Full transcript of an interview with

MARGARET CAHILL

on 14 January 1997

by Rob Linn

Recording available on CD

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RURAL HISTORY PROJECT.
Interview with Mrs Margaret Cahill in Merredin, Western Australia, on 14th January, 1997.
Interviewer: Rob Linn.

Mrs Cahill, could you just tell me a little bit about how you came first to Merredin?

MC: How I came to live in the house in town here?

No. No. How you first came with your parents?

MC: Oh! Well, my uncle and aunt were farmers down in Nangeenan. Yes, anyhow, my father was working in Perth and he wasn't very keen on the work he had. Anyhow my aunt persuaded him to come to - see, he came from Ireland, in the first place, from a farm.

From Ireland?

MC: From Ireland, my father did. And, like, his father brought him out in the early days. Anyhow they - actually they landed at Cooktown, over in Queensland. That's where they landed and gradually they got over here.

What was your father's name?

MC: Martin Maher. Anyhow, so eventually they all got over here and my uncle and aunt, Jack and Mary Carter, they took up land here down Nangeenan in 1910, and they were - you know, were sort of - well, the place was all virgin then. Not cleared like it is now.

So, was it all timbered country?
MC: It was all timbered country, heavy gimlet country. So, anyhow, he talked my father into coming up here. I was only 10 years of age then. There was no mechanised machinery like there is now.

So you were born in 1905, were you?

MC: 1905, and my husband was born in 1903. Anyhow, we came up here and he was working for a man who was one of the early settlers here, a Mr AB Caw. He's dead now. Anyhow, he's - well, he's passed on now. Anyhow, my father worked for him for quite - for four years, and while he was working for him he took up this block of land. So he got a crop in the first - no, he had to clear it. It wasn't - I think the first bit of land was only about 60 acres that he got cleared. And of course he gradually - he's still working after - he was there for about four years. Mr Caw wanted (he had his elderly mother and father living with him) and he wanted to get away from the farm, and he went down to Kojonup, and took up land down at Kojonup and was running sheep. Like, we settled on the farm then.

I left school when I was 14. There was no school buses in those days. (Laughter in voice) There was a school. We had a school in Nangeenan, and a school out in Nokaning. Anyhow, I left school when I was 14. Used to help my parents on the farm. Anyhow, to get a bit of extra income, in those days, my mother milked a lot of cows. We had about ten cows. Of course there was no rationing like there is now, and all this sort of business. So we milked these cows, and she used to send cream away and so forth. And make butter. She used to make 70 lbs of butter a week.

What type of cows were they? Do you remember?

MC: Oh, they were all sorts of cows.

So they were mixed breeds?

MC: They were mixed breed. There were no special breeds here then. Anyhow, so that's -

Well, what was your first house like out there?
MC: Oh, our first house. My father built our first house. There was no homes like there is now on the farms. They were all - sort of humpies. Anyhow -

Just hang on. When you say humpies, do you mean made out of Hessian?

MC: Yes.

Timber frames with Hessian -

MC: Timber framed houses. And was all timber. In fact he cut the gimlets out of the paddock.

You've said that twice now. What is that? Is that a type of timber?

MC: That's the timber.

How do you spell that? I've never heard it before.

MC: G.I.M.L.E.T.S.

Oh, gimlets.

MC: Yes, it's a straight -

A straight piece. Yes, I know what you mean.

MC: Anyhow, he built the house, and then - well, I worked on the farm. Used to help. Hanley used to drive the horse and plough.

Well, the farm he built. Was that a Hessian one or was it all timbered?

MC: No, it was Hessian. It was timber. They used to call it filter press.

Filter press?

MC: Yes. It was like a heavy canvas.

And did you put a lime wash over the top of it?

MC: Yes, it was whitewashed. We sewed bags together to put a lining in the house, and that was our first house.
And what? An earthen floor?

MC: Oh, yes. We had an earthen floor. Anyhow, the earthen floor was pretty solid when you walked on it all the time. *(Laughter in voice)* No, it was pretty solid and we'd have a few bags around where the - you know, to help out.

You worked with your father in the fields?

MC: Yes. I worked with my father in the paddock. He told me once, 'Now, if you clear an acre of ground, I'll put it in crop and you can have it'. I went out with the axes to cut down a couple of gimlets, and that was the finish of it. *(Laughter)* I never cleared no acre of ground. I used to drive the plough while he'd be sort of clearing our land. I worked pretty hard. There's a house out on the farm now but that's the house he had built. You know, had had built. That was just before he died actually. In fact he died here. And then, I was about 18 I suppose, I came to work in Merredin and I worked at a place for about four or five years and then went to work at the Commercial Hotel, and I worked there until I got married.

What type of work did you do at the Commercial?

MC: I was a waitress. Well, the first week there - how I got the job at the Hotel, my husband's (she'd have been his second cousin) was getting married and, see, I wanted to go to the Hotel, and of course she told me, you know, when she was going because we were great friends. So that's how I went to the Hotel. Anyhow, I was housemaid for about six weeks before she got married, and when she got married I got the job as waitress.

What was the Commercial Hotel like in those days?

MC: Oh, it was pretty flash. It was quite a nice one. Most of the commercial travellers and all the businessmen used to board there actually then.
Did they have a special room where the travellers could show their wares to people?

MC: Oh, yes. The front of the hotel. You see the whole of the hotel is all altered now. See, that room as you go into the front, oh, that now is - selling things or something or other. Well, see, that was the travellers' room. And there was a big billiard room. On the other hotel - it's not the same hotel now. It was quite a smart hotel.

And would these travellers come up on the train, would they?

MC: Yes. A few had cars but there wasn't so many cars in those days. No, they used - most of them came on the train because the night porter at the hotel, he used to go over to meet the trains when they came.

And meet the chaps off them?

MC: Yes. See, they didn't all have cars in those days.

Well, just try and describe Merredin to me in those days, and the district around it. It must have been very different from today.

MC: Oh, yes. Well, there was no bitumen roads like there is now. It was all just a dirt track. You know, bush track, coming in. When this part of the road, this highway, was too boggy, they'd come up the York Road way. See, the York Road was a bit more sandy, or something. It wasn't as heavy clay like it is down there. Oh, no, it was very rough in those days. Of course, there was another hotel there. See Duff's Hotel. See where - what's there now? It was at the corner of Boats and Mitchell Street. I think the - oh, what's that new building? There's Newburys thing that's built there now. Anyhow, the hotel, when I first remember it, it wasn't a great big hotel. But see, there was another hotel trying to come here. The Northern Brewery put the Commercial Hotel there. And see they kept building onto their hotel trying to keep the other hotel out. But then eventually the Northern Brewery got that hotel built, and for some reason or other - now who was it? Oh, the manager - years ago before the Senior Centre started here - now that's been going for about 25 years (we've got a certificate outside there) - the hotel got demolished. Oh, yes, they were trying to keep the Commercial out and they
kept building onto their hotel and then they couldn't - the Commercial got there just the same.

And there was also an arcade of shops there. See, there's nothing there now. The arcade of shops got knocked down. One was a men's shop. They sold all men's clothes. There was a photographer. There was a dentist. And there was another shop at the end there facing the street. I think the lady who had it was a widow. She was a painter and there was all paintings and all sorts of things in that shop. No, they demolished - that was all demolished.

When you came in to be the waitress at the hotel, your parents stayed on the farm, did they?

MC: Oh, yes, they were still on the farm. Yes, they were on the farm. See, I had three brothers, and farming in those days wasn't much. You know, wheat was very low. In fact wheat was only one and six a bushel when my husband and I were married. Things weren't like it is now.

Anyhow, my eldest brother (Martin) he took up a block of land. We called it Connells. That was the name of the people who were on it. And he had it leased, I think. And he had - we had three years and was three bad crops, and he said, 'I'm not staying here any longer. I'm going to Kalgoorlie'. Because the mines were all opening up there. So he went to Kalgoorlie. In fact he was there until he retired. He was made an Underground Manager or something before he died.

Anyhow, my other brother (Eddie) he, and some other lads around the district, he got fed up with working - well, you know, our parents couldn't pay them. They weren't able to pay them wages. They went over east. There was four of them I think altogether.

And then my youngest brother, I was still working in town when he joined the Navy, and he was on the Australia right through the War. And he was in the Battle of Britain and all that. He was in the War properly. Well, he's retired now and he lives over in Urunga in New South Wales.

Urunga Waters.

MC: Yes. He married a local girl. They were friends before he joined the Navy. They were farmers out at Nukarni. Name of Dot Hart.

Now, just tell me. Your father had how many acres where he was?
MC: 1,000 acres.

But he'd only cleared 60 in the first couple of years?

MC: Oh, the first year. Well, see, he was still working. He did that of a weekend.

Is that right?

MC: Yes. And then it was all cleared eventually.

So while he was working for Mr Caw, he cleared it on the weekends?

MC: Yes.

Goodness me!

MC: They worked hard in those days. Not like they do now. *(Laughter in voice)*

And anyhow, then he let contract clearing to different people. I know his brother-in-law was one man that he let it to. It was all cleared. The whole of the farm was cleared, the whole 1,000 acres.

What was his brother-in-law's name?

MC: His name was Mick O'Donnell. He's dead now. In fact the whole of his family is dead now. His youngest daughter died last year.

So that was pretty normal for families to work together right across in-laws and -

MC: Yes, yes. He wanted work and that, so that's what happened. And then -

Let's get back to you working as a waitress. How do you come to meet your husband, Vin?

MC: Oh, well, years and years ago, in 1917, we were confirmed together. See, we're both Catholics. I never knew I was going to marry him though. *(Laughter in voice)*

1917 you were both confirmed?
MC: In 1917 we were confirmed down - the Church wasn't here then. It was down the other side of the town where the Masonic Hall is. Alongside the Masonic Hall. I think the CWA building house, if it's still there, is on the site where it was.

I suppose I met him at dances, when I first met him I suppose. Because there used to be dances down in Nangeenan Hall every - dances down there nearly every week. Wasn't like it is now. Music wasn't so dear. They'd come down - a lass from Merredin would come down and play the piano for £1. That's all she used to get. Now if you run a dance, the music's about $1,000.

So most weekends all the people of the district would come to the dance, would they?

MC: All the people of the district would come, yes. All the mothers would bring their babies in their prams.

Yes?

MC: Oh, yes. Vin and I used to go to the dances and I used to have Noreen and Kevin in the hall because Vin was very much involved with the hall. And I would have them in the pram out in the what they called the ladies room. And Kevin and Noreen were babies. See, Kevin's a twin. I don't know whether he's told you that.

No, he didn't tell me that.

MC: He's a twin. He's got a sister, Noreen, older than him. She's an hour older than him. In fact she was here the other week. She came home Boxing Day, and we went away on the 4th January down to Dennis' daughter's wedding. She was here till then. She took me down there.

So that was very much a part of the life of the district, were these dances?

MC: Yes, everybody would.

That sounds fantastic.

MC: Yes, it is.
So what type of dances? Just all the Royal Alberts and the waltzes?

MC: All the old time dances. The Royal Alberts, the Lancers, the Schottees, and the Barn Dance. All the dances. Not like they do now.

And would the hall be filled?

MC: Yes. Be all around the hall. The chairs all around the hall. It was a lovely hall.

Looked like it was a big hall.

MC: It was a big hall. It was built in 1912 I think. Or 1915.

Did people like your father and mother think of themselves as pioneers, or not?

MC: There's my mother and father over there in that photo. That was taken - oh, down in the museum down here, Roma Cooks, who was something to do with the museum down there, she wanted a - oh, they've got a history down there. I used to mind the - look after down there for about twelve months when they wanted a caretaker. And of course they came and asked me to go and, of course, silly me goes down there. Anyhow, I knocked it off after twelve months. I couldn't - I think Vin got sick or something. It was too inconvenient to go down there so I gave it up. So anyhow she wanted something of me and they had something of me that the priest over here - when I turned 90 he had something in the record about me, and of course it had a snap of me across there. Because I did ask, 'Who put that in the record?' And he said, 'Oh, I did'. Anyhow, so I sent this cutting - gave it to Roma but she said that wasn't what she wanted. Anyhow, so that photo that's there was my mother and father. She said, 'Oh, your mother was a pioneer, too'. See, whatever they've got written down there in that museum - I don't know whether you've been down there or not.

No, I haven't been.

MC: No, well, I haven't been down there, well, not for a few years now. I did look after the place there for twelve months. Used to be down there every
Saturday and Sunday, and now I have to give it up. Anyhow, she's got a photo of that down there. Anyhow, I think they've got other pioneers around there district besides - I'm not the only one I don't think.

No. Did you think of yourselves as pioneers, in a sense? Or were you too busy all the time?

MC: You don't think of those things, no.

So was your main aim just to get the crops in, to get a return back and to keep the thing going?

MC: Yes. And to get a living off the crop too. We used to milk the cows, and I used to make butter and send cream away.

This is with your mother or when you were married?

MC: When I was married. See, I had five children to raise.

Just go back a bit. When were you and Vin married? What year?

MC: In 1931. 3rd October, 1931.

That must have been a pretty hard time to get married.

MC: It was then, yes.

Financially it was right at the beginning of all the problems, wasn't it really?

MC: That was - the Great Depression was on then really. And there was - oh, wouldn't be a day go past my place down the farm I wouldn't have somebody call in for a feed.

Yes? What, a Swaggie?

MC: Swaggies looking for food. I'd cut them a lunch and give it to them and say that's all I could give them. Anyhow, they were all just looking for work.

So for their sandwich, did they have to chop some wood up or something?
MC: No, they didn't have to do anything. Vin was down - like there was no mechanised machinery in those days and he used to cut a lot of hay and had a chaff cutter and used to make chaff. Anyway he was down at the station loading up one day a truck to send to Kalgoorlie to Mr Pauley.

Was he on the mines, was he?

MC: No. He was a - what would you call him?

Contractor?

MC: Oh, he had something to do with the flour mills in Kellerberrin, and he also had something to do with the flour mills somewhere else, because every week he'd stay down at Cahills, down at Alf's, our farm. He had a business in Kalgoorlie. He lived in Kalgoorlie. He was the - he used to stay there. Come there every week. Then eventually I think he got too old to travel, and I think his family probably took it over.

So what was your husband doing for him? Chaff, was he?

MC: He used to sell chaff to him. He had a chaff cutter. He used to cut the hay and sell chaff to him because it was all horses in Kalgoorlie then. It wasn't like it is now.

So did the swaggies help with that, did they, at all?

MC: No. This fellow was down the station and my husband was loading the truck and he wanted a job so we gave him a job. Anyhow, it was hay cutting time I think on the farm down there, one of the paddocks up the other side of the York Road, and he said to Vin coming home in the dinner, 'Oh, I think I'll call it a day on Friday'. And Vin said, 'You're leaving?'. See, Olly came and worked for us, we bought him a pair of boots and I bought him a new shirt. Well, like, he paid for it. Took it out of his wages but I bought it in Merredin, a pair of boots. He got a new shirt and boots and he was just going to live on the dole again I suppose. (Laughter in voice) That was just his attitude.

The swaggies were coming through regularly, were they?
MC: Oh, yes. There wouldn't be hardly a day go past there'd be a swaggie. They'd be out of work and they'd come in and ask for a feed. See, down in Nangeenan in those days there was the great big shed because they used to shunt the engines and so forth down there. Like it wasn't like it is now. See, they'd camp in the shed down there and of course they'd go around to the neighbours for - Growdens lived behind the station. And of course I lived just up the road.

So Vin's family, had they been pioneers out there the same time as your parents?

MC: Yes, well, Vin's family, they came here in 1903. His mother and father were in Kalgoorlie. They'd come over from Bendigo, and they were in Kalgoorlie. I think he was working on the mines and that. He came down and took - see, the district was only getting - was thrown open then and (indecipherable - could be a name) was one of the early settlers - like his father. And when Vin, my husband, came onto the farm I think he said he was only three years of age. Because his mother went back to Kalgoorlie for the next two to be born. No, he was about three. Steve was a baby. And then she went back to Boulder for Joe to be born and Ursula. Ursula and Jack, the youngest one, - well, he's the only one still alive of my in-laws on the Cahill's side - she went down to Osborne Park to a midwife that she knew. And they were born there.

So that would have been about 1906 then if Vin was three? That be right?

MC: No, he was born in 1903, but he was born in Boulder.

About 1906 he came to the farm?

MC: Yes. About 1906 his parents came to the farm. He said he was only about three or four when Alf came. See, the land in those days, when that land was thrown open in Nangeenan they were thrown open 250 blocks of land and so gradually he kept building it up. And see, how we've got so much - see, when the boys - like, we had three boys and of course they all wanted to be farmers, and of course as they grew up I suppose we took up more land. And see, actually down Nangeenan the
Cahills - the Cahills in Nangeenan have about ten properties - nine properties. See, they were different farmers that have gone off the farms or have left the farms.

**The children you had were Noreen and Kevin?**

**MC:** Yes. And then I had Brian. Well, he lives up at Moora. And then I had Margaret. She became a school teacher. She’s married to a farmer down at Boyup Brook. And then I had Dennis. See, Dennis and I had a school, and of course Dennis wasn’t very brilliant at school I might tell you. *(Laughter in voice)* Anyhow, he wanted to be a farmer so that was that. So he came home, and of course he’s on the farm. Well, he’s down on holidays at Mandurah now. They went away about a week ago. They’ve gone away for a month. They’ve got a house down there. Well, they bought a house at Falcon. Falcon’s a suburb of Mandurah really.

**So Kevin lives on Glenalbyn now? Is that right**

**MC:** He’s living where I used to live.

**That’s right on the corner there, is it?**

**MC:** Yes. See, after he was home for a while he went away and worked for Elders down in Northam for about twelve months, and then he came home.

**Now did your place change after you were married? Did you build onto it, or what did you do?**

**MC:** Oh, the house. Oh, the house down Nangeenan, that’s been - where Kevin lives - that’s been built on. When I got married it was only just four rooms.

**Stone rooms?**

**MC:** No, just four rooms. Anyhow, before the house was built, years and years ago, that house down at Nangeenan siding - I don’t know if you’ve been to the siding yet?

**Oh, that’s back from the road.**
MC: Yes. Well, you see that was a siding. Well, those houses were Marley's. They weren't there then. And that house belonged to the man - in fact he's dead now - but that was the storekeeper's house. He was the storekeeper and the Post Office. And just before Vin - like, Kevin's father died - he had a chaff cutting plant. See there was no mechanised machinery then. And he had a chaff cutting plant, and he had a - what they call up on Fagan's(?) farm - and he got kicked. He was shifting the engine from - going to take it to another farm and the horse kicked him and broke his leg. See, there was no hospital and all that here in Merredin then. The hospital was up - a private hospital. In fact it's demolished now, and it was Nurse Armstrong's hospital. Anyhow, he was in the hospital and Grandma Cahill (she came in every day in the horse and sulky to see him) and on the Sunday she said, 'I won't go in to see Dad today because I'm going in in the morning to bring him home'. He collapsed and died that night.

This was Vin's father?

MC: My husband's father. Vin was only - how old was he then? He was only about ten then. And see, his mother was very hard working, determined woman, and she wanted as soon as they came and took up land to have a future for their family. She had a lot of cows. She hired(?) a lot of cows and she used to milk for butter. They had about ten cows or something. No, I think they had more than that. She used to make butter and come into Merredin and sell butter. She used to sell butter at nearly every house, because Merredin wasn't like it is now either. Anyhow, she used to sell that. So that's how she got going. Of course, the boys all worked the farm. And I can remember, I was going to school, and they used to have the Post Office. See, there was no Post Office. The mail used to be left there.

To their house?

MC: At their house. And of course I used to have to go down at dinner time to get the mail for us to take home.
MC: And my husband was driving the harvester. You know, she was frightened he would fall off and wouldn't know what to do. He was only a lad and she was *(couldn't decipher word - very noisy background)*. I can remember him, not knowing then that I was ever going to marry him.

**So your mother-in-law shepherded the boys through, really?**

MC: Yes. She was really a very hard worker. She was determined they were going to keep that land and have something for the future. And then eventually they took other blocks of land up, and that. Anyhow, they all ended up being farmers except the youngest boy. He was on the farm for a while. Of course things were bad, and of course he used to want to get his wages every week and come in to spend it in Merredin. And of course he had a squabble with Vin, and of course he came and got a job at the brewery, which was better for him because he was getting his weekly wage there.

**So there was a brewery in Merredin?**

MC: There was a brewery, yes. Came from Kalgoorlie or Boulder. I forget the name of the man that had the brewery. There was a brewery there and it employed quite a lot of people. It was up the other side of the town now. Have you been up the other side of the town where there's a great big - was Miss Ellis Cummins brewery. Cummins Brewery.

**Cummins Brewery.**

MC: Yes. See, it's Cummins Theatre. They built the theatre. And the brewery, that great big stone house up there, that was where her mother and father lived, and she lived.

Mrs Cahill, let's go back to your farm. You married and it's the Great Depression and things are pretty tough. When did things start to come good for the farm? Can you remember? Was it about the start of the War or was it before that?

MC: It was towards the end of the War it started to come good, then.
Did your husband have to go to fight?

MC: No, but they had a militia in - I think they called it a militia - in Merredin.

Yes.

MC: He used to come in every Sunday morning. And see, he had land so he was - but they had a - used to come and have this practise. Thing called militia, or something. Every Sunday morning. See, his brother - his youngest brother went. Well, he went up - I think he was up in Broome. Or up north somewhere.

Berrimah?

MC: No. You know, they thought the Japs were coming in.

In the islands do you mean?

MC: Wasn't actually in the islands. He was up there but -

He was in Queensland somewhere, was he?

MC: No, he was in Western Australia.

Oh, I see what you mean. Up the top of Western Australia.

MC: Yes, they were up there. Things started to get a bit good then. Of course then they had an Army Barracks down the other side of Merredin and they had all these soldiers there.

So you had to supply them with food, did you, at times?

MC: Yes, I think they did. Of course I was boarding school teachers, too. We had school - I was boarding school teachers to earn a bit of money, and of course we'd have all these mob of soldiers down there every weekend. There'd be a couple coming down to see the school teacher. Having them down there every weekend.

Well, did the War affect the district a great deal here?
MC: Well, I suppose it did. They used to have dances every Saturday night. You know, we never have a dance now.

To raise money, was it?

MC: Entertainment I think for the soldiers.

I see. That's right.

MC: There was a big Army place out at Nungarin. Of course they would all come into Merredin because Merredin had a Town Hall then. It's demolished now. And there used to be dances in the Railway Institute. Could be two dances on in the town. There was a lot of soldiers here then.

And after the War did those good years continue for the farm?

MC: Well, I suppose it has continued because things are lot - of course everything's dearer now on the farms. Even to buy machinery and that.

The thing that interests me, Mrs Cahill, is that for your whole life you never lived in a city, did you? Really, to speak of.

MC: No. I lived in the city - see, my father years ago - I was born in an hotel. He had an hotel over in Bulla in Victoria and I was born in the hotel, and he had another hotel in Collingwood, and my sister was born there. I lived in the city until I was about ten. See, when he came from the east over here he had a business in Bulwer Street in Perth, a green grocery business. And then he had a business up in Beaufort Street. And then we came to Nangeenan.

So I didn't realise that. Things didn't work out with the business, or something?

MC: Oh, well, things - in those days - he reckoned he gave too much credit. See, people didn't pay cash like they do now. You know, they give credit. Of course, you know, you wouldn't get paid. You'd be waiting for the -

All on the 'tick'?

MC: Yes, put down. That's what he gave it away for, I think.
Because he couldn't pay his own bills probably.

MC: Yes, well, see, he used to go - I can remember going to the markets with him and he used to buy his stuff. Course, markets all different now, in Perth.

But did you find rural society somehow different from Perth, in your memory?

MC: Oh, yes. We went to school in a horse and cart, or we rode a horse. We didn't - there was no motor cars in those days.

Were the communities different, do you think?

MC: Oh, yes. More friendly and that. And see, all the ladies would go around in the horse and sulky and visit one another.

Is that right?

MC: Yes. See, you never see that now.

And did people do that in the city or not so much?

MC: I don't think they did it in the city.

Was it one of the things that happened out here?

MC: I know it happened in Nangeenan.

Well, from what you've told me tonight with the dances, with all the families coming along, and the visiting, it was a pretty friendly type of community.

MC: Yes, it was really. More friendly than they are now.

Was there a Catholic Church in Nangeenan as well as here?

MC: No. There was no Church in Nangeenan. The Priest used to come from Kellerberrin. There was no Church in Merredin then. The Priest used to come from Kellerberrin and we'd have Church down in the Nangeenan Hall once a month, and there'd be Church in the RSL Hall once a month, and eventually in 1926 Father Smith came here to Merredin. That was the first Parish Priest. And then when he left here, he was here for - in fact I think he married - I forget
now whether he married us - anyhow, when he left here he was transferred down to Beaconsfield. You know that's out from Fremantle?

Yes. I do.

**MC:** He was out fishing one day and he got - capsized in the boat and was drowned. He was drowned at Beaconsfield. And then, it was while I was working in Merredin - I was married in the - what is down here now, the old - what we call the old hall - that was the Church. See, that was the Catholic Church. That's the Church I was married in. And see there was no - the school at that time, the Convent house was there and they had a bit of a lean-to against the old Church, that was the first Convent school here. Just a lean-to against the old Church. Well, of course, it's all demolished now. There's a new building there. Of course the Church here on the end.

**And do you feel glad you've lived in Merredin all these years?**

**MC:** Oh, yes. I've always been liked here. Done quite a bit of travelling. That's when Noreen and Kevin were away to school, Vin said one day, 'When Noreen and Kevin leave school we're going off the farm for six months, and we're going to leave them to look after things'. So when Kevin was about - well, he did his junior. He didn't stay to do his Leaving. His father wanted him on the farm actually. Anyhow, I suppose he was nearly 16 when he left school, and anyhow then Noreen left - she wanted to stay a bit longer. She wanted to get some diploma at school. Anyhow, she stayed at school for the following May and then her father said she had to leave. So she had three months longer schooling. She wanted to be a school teacher - music teacher I mean. And she taught here at the Merredin Convent for quite a while till - like, used to come in - doing her diploma, or some of these letters they do. Diploma of something.

**For music teacher?**

**MC:** Yes. Anyhow, she used to come in on the school bus. Of course the bus had started then. And of course my husband was the one that originated the school bus. When the school down Nangeenan, it got down to - we only had about eight pupils, or seven pupils. Anyhow, the school got closed so they had
to come into the Merredin school. So anyhow, Vin and Mrs Snell, who lived over the back of us, they used to take it in turns. One would bring them in the morning and she would take them home at night. Then we bought them bikes. Anyhow, if the wind was blowing this way, they had to ride the bikes to school, but if it was blowing the other way their father took them. Vice versa.

(Laughter in voice)
So then, oh, it was getting a bit of a problem because we had to get the crop in. You know, there was too much time wasted because I wasn't able to drive the car then. In fact I wasn't allowed to drive it. He wouldn't let me drive it. He reckoned I'd hit a tree or something. (Laughter) Anyhow, but I learnt to drive unbeknown to him. And now I've got my licence.

Anyhow, there was no school buses in those days so he got Mr Frank Cauhey, who's dead now - he was on the Merredin Shire, one of the counsellors - anyhow, he got him to go down with him to Perth, and of course he had children out at Nokaning going to school too. Of course, Nokaning school was closed. So anyhow, they closed the Nokaning school, and Nangeenan never had a school, so that made enough children. There was about 27 children altogether.

Anyhow, he went down to see this - his name was Mr Little at that time who was the Minister of Education, I think it was. Anyhow, they talked about getting a school bus. Anyhow, the school bus had to be a bus with no glass in it. Anyhow, Vin said, 'You're not going to see this Mr Little but this bus is going to have glass in it'. He said, 'If the kids can see so and so's ploughing, and so and so's cows are in the paddock, and this that and the other, they won't be squabbling and fighting. But if they've got to sit in a bus with just blinds and can't see out, well, they'll all be squabbling with one another'. So anyhow, eventually we got that bus. Anyhow, that's how the bus started.

Of course, the Nokaning school closed. Of course people weren't very happy out there because Vin Cahill had closed the school, and of course they happened to say, 'Oh, he only wanted to get his children to the Convent school'. We didn't care where they went to school as long as they got education. But anyhow, there was so many of them come to the Convent school and so many went to the State school. There was only the State school down there. There was no high school or anything up here then.

Mrs Cahill, did most families want their children to have schooling?
**MC:** Of course they wanted them to have schooling. See, those who - there was one family out at Nokaning had their school on correspondence. Of course, she had been a school teacher herself in England and she was able to do with her children. Her boys - she had a boy and a girl and when the wind was blowing right, the boy went to school but if the wind wasn't blowing the right way he stayed home. *(Laughter in voice)* See that's how they got - anyhow when the school buses started, well, it was the making of the children in Merredin.

*Well, when you say - were the winds that strong that they couldn't get the bikes going at all?*

**MC:** No. See, if you're riding a push-bike and you've got the wind blowing against you it's pretty hard when you're a child trying to push the bike. My husband, one night, just to save petrol, he rode - he had to post some letters - so he rode the push-bike into Merredin. He had a big man's push-bike. He rode the bike into Merredin and he said, 'I'll never ride the bike again'. *(Laughter)* He only did it to save petrol.

*Is that right?*

**MC:** He did it to save the petrol. He said, 'I'll never ride it again'. It was that hard riding in and out.

*Have you found this a good area to live in over the years?*

**MC:** Oh, yes. It's up on the hill and all the water runs away. Sometimes that road out there - Pioneer Road - that's just like a river when it rains.

*Is that true? You get that much?*

**MC:** Yes. The rain comes down - it's the slope of the land on the road.

*Well, thank you very much for talking to me, Mrs Cahill.*

*Could you tell us a bit more about your husband, Mrs Cahill?*
MC: Well, he was a very hard worker. When he used to drive the tractor, I think we were about the first ones in the district to have a tractor, and he used to work all hours, and he used to have himself with a belt tied on the tractor in case he went to sleep. That's true as goodness. He'd work till all hours of the night, and he had himself belted in on the tractor in case he dozed off to sleep. We had to get more crop in to sort of get on our feet. It was no use just drilling a few hundred acres every year. And then as the boys grew up he took up more land. All the farms around us are all adjoining us really, actually. People have to go off them or - we got them anyhow.

So your husband was a very hard worker?

MC: He was hard working. He worked too hard.

What were other things about him that were outstanding, do you think? Did he do much community work?

MC: Yes, he did a lot of community work really. He helped quite a lot. Oh, he went out and worked on the roads, too. When we first got our tractor - we got this new tractor and he went to the Bank Manager and said he'd got work on the roads, like, the main road was getting bitumenised and formed and so forth, and he worked on the roads and he said that the money he was earning off that road had to go to pay for the tractor. The Bank wasn't to take it to reduce the debt on the farm, and that. He wanted that. No, he was a very hard worker. He used to work, you know, of a night time. I used to lay in the bed and listen to the blooming - the first tractor we had was a pop, pop, pop thing. Not like the modern tractors. (Indecipherable - possibly a name) was working on a farm out here at Teasdales, I think it was. Anyhow I used to lay in bed, and I had a young baby. I forget who was the baby then. I think Brian was. The second boy. And I used to hear this tractor of a night time and know he was still working. No, he was a very hard worker.

So what year would that have been about when you got the tractor? In the 1930's?

MC: 1937, I think it was. Yes, I think it was 1937 when we got our first tractor.

That was more or less the first one in the district, was it?
**MC:** Well, it was really because he got a lot of contract work to do it. And see, that’s how he used to be working in the night time. He’d be away working on other farms with the tractor and he’d come home and work on a Saturday and Sunday on our farm. No, he was a very hard worker. In fact if it wasn’t for their father Kevin wouldn't be farming down there now.

*Well, thank you again for talking to me, Mrs Cahill.*