, a lovely Collie, but father didn't like it, and when we were out one day he gave it away. It sounds as though he was tyrannical. He wasn't. He was lovely. I adored my parents. They were both so kind and loving. We grew up in love and I think that's a great thing. I felt sorry for people who didn't. And then my husband sent me a dog from Coonamble, a little black Cocker, and I called it 'Coon', but it was stolen on a Regatta day. The only pet we had here after that I think ... Wendy had a Corgi, our eldest daughter, and then our son had a little dog.

16.49 And talking about the Regatta. That was a big event - it's always been a big event Penrith?

Now, when I was in bed with Wendy in 1940, it was April and that was when the GPS Regatta was on, in War time. It was just after it had come up and my husband and the sister used to get in the car and follow the race down. There weren't any people. Earlier on when it used to be in Sydney, we used to go down and stay the weekend.

And it only came up here in about 1940 did it?

Yes or slightly before, but only just. Because they could get the eight crews across on the Parramatta River. They would have to have the heats on the Wednesday and then the final on the Saturday. But after it was here and it became a very big thing, with eight crews abreast we used to have Guild stall down at the finish on the property of one of members. I'd be down there at eight and we'd make sandwiches and do all the things, and sell this and that and charge them to come into her property. Then we always had people staying here and I'd come home and have a party from always at night. I don't where I got the energy. You do it when you're young I suppose, and you'd do all your own cooking, no buying.

18.13 So, these days it's quite different isn't it? There is so much take away food.

Yes, and you can buy so much.

18.23 And so I think ... is there anything else that comes to mind when you think about the early days and how things have changed over the period of the 50's and '60's?

No, I would have finished riding then. I used to ride a horse.

Did you?

Yes. We had two horses when were younger. One was slow - that's the one I used to call Max because the Maxina was a slow dance - and the other one was rather fast - we called it Jazz! And that was one thing - my brother and sister are older than I am - and we used to go out in riding groups at night, because there wasn't a lot of motor traffic. I loved doing that.

19.14 And thinking ... you couldn't do that now?

No, you couldn't do that now.

19.18 And when you mention the Maxina being a slow dance and so forth - did you do a lot of dancing in those days?

Yes we did. We had a lot of dances. I suppose that was one of the main things at night.

Where did you go? To the local ...?

In Penrith. I think they used to have them in the Masonic Hall. I don't think St. Stephens has them in their hall. I think they used to have them in the Masonic Hall too.

19.51 And so, generally, looking back at those old times and reflecting over your life before the great changes started to take place around here, do you think generally it's better or worse, or how does it make you feel?

Well, I think you have to have progress. I read the word 'traditionalist' isn't really good, but I think I am! I like the old ways and I still like the old bread and butter letter within 24-hours and that sort of thing, because I was brought up to it. But I think you have progress! My parents were very progressive. One of the big things in the '60's of course was the changeover from the old hospital to the new one, and we made sure the first person to go in it was the Editor of the 'Nepean Times' which was the only paper we had in those days - I think - and we had to get people down from the airforce to help move them over. And my husband being the Chairman, I went in to get a job too, and I was counting out all the cutlery in all the wards. There were so many things to do, it was a very interesting thing.

21.15 Did you do that as voluntary work?

Wives were expected to do all kinds of things.

Were they? All voluntary work?

Oh yes, it was all part of living I think.

And you didn't object to that?

No, I've never been paid for anything. I did a lot of work I suppose as a mannequin. You wouldn't believe it now!

Oh, yes you would!

I don't think so. But my mother always said, if she was in the audience, she'd be smiling at me. She always said "Why don't you smile more?" But I found I couldn't. But I know once we were doing it afternoon and evening in, as you called it, the Avon Theatre, and I hated walking on a cat-walk that was trestle tables - it's unsure. And I got so overcome that I had to sit down in the dressing room and put my head between my legs until I could go on again.

You felt faint!

- 22.21 But I really am so tired of public life. I'm still a member of Inner Wheel and some things. But my daughter who has also been a President of it, the eldest one, said "Why don't you come to the meeting, Mum?" and I said "I can't stand it, the same thing over and over again."

You'd had enough of that sort of thing?

Yes, I'd had enough.

And it was a very big part of your life!

Yes. Well I just thought it was part of living. We were brought up to do what came along I suppose, whether you liked it or you didn't. One of the things I didn't like when I was young was that you came into contact with death as it was. When I was at primary school we were all told to take flowers to school - and elderly man had died - and we made a wreath out of the willow leaves, willow things, all took flowers and did them, and I was one of people that had to take them. And in those days when anyone died you were always taken in to see the body. It was ... I suppose we accepted it - I can remember doing it time and time again. But I wouldn't like my children to do it. But that was just a part of life!

23.38 That's something that has changed hasn't it? I think sometimes children are protected from that sort of thing.

Well twice a child died. The school children carried the coffin - my sister helped - it's a long way - and they had to keep changing and it took four of them and it was a long way to walk from these houses up to where ... well, the cemetery's on the top of the hill.

24.00 Can I ask how your sister died? Was it an accident or was it ill health?

My sister?

Oh, it wasn't your sister?

Oh, no. No, she carried the coffin.

24.09 Do you remember the influenza epidemic here? This is going back a bit.

Yes. My father nearly died with that. And we didn't have the phone on. Mr. Shepherd did at the next house, and one of us went over to ring the doctor and evidently mother thought the doctor should be here by now and another of us was sent over - but we all had to wear masks - and father got better.

24.38 I think we've just about covered everything, but I just wondered if you'd like to maybe, in your mind's eye, describe how the countryside was and how you felt about it back in the days before the War, and compare it to what it's like now and how you feel about it now - the landscape?

Well, it's very different. My father having been born here, and - I'm fourth generation here in Emu Plains and Penrith - he always referred to it as "green and grassy Emu" and you could stand on the hill and look down over the parks that was - now you stand on the hill and you look at roofs! I say 'roofs' because our English friends always say that Australians say 'rooves'. So ever since they said that to us, I say 'roofs'.

I don't like the traffic. When we first lived here we could have a meal out on the front lawn. Also, and I suppose this applies to everywhere in New South Wales, we could sleep out on a verandah. I don't remember having to lock the car always - we certainly didn't lock the house. But now-a-days I don't go to our daughters, either side of us, without locking the house. It's a dreadful state isn't it?

Yes.

26.11 I've had to get the children up in the middle of the night and take them with us, because my husband had to make a will somewhere and he needed two witnesses. But another time, it was the evening of a holiday like yesterday, someone came to the door and he came back in and said "I have to make a will and I want three witnesses, Wendy, you'll have to come with your mother and me. He's a marksman." And I said "What religion's a Marksman?" He said "He makes a mark, and you have to have three witnesses." So down we went to this ... and he was absolutely in his right mind and he said, yes that's what he wanted, and made his mark and we witnessed it, and as the children were going to the train the next morning the undertaker was there! These were sort of emergency things.

27.19 Another one - we had to get up and take the children in a hurry. It was winter, about midnight and this old lady wanted to have a will made. When we got up there the house was in darkness and my husband couldn't rouse anyone, so we went into the neighbour and said "I was asked to come up and see this old lady" and she said "Oh, she feels better now, so she's not going to bother!" (Laughs). It was great! Can you imagine people doing it now? We're not on are we?

27.54 And so looking back then at those times through the '40's into the '60's, the main things you don't like are the traffic and the lack of security?

I think so, I don't like that. I don't like the modern young people's way of life, the way they accept anything that to me ... well, it's wrong! A thing is right or wrong! My father used to say "There is no grey. Things are right or wrong". I think that's right. I know it makes my parents sound very terrible, but they were the most loving, helpful, generous people. They used to be called - I shouldn't say this on tape - the "Benevolent Society" of Emu Plains! Because they were in a position to help and they did so, and they brought us up to do it. It mightn't be much. I found a letter last night from a lady who was to be a Guide Commissioner here and she wrote to thank me for appointing her and also for helping her to buy her uniform, otherwise she couldn't have bought it. That was in '66! I said to my husband I didn't even know I had! But you do it where you can.

29.21 And so you've probably been quite instrumental in setting up a lot of organisations in this area, because you've lived here so long?

Yes, well we've helped. My husband re-started the Chamber of Commerce, he was on the Council and on the Hospital. It was War-time and he was also Secretary for the Food for Britain. We worked in just about every avenue.

29.48 And it sounds as though you were as busy as he was?

Well, we both were. We worked together as much as we could. But also in Emu Plains my mother and some other ladies started supporting a cot in the Scarbrough Home - the Benevolent Society - it was called the Emu Plains Scarbrough Cot. It was collected for every year. I don't know how many cots there are there now. I found one of the books last night with the collection list money in it, because after Mother died my sister and I did it. And as each of our family died, instead of flowers we've had money sent to the Benevolent Society and endowed another cot in perpetuity. I hate talking about the things we've done, because it sounds dreadful!

30.43 Oh, no, not at all. Not at all. But I think we've just about covered everything. If you can think of any other little thing that comes to mind ...

Oh, there are only the things like the electric railway starting, and the City being made a ...

That made a big difference to the area.

Yes it did. And my husband and Adrian, my son who was young, went down and came up in the train. But we used to have processions and ... Christmas Eve was a wonderful time when I was young, because the shops stayed open in Penrith and everyone went into Penrith.

On Christmas Eve?

31.40 Yes. And you didn't have all these big presents. You had nice presents and Santa Clause came. It was not the big fuss and all the pre-parties that there are now.

31.46 It was more relaxed and enjoyable?

Yes. That's going on and off, is that finishing?

31.53 That's warning us. Well thank you very much.

Well, would you like a cup of tea or coffee now?

32.02 Thank you, that would be lovely.

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