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Full transcript of an interview with

HELEN JONES

on 6 July 1999

by Jenny Palmer

Transcript prepared by Kate Battersby

Recording available

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LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIANA: INTERVIEW NO. OH 505/7

TAPE 1 SIDE A

This is an interview with Dr Helen Jones for the The Honoured Women Oral History Project, conducted by Jenny Palmer on behalf of the State Library of South Australia. The interview takes place at Dr Jones' home at Burnside on the 6th of July 1999.

All right, Dr Jones, we do have some background questions that we'd like to ask you as part of the process of the interview. And we begin with very simple things which most people that we talk to can remember, like your full name (laughs), your maiden name and details of your parents. So who were you when you were born, and where was that, and when, and so forth?

I was born on the 5th of September 1926 at the Memorial Hospital, North Adelaide. My name was given as Helen Patricia Cashmore, and my mother was Myrtle Elizabeth Cashmore; my father Arthur Herbert Cashmore.

And you were the firstborn?

Yes.

And had your parents been married long? That's not meant to be a leading question, but were they young and -- --.

Yes, they had been married for almost three years before I was born, and they weren't in their early twenties -- my mother was then twenty-seven, I think, and my father twenty-six, thereabouts.

All right. Well, they weren't *very* young; I mean they were quite mature at the time, weren't they?

Yes.

Right. Now, you grew up in Lockleys --

Yes.

-- so the transition -- did you just tell me that that's where they were actually living when you were born?

Well, my father was in England when I was born; my mother had been there with him, but they decided that it wouldn't be good to have a baby in a private hotel in

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London, and it was not the right place to bring up a newborn. So my father had to stay on; my mother came home and she got home six weeks before I was born. She'd sailed back on a liner, and was completely at home about that: she had had experience of travel. She'd – in 1922 she'd been manager of the South Australian Women's Hockey Team that went to Perth, and she'd done all that as quite a young [woman]; and so it was nothing to her to just take the journey on her own – at least, that's as I understand it – and she then went on travelling whenever she had the opportunity.

Were they there visiting relatives?

No. No; my father was working there. He had been – he was a baker, but he became involved in a project, the Kay Engine, which – from what I can gather and what I've seen of the patents records – was somewhat similar to the Sarich Engine, but it was before its time because the materials used for it weren't going to be as effective. They wore, certain bearings wore. But the Kay Engine was taken to England, and my parents went on the ship with it – and with the inventor who'd come from Melbourne – and my father was the Sales Manager, and he worked in England and worked with Sir Malcolm Campbell and various big engineering firms. But, even though it wasn't going ahead particularly well, he had to stay on for another period and didn't see me until I was eight months old, when he returned.

So you say that he was a baker?

Mm.

But obviously he had the kind of mind that could accommodate –

Yes.

– engineering.

Yes; he did know quite a lot of the technical side of it. But he also had a personality which he could – he was able to influence people. He wasn't a salesman, really; he would talk in intelligent sort of ways about things and explain things to people, as he did to us as children – a lot of explanations, a lot of knowledge, was poured onto us.

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(shuffle and knocking sound)

Just getting rid of those headphones. What level of education did he have?

Well, that was the interesting thing. He left school when he was no more than fourteen, and I don't think had anything past primary school, *unless* he went to Hindmarsh – it wasn't high school, it was a top-up on the school – continuation school, or something like that. I've never been able to track it down, or I might be able to one day. But his mother, who had been to the Advanced School for Girls, and his father, who was a great reader, were insistent that he go to night school; and he went to night school at the School of Mines, and I don't know what he studied there. But he kept on studying, and he was always learning. But he wanted to get out and start working. It was his choice to a large extent, apparently.

And your mother also had been a hockey player –

Mm.

– and done quite independent things for –

Yes.

– a woman in her time.

Yes.

Was her family supportive of that?

Oh, yes.

Were other members of the family like that?

Mm. She was more independent-minded, probably, than her younger sisters. Her parents worked very hard. Her father had a carrying business for grain, and storage business, in Morphett Street, near the Morphett Street Bridge.

What name was that?

His name was William Grubb. He came from Cornwall when he was a boy of eighteen, as a labourer. He had left there – and this came firsthand to one of my cousins who was in England during the War from an old man who was there – when

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William Grubb *threw* down the scythe he was using to cut some hay, and said, 'I'm going to Australia.' (laughs) And he did. He didn't want to go into the mines. He thought there wasn't enough work on the farm for three sons, and he wanted to get out on his own.

They had four daughters and lived in Morphett Street and then in Whitmore Square, and they valued education highly. My mother went to Adelaide High School but after having been to the, first of all, the Grote Street Model School and then the Currie Street Model School, she left when she was just fifteen to look after the business when my grandfather went to Cornwall – he was longing to go back and see his people after so many years. And so she was there helping her mother run the business. And she went on, remained in the office working – she didn't have any typing skills; they didn't have a typewriter, I think – but she worked on organising the deliveries and doing the banking and all manner of things like that. She did that till her marriage.

And when did the hockey playing become a great feature of life?

Oh, I think she was only a girl in her teens. She was a fast runner and she, somehow or other, she and her sister Kathleen met some people who played hockey – including a man who coached them in a sort of way in the parklands – and they used a bent stick instead of a hockey stick to start with; and then she went to the Conservatorium part-time as a piano student, and by dint of that was able to join the University hockey team. And she went on from there – she played for University, and then she played for Blackwood. And so hockey became quite a big thing in the family.

And on your father's side, too? Or was it – – ?

Well, yes. When my mother suggested that one of his sisters, Mabel, who was a very good sport at school, would be a good player, she took it up, and she was a good player and became an international player – interstate first, as my mother and two of her sisters were; and the – my father's other sisters, two of them were very good players, but I don't think they were interstate players. And so hockey was a means of making – through hockey, a lot of friends, friendships arose: it was very influential because the women who played hockey were comrades together, and they all had a

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very good attitude to winning and losing, and a good sporting attitude. And it was wonderful exercise, especially for girls who were working in offices and inside during the week. But they'd sometimes go out to practise early in the morning, seven a.m. on the parklands for practice, and they formed a network of friendships with interstate players – those who went interstate or when the teams came here – and internationally. And a lot of friendships were made, and these individuals seemed to influence what happened in our lives.

It's an interesting connection: it's one that you, I don't think, have explored in your work, the importance of sport for reinforcing women's sense of independence and difference. Maybe that's something for the next book.

(laughs) Yes; I have written a little, a few pages – someone in the Women's Hockey Association asked me to do that – about the influence of hockey in our family, and so there's a seed there (laughs), but I don't know where it will go, if anywhere.

But it's a very important point, because it was a very powerful combining force for women.

Mm.

Were there any other people in your family who became quite as well known as – and I say a 'public figure' when I refer to you –

Mm.

– because since your Honour, of course, you are to a certain extent a public figure, and you were very well-known in your teaching days. As far as public life is concerned, or community service – – –.

Well, my uncle Jeff, J-E-double F, Cashmore was on the Norwood Council and Mayor of Norwood for a number of years. Let me see. My Aunt Mabel was very active and popular amongst many people through her hockey; but also she was active in the CWA and she – during the War, she was working on a relative's property as part of the women's Land Army, and then after the War she went to Angorichina for a period, just for a period, to help where the tubercular soldiers were working. She became quite widely known. I don't know that anybody else was, really, at that, my – at the senior level.

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And then among your sisters – and you –

Ah, well.

– we haven't explored that yet but we'll get onto siblings in a moment, but one – – –.

Mm, yes, well, of course my sister Jennifer has had a political career and a public career in other ways which she continues now, mostly voluntarily doing things to help in the community, and so she's the only one I would say of note.

We'll talk about your siblings in a second, just as part of the structure of your family life. Was the Church important in your life?

That's an interesting question. When we were children, we were sent to the Baptist Sunday School at Lockleys. My father – my father's mother was an extremely dedicated Baptist, and – her name had been Lilian Humphris, and the Humphrises – they lived at Nelshaby and up round Gladstone latterly – and they were Baptists. And my grandfather was Congregational, and he didn't seem to attend the Baptist church; but my grandmother and their eight children did, attended the Mile End Baptist Church where there was a plaque to her after her death – she was a very fine person, a lovely person, and died fairly young.

Now, my father was teaching in Sunday School there when he was about fourteen years old. But when he went to the War, he lost his faith in the trenches, and he told me very briefly about this. And – but he wanted us all to know the Bible – and partly from a literary point of view, but also a cultural point of view – and he thought it was a good idea that we went to Sunday School. There was no Church of England at Lockleys in those days. [My mother and my father] encouraged us to go to Sunday School, which we did. They arranged it and we used to walk to this Sunday School about, oh, half a mile away, I suppose.

Then when I went to Walford – which I attended partly because my mother said that, among the hockey girls she knew, the Walford girls she liked particularly well and liked the attitude and so on; and my father did not want me to go to Adelaide High because it was surrounded by asphalt – he would have liked me to go there had it been better surroundings. I'd been at Lockleys state school, public school, for

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seven years – – –. So I went to Walford where it was not officially a church school, but the Rector of St Augustine's used to come on Friday mornings and take a little service, and we – the girls of my age and friends, *mostly*, not all of them, who agreed to be confirmed – went to his classes and so on. And I liked the idea of that, and yes, that was agreed to. So I was confirmed. But then to carry it through – I won't go through all my life and religion – but that's how it was at school, that I was confirmed there. But without any fuss or pushing or anything; it just sort of happened because it seemed the thing to do, I think.

Why I ask that question is not that there had been any suggestion that religion had been a powerful force in your life, but just when I was looking at the history of Walford – which, of course, you wrote very early – it does finish with a very *strong* statement about the connection between God and being led to truth.

Mm. Well, this was not my words but quoting, yes.

Nonetheless you used them.

Mm. Oh, yes, yes. There was a very – the headmistress was a very sensible and highly intelligent woman who was a devoted Anglican and that permeated the school. But there was, there were girls of other faiths there, and one of my closest friends was a Quaker, and she – I was very much interested in and affected by the philosophy behind her religious beliefs.

We'll go back and then we'll come forward again to that. Because you were the firstborn and – just briefly, because we don't have time for –

Yes.

– (laughs) in-depth exploration of each of your siblings' lives – what was the succession of siblings?

Well, after me – seventeen months later – came Nancy, and she was a leader, like my father and like Jennifer. And she was a cadet in the Barr Smith Library like I was, she was Captain of the school of Walford – the rest of us were all prefects; oh, and Gillian was Vice-Captain – but Nancy, who started like I did as a cadet in the Barr Smith Library, started an Arts degree, but then wanted – she was so independent, and she went off with her parents' permission to be a governess at Mount Willoughby

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Station in Central Australia, and after that her life was away from home. She travelled to England with my next sister Margaret, who had been a nurse, and she'd done very well – she'd been the Gold Medallist of her year – and they went to England together and both married over there. Nancy came back; Margaret stayed.

And then came my brother Richard, who latterly, when he grew up a bit, was called 'Dick'. And he went to Roseworthy, but left and went off to the Northern Territory, did a lot of fencing; and then when my father died came back and took over what had become, my father had turned it into a breadcrumb factory after the War and all the traumas and troubles of business then. And he'd turned it that way and fortunately it was a means of support for my mother. And so he did that. He's now a professional fisherman at Coffin Bay, having retired from his business some ten years ago.

And then came my sister Jennifer, whose career is well-known and who had a family – they've all had family, had children. And finally Gillian who is more of an academic than any of the others – rather, she and I have a lot in common in that regard and other ways; but she has lived in Melbourne for many, many years and unfortunately we don't see each other as much as we'd like. But she's gone on. She was a librarian here and at the London School of Economics and elsewhere, and then married and then gave her life to her family, but then carried on again with library work which she's still doing. And also she's done higher degrees in Fine Arts and she's written a very fine catalogue for her exhibition of Lina Bryans' paintings and is still going on with that sort of work.

So her name is – – –?

Gillian Forwood.

Thank you. Helen, we'll move on now a little, and we'll take you into Walford, but on the way of getting you there: your parents having taken that decision to put you into greener pastures, so to speak, the opportunity of Adelaide High School – they were then, I presume, making a commitment to send you all there.

Yes.

And that seems to me to be a very bold decision to make, because it was quite an expensive procedure even though fees aren't what they are now.

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Mm.

When you know you're going to commit five girls to Walford.

Yes. Well, in fact, the fifth wasn't born when I started (laughs).

(laughs) Still brave at four!

Yes; she was born during that year. But it was to be – well, the first three of us had seven years at Lockleys School and then went to Walford. Then – and my brother, after seven years, went to Saints'. And then came the two, what we called 'the little girls,' and my father asked my advice about whether they – what did I think about them starting at Lockleys or starting at Walford with the rest of us, where we knew there was a beautiful kindergarten. Well, it was a lovely kindergarten – it wasn't fine in an architectural sense, but it was a *lovely* kindergarten – and they were such dear little girls, and I had – my mind was so coloured by the really frightening things that I had witnessed during the Depression and after the Depression, people were still very poor, and it seemed, I said – well, this was how I saw it, that it would be wonderful if they could go to Walford, although there was the journey – the two trams there and back – but that at Lockleys their experience would be quite different. And indeed it was, it was for them, and they just loved it and they seemed to take the journey in their stride.

What were some of those awful things you remember?

Well, there was one girl called Iris who was a friend of mine. And she always had apricot jam sandwiches for lunch. I mostly, I often went home for lunch, just walked down the street and had lunch at home and then walked back, but I do recall that one day we went to walk home, and I waited at her gate – she didn't want me to come in, it was just opposite the school – and she came out with a piece of bread and jam. And we walked down the street, and my mother was sweeping the front verandah, and she called across and said – across the Henley Beach Road – 'Hello, what are you doing here?' And I said, 'To come for lunch.' And she said, 'No, it's not lunchtime, it's recess time.' And so back we went. And that was all Iris had to eat all day. And then – I knew they were very poor, and bare feet; and then later, one

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day – just overnight – they all disappeared. And that happened to other families – they left when they couldn't pay the rent. And I used to fear that she was cold at night and that she wasn't getting enough to eat, and these things were repeated – that's just one little story.

But there was such poverty, and some of the parents were cruel to the children. One woman came in and thrashed her child in the classroom. And there were these sorts of things that I just – I absorbed them, and I don't think it worried me greatly (laughs) in my own life, really, but I didn't want these little girls to have to go through experiencing things like that. Maybe that was immature of me, but that's how it was. And my father did take note, but he wanted to do it anyway, I think. And, in fact, times were *not* very good for him, and we had, we lived in a very simple way, but he valued the education. He saw how much we, the older girls, were receiving from Walford and he wanted the younger ones to go.

We won't develop this particular point which I'll make now very much, because you've written a very nice summary about early childhood influences and so on, and you do mention books by name in both the summary that you did prior to this interview and in the talk that you gave to the Lyceum Club. But your father, very obviously, was a man prepared to make sacrifices for his family. There were always books in your home.

Yes.

What about the influence of radio and popular entertainment?

Well, we didn't get a radio until must have been about 1939, I think, and I do remember sitting round when the War was, the outbreak of War occurred. And, well, we just listened to a bit of music and some news. And later we got a second radio – we had a cabinet radio which everyone listened to in the dining room, which was the dining-living room, it was the large room – and then in the sitting room there was – it could be carried into the sitting room – a little bakelite one. And I remember listening to the Lux Radio Theatre, and I liked drama very much indeed.

And did you go to films?

Yes, yes. My father liked films; he took us, I remember, to Glenelg to see Captains Courageous.

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Spencer Tracy?

Yes, Spencer Tracy. And – but not many films, not many films. Not the Saturday afternoon going to the pictures that some children were allowed to do.

What about live theatre or musicals or live music performance?

Well, my father took us to the Russian Ballet in the 1930s – I'm a bit hazy; could have been '35-6 – and *The spectre of the rose* is something I vividly remember. He took us to a most remarkably good circus. He took us to a lot of ceremonial affairs on the Showground, and he loved bands and so on –

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– [he loved bands and so on.] He never, *ever* marched in the Anzac Day march. It wasn't that he wasn't patriotic, but he didn't see it as the thing he could do. He did belong to the RSL and he used to go there for lunch on Friday, and then he'd sometimes come home with a new book or something nice like that. But no, we didn't go out a lot. But there was the entertainment that we ourselves were in, the three older girls. Heather Gell, the eurhythmics teacher and kindergartener, had been a hockey player; my mother knew her; she knew about the eurhythmics and we went to eurhythmics on Saturday mornings, and in our blue woollen bathers which were a bit prickly of course. And then we – that was wonderful, it was lovely, the rhythm – she played the piano and we would gallop or run or skip or hop and got a great deal of understanding of music through her. And then when Ellinor Walker wrote the script and she produced and South Australians were the composers of *Heritage*, the wonderful play – play, pageant – that was presented in the Tivoli Theatre on ten nights – and my father took us one night: each of the little children were only on alternate nights and he took us on an off night – and so we saw the whole pageant of South Australian history up to 1936.

You also took part in the enormous display that the school children put on on the Adelaide Oval, too.

Yes; yes. That was in the same year, to my memory, and in that – it was enormous: I've forgotten how many thousand children there were, but a great number – and we

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had to catch the tram with our costumes I think in our cases, I'm not quite sure about that. But I was a Scotch thistle, and the costume was made of crêpe paper, and (laughs) it was different shades of purple and green, and I had to do the Highland Fling – not I alone, of course, there were formations of children doing these various dances, and my sister Nancy was a rose. And I remember she lost her case, and Miss Adelaide Miethke who was formidable, a director of the whole affair, an Inspector of Schools, she was walking through – there were no microphones; she had a megaphone – and she was walking through amongst the children saying, 'Nancy Cashmore's case, Nancy Cashmore's case,' (laughs) and that was – ended happily.

I'm trying to envisage, actually, putting one's crêpe paper rose costume into a case anyway – I think there'd be certain vulnerability (laughter).

We had our lunch in the case, too!

Wouldn't have wanted to leak onto the rose!

No (laughs).

Now there are those splendid photographs of that display on the Adelaide Oval, and with individual shots of children as various (laughs) members of the floral institution.

Yes, of the British Empire, yes.

Yes. Right. Who do you remember from your childhood as being a person you wanted to be like?

Ooh, I have never consciously thought of that. I don't know. I suppose I admired my aunts, especially Mabel, and my Aunt Marjorie was another one.

Why?

Because she was so – she was a very gentle, kind but laughing person. She was very able. She did a lot of sewing for us; she made – most of our clothes were made at home. And she was a very – just a *lovely* person; I can't say why. But – no.

She had children of her own?

Not for fourteen years after her marriage. So that that was why so much of her time was devoted to us.

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You can't remember public figures? For example, I was very smitten by the Queen, because of course I was that age – eight, nine, at the Coronation – and, well, that was the only thing to be, really, was the Queen. (laughter) Was there anybody like this in your life?

Ah, not, not particularly; no, I don't think I can – I can't isolate anyone. I liked my – – –.

What about film stars?

No; I didn't ever want to *be* like the film stars. I enjoyed Jeanette Macdonald singing with Nelson Eddy, that sort of thing. I suppose I – perhaps most of all I thought I'd like to be like my mother, I think that would be the answer, mm.

And yet your mother, once she was married to your father and produced six children, obviously – I say obviously; maybe I'm incorrect about this – her hemisphere was very much circumscribed by the family, was it?

It was circumscribed, but it was also a means of herself moving out through knowing our friends, making friends with mothers of our friends in some cases, and going to school affairs which – – –. She always took an interest – at Lockleys School she went to various things, and at Walford when the Parent-Teacher Association was made, that she went to, too. She always read a great deal; she wrote a tremendous number of letters and corresponded with people – friends, relations. She was as friendly with my father's sisters almost as she was with her own. It was all very, very good harmonious relationships; and she was a person who was reserved but who could slip into being friendly with people, and then she did make, had very close friends from old times – and newer ones.

Would you just put your arm over that – under – over the cord, that's right. That's great. That will stop it from moving. Right, so mother was somebody who you obviously loved and admired enormously. And family life – with a family that size, I was going to say was there room for many outsiders at all?

Ah, well, we always brought friends home, and we'd have a friend to stay overnight, and we had – when I was about twelve, thirteen or so, my father made our back lawn – it was a great deal of work – into a tennis court, and had to build it up and he did it all, he did it, he worked so hard. And so, gradually, as I got to about fifteen or so, we'd have tennis parties which were Saturday afternoons, and so there we had a lot of

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people coming and going; and because we lived near the beach, people would, friends from school would come, and we would take them down to the beach – well, take them in the tram: we'd go to the beach and we'd have a swim, and then we'd – and we'd perhaps take some afternoon tea, and then come back, and they might have a shower and then get changed properly and go back home to their homes in the tram.

But my mother's friends were – a lot of my mother and father's friends were mutual friends, they were couples they'd been friendly with before their marriage. And they – well, not a lot, there were several couples like that. Yes, it was a very busy life, but – – –.

And what about sibling rivalry, and – well, your growth through adolescence: were there areas of conflict in the family at all? I'm thinking how does one define oneself a little inside this enormous patchwork?

Well, it was the case that Nancy and I did things together. Margaret, the third one, she liked teasing people a lot. But she used to call herself – well, we called her Marka, or my father called her Marka, because she'd always say, 'Marka too, Marka too.' She wanted to come with us as well. And I think that, as time went by, as Nancy grew older, although she did well at school – except for Mathematics which she could not pass – her interests were more outdoor and she was much more adventurous than I, and when we came into our teens we did go in different directions. But my mother used to say, 'Little birds in their nests agree,' (laughs) and mostly the little birds did.

And that's an order. (laughter)

Well, it was a fact.

Ah, dear. And you didn't experience any conflict with your parents?

Oh, no – no, no conflict, no.

This sounds like an idyllic childhood.

No, it wasn't idyllic, it wasn't idyllic, because there were hardships and sometimes my father was very, very preoccupied because of his business worries, especially with the coming of the War – well, the Depression, and he gave away a lot of bread.

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And he used to send a bag of bread, a wheat bag full, to my Auntie Edith and her husband in the country: they had a farm where they were trying to scratch a living and they hadn't any money, and he used to send a bag of bread. But not only that, he'd send groceries and all sorts of things up on the train. My Aunt'd dip them in water, the bread, and then put them in the oven and they'd come up nicely. We used to go and stay there.

And – no, my father was very preoccupied. He, in the earlier '30s, he thought that he was going to be prosperous, but it didn't happen and he – I remember, he used to often take us down to Outer Harbor if a liner came in: he loved ships and he used to take us all over the ship showing us and telling us and so on. And I remember one day he said to me – we were standing there on the deck – and he said, 'One day I'll take *all* of you round the world.' That was before they were all born (laughs). But he had loved travelling, and after the War didn't get home till November 1919 – he didn't have to come home; he had no-one to support, and he went to a trade school in Glasgow and did a term in the baking trade so he helped himself along there: but he travelled in Europe and just loved it.

Did he ever get the opportunity?

No; he died when he was 55 of a heart attack.

And your mother – did she ever travel again?

Oh, yes. Well, my sister Margaret stayed in England and my mother visited her eight times, and didn't just visit her; she travelled around very, very fulfillingly to various places. The first three journeys I think were by ship, and then after that she flew. And she had friends and relations: she went to Cornwall where her father had come from; and she lived with Margaret for a few months at a time – Margaret and her family. And she travelled. It was a family with a lot of happy memories of travel and always looking forward to having a trip somewhere – little trip down to Port Elliot, or bigger one to Port Lincoln, or one to Melbourne or perhaps to Sydney and that sort of thing. But it was always done very – it was, you know, very simply and carefully.

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Why I think all this is important is because you've developed amongst a family of people whose horizons have been broad –

Mm.

– and who have been open to – it seems to me – the influence and ideas that come from reading and being selective about where they take their entertainment from –

Yes.

– and obviously very generous too, in terms of their human relationships. So – and I think that's a wonderful foundation, isn't it, for anybody –

Oh, it is.

– to come from.

Yes, oh yes, I was extremely fortunate.

So at school – you do tell us about this sort of thing in your summaries for us – but, just quickly: who were the major influences there at school?

Yes. Well, the headmistress herself, who was a figure of great dignity and – but with a little smile around the corners of her mouth – and the, *many* of the teachers. There was, for example, a teacher of craft who taught us leatherwork; a teacher of art, and we had lovely experiences with people coming, visiting people – artists who came, friends of Miss Baker's, the headmistress, who would invite people to come. The music master was John Dempster, that was – he was all right, but he wasn't actually *au fait* with girls, I think. And then there were the English teachers: the first one was Mary Shaw, who was a very gentle and excellent teacher; but then Vera Swift who had a most pronounced influence on many people – her use of language was beautiful, and her knowledge of literature was extensive and deep, and she was also funny. And Barbara Woodham – Miss Woodham, who later became Barbara Crase – was the history teacher who had been studying under Professor Portus, GV Portus, and she opened up history to me tremendously.

As far as English went, I had already from home become familiar with a lot of poetry and classical writers, but of course it was extended far, far more. And analysis was *very* strong. My mother gave me a book, Legouis and Cazamian on the history of English literature, which enriched what I was doing at school, and that was great. I

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thought I would love to have gone on with English. I didn't really, I suppose, think I could go on with history – at the time I didn't see, didn't think about how it could possibly be: I didn't want to be a teacher, particularly.

Yet you won history competition essays.

Oh, well, that was after I left school – yes, yes – the first one was, I think, 1945, May, the Faulding Centenary Essay Prize, the history of South Australia in the past hundred years. And that I wrote all by myself, but my father just suggested that I might mention business houses because Fauldings was a business – so I *did* put that little phrase in somewhere (laughs), and it perhaps was partly helpful. But – yes, that was a marvellous feeling, to have won that, because it was – there was, there were two sections: a junior section and then sixteen to eighteen years.

And then the League of Nations Essay Prize, which was the end of that year or the beginning of the next, and that was the prize that was, directly came out of the teaching I had had at the hands of Professor Portus. Miss Woodham, who was a lovely person – she had a 'copper head' as people called it, coppery hair, and blue eyes and a great laugh and she'd throw back her head and laugh, and she'd talk about her aunt doing this, that and the other as an illustration of something about economic history, for example – she was completely at home in the classroom, as Vera Swift was. Some of the teachers were, I suppose, rather nervous and they weren't completely at home.

But I also loved the botany excursions, going down to the sandhills at West Beach and identifying plants and sketching them, and going up to the Hills and finding orchids, and this was all just part of school and it was the natural world. But I didn't study chemistry at school. The girls who did that had to go to the School of Mines, because there weren't the facilities or the teachers. And physics likewise. I didn't go very far with that.

You said in your writing that you did write poems and short stories, and it has been an ongoing theme in your life.

Mm.

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You've also just said that you didn't – at this stage, when you were at school – particularly want to be a teacher.

No.

What did you want to be?

I don't really know. I didn't know. And in fact I did think I'd like to do an Arts degree, but I didn't know where it would lead and neither did my family. And finally, between us, we decided that the best thing I could do would be physiotherapy. And so then I had to do physics privately, because I hadn't been able to pass it at school in – I think I must've done it in Leaving and didn't pass it – and had to have some coaching for that. And then – so physiotherapy, I was then qualified to go, to enter that. But fortunately a friend of my mother's – one of these old friends from high school days, I think, who was a lecturer in physics at the University of Adelaide – he saw my mother one day in the street and said, 'What's Helen going to do?' And she told him, and he said, 'Well, there are cadetships in the Barr Smith Library.' And that was the answer. Because even though I'd thought I might do physiotherapy, I don't know where the money was coming from for the course, but this was the most wonderful answer: I didn't have to pay any fees, and I'd be working in the library.

So it became just something that I applied for, and another girl and I – and she was also a Walford girl – started in the same year, and I carried through for three years being a cadet, which was just a dream. Except that, of course, I couldn't participate except at lunchtimes – lunchtimes being an *hour*, a strict hour – couldn't participate in university activities. But I was able to go to lectures, League of Nations Union lectures, and politics lectures and SCM meetings, and this was, this was fine. And then in the Library I was able to read when I was on desk duty, specially on Saturday afternoons when not many people came in – I could study, and that was wonderful. And I didn't have to buy some of the books; I just used the library books. And so working there was an absolute joy; I enjoyed it.

And were you still at this time balancing what you would do with this tertiary education? Would you write fiction, would you be something else, or you could always fall back on the library now – that must have been like a wonderful – –.

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Well, it wasn't a training – it wasn't a library course; and I know I had determined soon – in the first year – I had determined that I would like to do Honours history because of the lectures with Professor Portus and, well, with Dr Oldham, I think it was in the first year. And knowing about history, I just became so involved in learning it that I wanted to continue. And – – –.

Even if that meant you might have to teach it.

No; I didn't even think of that. I don't know what I thought. But by the time I reached my Honours year, I knew that I was going to be married. And in those days, and marrying a doctor, one didn't necessarily have to do anything in the way of earning a living, because it was considered to be the natural thing for the husband to support the family. But then, when I came to the Honours year, I enjoyed it very very much, and then – Professor Portus took an interest in his students, a *very* great interest in his students – and when I had completed that year he asked me if I would accept a scholarship for the next year. And I had to ask him what that would be worth, because my husband-to-be, Geoff Jones, had no money at all, and I was going to be working for a year before we were married. And I had already been accepted as a primary teacher at St Peter's College, so – – –.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B: TAPE 2 SIDE A

OK. You had been accepted as a kindergarten teacher.

No, no, no. In – – –.

What was that bit about the kindergarten teacher?

No; in a primary school.

Primary school.

In – it was in Palm House –

Right.

– at St Peter's College. And it was something I had absolutely no training for, but a friend who was doing history with me, Don Selth, had told me there was this opportunity and I forget how it came about, but they thought I'd be all right. And I

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was going to be paid two hundred pounds a year, I think it was, and to me that was a fortune. And – but I wanted to be able to establish myself before I was married to have certain things, as people did in those days, you know, linen and suchlike. And just to have a bit of money for us to start off with, because Geoff was at the Adelaide Hospital – I forget exactly when he started; not till '47, '48 – '48. And there they were, they were on the pittance, like I was at the University Library, and – – –.

So what year was this?

Well, in 1947 I completed my Honours degree, and in 1948 received the degree and taught the little boys for a year while Geoff was at the hospital. We were engaged in '47 in September and married in January '49. So we had an engagement for just over, a bit over a year.

And did you meet him while you were at university?

Yes. He was in the SCM, it was through the SCM. And he was at one time President of the SCM. He was a very – he looked at religion in an intellectual manner. Anyway, but there was a *lot* of discussion in the SCM, a lot of discussion of social questions and political questions, as well as the prayer side which was not something that I was much involved in.

So really the SCM for you was a forum for intellectual activity –

Yes.

– not so much a development of faith?

No, no. We did discuss religion, and there was a group of us – and we called ourselves 'The Group,' – and there were about twelve; they were girls and boys, and there was a movement in the second year of the group, I think, with some – more came in. But we used to have meetings, and we were all SCM people to start with, and we met privately in each other's homes in the evening, and we did – each one would give a talk or we'd read a play. 'Last night I saw *The wild duck*', we read *The enemy of the people*, and I gave a paper on Plato's *Republic*, I remember. And sometimes we'd play records, classical music. And then in the holidays there were two years when we had a wonderful week, all of us, on Hindmarsh Island and staying

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in the Newells' house. And it was all just completely platonic, the whole thing, but out of that group three couples married, or I think even four couples married, and it was a wonderful foundation because we really got to know each other and what we thought.

Interesting, because I suppose that now people could draw salacious conclusions –

Yes.

– from your activities on Hindmarsh Island. (laughs)

They could, but there was not a single bit of that. And we rode horses, we rowed in the boat, we gave a concert for the local residents in the little hall: it was wonderful. Elliott Forsyth was the one who'd invited me into the group, and we were just friends. And then Geoff was in the group too, and then we became greater friends.

And what other heroes were you discovering at this time, through your work? Because you were doing – and I don't say this in a pejorative sense – but 'standard' historical studies like, you know, European, more European history and so on. Not the kind of history that we associate with you, your own work so much now, where we can name people and individuals and so on.

Yes, yes.

Who were the heroes? Who were the inspiring people or what were the inspiring events?

Well, Professor Portus – I come back to him again – and his international outlook were very, very important. I can't say that there was anything particular that related to women's history at all.

But other people, other individuals?

Oh, other individuals. Well, (pause) the, (speaking slowly and quietly) the other teachers I had at the university were – – –.

But you weren't completely taken up – for example, by the character of Lenin, whom I found quite fascinating.

No.

Manning Clark obviously found fascinating, although I didn't know that at the time.

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Mm.

But there weren't people on the historical stage, as such, that you found absolutely ---?

No. It was the War, the War. And I think one looked to the Prime Minister, Chifley, to clergy ---.

So contemporary heroes?

Yes. And to the British: to Churchill; to the King and Queen a little, and – but figures in history – well, I guess perhaps it was more people, creative people, like Rousseau and Molière, and Tom Paine perhaps, people who – with principles that were appealing.

But meanwhile there was the tremendous, terrible problem of what was to happen after the War. And the discussions that went on in the League of Nations Union and in the lunchtime meetings at the university ---. And the fact – it just seemed inevitable that this war would end all wars because it was so terrible; and that the munitions makers would be put in their place somehow or other. Professor Portus thought that the answer lay in federal union which perhaps, seeing the EU, he might think perhaps he was a little bit on the right track today ---. But the monstrosities of war that we heard of and knew of were just too, too dreadful to contemplate, and so we looked – I did, looked to ideals. But how they were to be implemented was to be through a continuation of the League of Nations or its equivalent, and that of course happened with the United Nations which was very exciting, and it was thought that this would be the end of war. And the War was so shocking – it ate into us all, however happy we were basically, but there was this needling away all the time of what was happening. And I'd ride my bike home and I'd see the headlines in *The News* of how many planes had been shot down – Allied planes down or enemy planes down, or – and of course there was censorship, but they had to tell us some of the news, and these things were very disturbing – especially when there were the deaths of boys we knew.

So how do you account for your, the shift in your interest from grand scale thinking of this nature – and I'm not suggesting that this is not *as* important – but

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to the interests of children and development through education, and almost a parallel line which is the interests in social development for women?

Yes. Well, it happened like this. When we were married we went and lived at Red Cliffs in Victoria, a Victorian country town – and while I was there I did some writing and Professor Portus kept in touch with me, and I wrote and told him we were coming back to Adelaide because Geoff had decided that, having been at the Mildura Base Hospital, he'd become very interested in radiology, and that was his *forte*, with its precision and analysis and its embracing of many aspects of medicine. We were coming back, so I wrote and told him. And he wrote back to me, and he said, 'You've asked me if I have any work for you this year. I would like you to give lectures in political institutions to students of the Diploma of Public Administration: there are 30 lectures and the examinations. It falls well within the range of your – the political science subject you did for me, for which you gained a credit' – there were no distinctions in those days, it was just credits. And I said, 'Yes.' So he gave me that work. He also gave me all the economic – all, I don't know, I marked 150 one term and 155 I think it was another term – economic history essays. There were men back from the Forces and big classes. And so I was doing that work.

And I was – when I was teaching political institutions and around up and down North Terrace – although the lectures were at quarter past five for these men who were working in the Public Service – I was in touch with Douglas Pike, the historian, who had done Honours history with me and who at that time was a Church of Christ minister. And he – we were friends, and he and his wife had come to our wedding, and – as Professor Portus and his wife had, too – and Douglas Pike was writing on South Australian history, doing research, and he had come across Jacob Pitman's name. And he said, 'Look, why – this is very interesting, this commercial education,' – he didn't use that term – he said, 'Jacob Pitman – there's a whole lot to be found out about him. Wouldn't you like to do that, and do it as an MA?' And I thought, 'Oh, that sounds a good idea,' and so I started in 1950, towards the end of 1950 – I have a letter from the University, although it's not on my academic transcript that I started then, but I did – and began it. And meanwhile I was also working in my uncle-by-marriage's medical practice in this tiny little office which was part of the

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waiting room, and I used to ride a bike over there and work there as well. So we were sort of getting ourselves a bit established. And Douglas gave me this idea, and I started off with it, and it developed into a history of commercial education and latterly, as I got on with it, I thought, ‘This has got to be more about women. It’s all about women, nearly,’ – although Jacob Pitman was the brother of the inventor of Pitman’s shorthand, and there were men shorthand writers on the newspapers and so on; but there were also women coming on in the nineteenth century.

And then I had to put this aside for a long time because, from May 195[2] until November 1959, they were the dates of birth of my first and fourth children. And all those years I was devoted pretty well entirely to the children. I put the thesis away in the bottom of the wardrobe, and didn’t think of it until my daughter was, youngest daughter was two, and she was trotting around wherever I went she was with me, and didn’t ever have a sleep in the daytime, and I thought, ‘Oh, goodness me! She’s always there; she needs another companion,’ or something like that. But in the event what happened was I had a letter from England, from someone in the Pitman firm who knew I’d been starting this, asking what was happening. And I got back to it, and the university said in 1962 that I could resume part-time – – –.

So you were consciously waiting all this time to pick it up again?

Well, it was subconsciously waiting, I think. And I thought with the little one by me all the time, I thought, ‘Ah! There’s the *thesis* there. And she can have – – –.’ And in fact it was, she had a favourite babysitter came for a day a week and I could go and do some research. But it took until 1967 to complete because we went to England, all of us, for seven months; we had all sorts of quite bad illnesses with the children and I had to ask for interruptions and they were granted. And then – so I turned to women. And then, in 1967, the year I finished the thesis, I was invited to apply to be a temporary lecturer at – not a temporary, a part-time lecturer – at the Kindergarten Teachers’ College as it had become in that year; it was formerly a Training College.

And when I got there, gradually it came to me how much history there was there to be discovered, and also the buildings we were in were the buildings of the former Tormore House School, which was a very good girls’ school. And I became friendly with some of the women who’d been there, one of whom had been a hockey friend of

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my mother's and was still a friend; and so I did interviews with them from the early '70s, and pieced things together. And then [I] became so interested in Lillian de Lissa, the first Director of the Kindergarten Union and the founder of the College and Principal of the College, which was all on a very small scale in the first decade, and I wrote a long piece, a long article, on Lillian de Lissa and sent it to *Melbourne studies in education* which is a bound volume each year – a book, really – and Stephen Murray-Smith was the editor, and he asked me – he was very interested in it, but he asked me to cut it down – well, naturally, of course. And then he – I could see, it was very interesting to see his editing skills, and he got quite excited about the fact that we were allowed to have photographs in it. And he was a very great help and a mentor. And then I believed I could go further with investigations into women's activities – education, employment and public activities – and approached the University of Adelaide – John Tregenza and people at Flinders – and talked to them; and John was a very great enthusiast for it, and also became my first supervisor.

But there's this dialectical relationship, isn't there, between the wellbeing of children and the development of women. That's very clear in *In her own name*: you draw – you show that. And I say dialectical relationship –

Yes.

– because it isn't a straight matter of being parallel; there – it's interaction, interaction between the two things, and that's how it's been in your life.

True. Yes, that's an interesting comment. It has, it has. And I must say that my husband and the children have been absolutely interested, supportive, and a great help to me – – –.

What did they actually do? Like that wretched two year-old, wouldn't go to sleep in the afternoon (laughter) – did they do anything? What did they *do* that was so helpful?

They just took it for granted that I was, that it was part of life – that I was doing this work, that I was writing lectures – – –.

But you had had house help.

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I had help in – I had a dear helper; she was with me for twenty years. She came, when they were very small, she came twice a week. Latterly, later on it was once a week. And she was one of the ‘old school’, and she had grown up at Broken Hill, and she’d gone out to service at White Cliffs when she was thirteen. And the first day she came to me – she’d been to my Aunt Thelma who lived not far away at Kensington Gardens – and when she’d done the cleaning that I asked her to do she said to me, ‘Have I given satisfaction?’ She was one of the very old school. And she was good with the children. She was not young; she kept coming to me till she was 80 or so. She was amazing! (laughs) Mrs Myers. And the children all – she was just a friend (laughs) in the family. A very, very interesting person indeed. She used to go ballroom dancing with her girlfriends.

Also at 80?

Yes, still. Mm.

You should have recorded an interview with *her*.

(laughs) Yes, I should have, I should have. I’ve got a photo of her, that’s all.

But – this is very interesting – and I’m going to jump about from my list of questions here because I was going to ask you what you think about this discernible trend, and in fact it’s been much written about, for women to eschew the whole business of having families now and choose career – in fact – like a career instead. In fact, I remember – oh, some weeks back, in one of the weekend newspapers, there were a series of interviews – might have been the *Bulletin* – with career women, one of whom said that she just thinks that the women now who have children are ‘copping out’: that the real thing to do is to have the career.

Mm.

And of course the women that you wrote about – not just, not the Suffrage Movement *per se*, but all of those women who were involved in moving society forward to embrace women in the nineteenth century and the twentieth century – most of them – I’m just doing a quick glance back through my memory – were women with families.

Oh, indeed.

And I daresay had help in the house: I’m quite sure that Mrs Colton, for example, had help in the house.

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Yes. They all did, yes.

And of course career women today have to ‘outsource’ –

Yes.

– work. You know, Professor Judy Sloane has talked about being, you know, a prime example of someone who outsources everything.

Yes.

So you do have to actually make money. You can’t sit in the attic squirrelling away; you do have to have a paying job.

No, mm.

What do you feel about this trend among women now to –

Well, I think that –

– give up the family.

– to have children young – I was 25 when I had my first child – and I think that that is wonderful. You’ve got energy, you’ve got the vigour and you’ve got the – it’s a natural instinct to have children – well, it has been happening all through life, through various societies. And I completely understand why women who want careers – and most do – want to postpone having children. But I think, physically, it’s wiser. You’ve got more energy, and I believe now there’s some questioning that leaving babies later is perhaps, has perhaps some inherent dangers in other ways. So I think it’s wise to have them young. In a way, you’re more flexible; you’re not set in your ways. If you remain with the same – in a marriage with the same husband, if you go on for fifteen years before you have children, I think it would be not as easy, not as simple, and you may not be quite as flexible and you may – when you’re young, you take it for granted and the children fit in with you as well as you fitting in with them. It’s all something that you do together.

When I was devoting my life to the children in the ’50s and early ’60s, *only* to the children – well, virtually, only to the children – and I was making *every* garment they wore and mine too: I was sewing a lot; I was doing, reading a lot – I was very busy – and taking them to kindergarten and seeing about their illnesses and nursing them in

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bed and so on. They always went to bed – as they don't now – sick children. Nothing like rest. And anyway, I believe that to have children young is better, but maybe there's a moderation way of looking at it and you could say, 'Well, build up the basis of a career then have children and then go back to it, making use of child care services and the way people manage now.' But it's very tiring, having children.

It's also assuming that there's something to go back to. Because when –

That's right.

– I say 'we' – I think we're very fortunate in that we moved through a much more buoyant period with the expansion of education –

Exactly, exactly.

– and I was going to ask you about this as perhaps one of the things that might have been disappointing for you, was that what you experienced was a series of 'coming together' (laughs) –

Mm.

– with the various institutions that you worked for –

Yes, yes.

– the loss of the identity of smaller places. And of course, with every conglomeration, some people were disadvantaged and it has been much more difficult for people to get jobs in teaching institutions.

Oh, yes, indeed it is, indeed it is. And to get academic jobs at all, even teaching jobs, people can only get a contract and then they're not paid in the holidays and all of that.

And so this seems to me – it's possibly – and I'm wondering if you see it this way too – a factor for women deciding that, 'Well, if I don't do it now, I'm – the opportunity's *not* going to be there.'

I understand it. It's – certainly. And when they're doing well at something, to be able to step on, step up and do that is wonderful. And then to – I can't judge what other people have done, but I myself am pleased that I did have the children young and that I didn't – well, there was no *thought* when I went to the country that I was going to be anything but a country doctor's wife. But then, coming back to the city and the opportunities began arising from the university, I could have gone on. When

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I received news that my MA degree in nineteen sixty seven, eight was accepted – in 1968, I think it was accepted – and my supervisor said to me, ‘I can get you a job here as a tutor at the University of Adelaide in the History Department,’ I had to think very carefully: did I want to step into the university field, or would I stay at what was then – still – the Kindergarten Teachers College. And I thought, ‘Well, I like it there. I know that there’s a lot that I can offer, and I think I’d better stay there because that is somewhere where I feel as though I’m completely at home,’ and in the University I didn’t quite know how it would be. There were a number of new, young history staff. It was thriving then.

Was it a factor that you were also working with women – and they were predominantly women –

Yes.

– who were going to be devoting at least some years of their life to the development of children?

Yes. Oh, yes. I’d become very interested in the ethos of the kindergarten movement, and the fact that children were so important here. I suppose I’d always had five younger than I at home, and I was used to younger children and doing things for the children – it was *natural* for me to be in a *milieu* with children. So – – –.

So this is the natural environment for you to work in, as opposed to that university life – and you had had a period of time there, as I said, we’ve said earlier, where the horizons were very broad; you were debating international issues –

Yes, yes.

– and now there was this harmony between your own life as a mother and the wife of a doctor, and yet an intellectual *milieu* that matched this –

Yes, yes.

– very comfortably.

Yes, I think so. Of course, it was on a modest scale, the history I taught – I was only there part-time, I forget the exact proportion of time, to start with. It built up fairly quickly to half time – but I was, I thought I had freedom to develop in a way that looked promising to me, where I could bring out of my experience, I could apply my

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experience in various ways. And in fact I enjoyed the other members of staff, their company –

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A: TAPE 2 SIDE B

– [in various ways. And in fact I enjoyed the other members of staff, their company] very much indeed, and some remain very good friends still. And the whole early childhood area was looked down upon by the other Teachers' College people. They didn't believe it was up to scratch because they were dealing with such young children. And in 1984, I think it was, we celebrated 60 years of the three year course at the College. And – or was it '74, it was 50 years – and the Principal invited – '74, I think, yes – invited the principals of other CAE's to come, and various people from the Education Department one evening. And I read a little paper, just – not very long, couple of pages – about this three year course that began in 1924 and it hadn't been introduced into the other – into the Adelaide Teachers' College, it didn't come in for a good long time, second half of the century sometime. But I think that was a way – we were trying to upgrade the status of the students and the teachers, so that they would then be able to receive salaries commensurate with work they did, and that they would be able to step into the primary years of the State schools, which was very much resisted by the Education Department.

Well, that prejudice pertaining to the relative importance of early childhood teaching, primary teaching, secondary teaching – was there, wasn't it, like you could get into kindergarten teachers' training college with lower academic qualifications than into the primary school education teaching institutions; and then you needed a higher grade again, of course, to go to the Adelaide Teachers' College where you could do a degree in line, in parallel, with teaching subjects, and do your Diploma of Education. But – that suggestion being, of course, that it was less important who actually taught younger children than older ones. And we've seen that turn around as the psychologists, of course, have thrown themselves in a frenzy into (general laughter) early childhood –

Early child development, yes.

– development, and it's come back in the other way where now you have brilliant people –

Yes.

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– most properly – working in that field. Did that used to annoy you?

Well, it was a fact of life; and it wasn't just here, it was in overseas countries as well. And it was very frustrating in many ways. And when it came to the naming of Kingston College, when the Kindergarten Teachers' College became the CAE, we wanted it to be named the de Lissa College of Advanced Education after Lillian de Lissa, who was a brilliant woman and who went on and had a great impact in England and other countries. And I went, with Miss Davis, the Principal, to see Hugh Hudson, the Education Minister, on this matter; and he was quite adamant. He said, 'Nobody's heard of de Lissa, and I want, we want to honour Kingston, Charles Kingston,' who had his name scattered around in various ways. But Hugh Hudson and his – I think he mentioned that his confrères in Parliament just laughed when they heard the name de Lissa: they'd never heard it.

So their reaction was very similar to the response some of the honourable gentlemen had to suggestions for empowering women in the nineteenth century.

Oh, absolutely – very, very much so, yes.

And you continued to be heard – – –

But it was – yes; well, Betty Davis continued, and others, and gradually, gradually chipped away and worked away, and some of the better academics, the better students from Kingston were – or from the Kindergarten, no, from the Kindergarten Teachers College – were encouraged to go to the University and do a subject a year instead of their electives which they could have chosen from within the College, my history being one of them. And this did happen. And one of them was Gillian Weiss, who then later went on and did her doctorate, did her Honours history MA and then a doctorate in Canada. So it was very –

It was a struggle, wasn't it?

– very much a struggle.

Like improving circumstances for children and for women.

Exactly. The younger children – it was somehow thought that anybody could look after young children. And a baby – well, if there was a nursery full of babies, well,

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that was one woman's work or perhaps two – well, they might need two or three. It was very bad, the attitude, because there was such a lack of understanding. It was based on complete lack of understanding of how human beings develop.

And there's a very strong parallel between educationists like de Lissa, Montessori –

Yes.

– Rousseau! –

Yes.

– who did argue the rights of the child very, very early, long before the Declaration of the Rights of the Child –

Yes.

– they made in the United Nations, but – which, of course, was well into this century.

Yes.

As though there's a parallel between the educationists and people working for social and political dignity –

Yes, I think so.

– for women and children.

I think so, yes. That's a good phrase, 'social and political dignity.' Indeed, yes. The politics has come through with – I don't know if you're ready to talk about that yet – but I was very interested in politics always; and my parents were interested in politics. But my father was – and my mother – both voted Liberal always, and I used to argue in opposite directions. And that was all right, it was good to have a discussion; but my father, I remember him once saying, 'Oh, as you get older you'll think differently.' But he admired the fact, I think, that I had an intelligent interest in politics, and he liked talking about such things. And he was – but he encouraged me very much to go on with my studies and was interested to learn that I was learning about Communism and so on. He was not bigoted in the slightest. So I had a very good basic approach, I think, an open approach.

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And when it came to thinking about political change and women's history and the way so much depended on the law – the way the law was made and implemented – then I felt, feel as though that I probably had a reasonably strong general basis to go into that when I started writing about women, changes in the law and women. But before that I was writing about women in education and then that, politics impinged on that. (whistling, wailing sound)

Is that your friends next door?

That's the rubbish van. (break in recording)

OK, we'll pick up the recording now that the rubbish person has passed by, we hope. Have you lost your thread? Can you go straight on?

Oh no, what was I saying? I'm not quite sure. I was saying about the basis for working in – – –.

Having political discussions with your parents –

Oh yes, yes.

– and he not being bigoted, and – – –.

No. Well, I don't think my father was bigoted, but my sister Jennifer recalls very vividly – and this must have been in the '50s when I must have been at home for a meal – and my father and I argued about the referendum on the outlawing of the Communist Party, and he was in favour of that course and I was not. And we had a distinct argumentative discussion on that which Jennifer says had some influence on her, and – – –.

Which way?

(laughs) In interesting her in questions of politics, I think.

But who did she agree with, your father or you?

(laughs) Well, she was only quite young then, a young girl. I'm not sure. We were quite young; she didn't tell me. But the fact was that I, in interviewing women for education history which expanded a great deal in various other fields, I came across Miss Ellinor Walker, whose name I've mentioned earlier, who wrote the pageant,

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Heritage. She did the research in the very, very early archives that were present for that, and she had been a member of the Women's Non-Party Association. This had several names: it became the League of Women Voters. She'd been a member since, I think it was nineteen hundred and twelve. And she had been an *active* member. She had been a Montessori teacher; she'd been to the Kindergarten Teachers College; she had her own Montessori school and she was a very socially active woman who joined this association as soon as she was 21 when her father no longer could say she couldn't. And she and I talked a number of times; we had a number of meetings. She died only in the – I think it was the early '90s.

And the whole of this, the course of this League of Women Voters was directed towards bettering conditions for women and children through changes in the law. They were responsible very largely for spearheading the attack on the marriage age for girls which was twelve until 1957, and they were in the forefront of many other campaigns. Of course, the National Council of Women did take these campaigns up, but the League was specifically devoted to these things. Now, when the League ended in 1979, she was still Secretary, and she handed over – not – oh, she handed to the Mortlock all the *papers* of the League, very well collected, very well maintained – but she then felt, and the other members who were old by then, felt that they were handing over to the Women's Liberation Movement – to WEL, I mean, and – sorry, Women's Electoral Lobby. And strangely enough I was invited to give the – to launch – the launching speech at the Women's Liberation Archives. I can't quite remember the year of that, but I was able to sketch in some history of the League of Women Voters and how WEL was then seen to be their natural follower. So – but I have never been an active feminist and I've been a recorder rather than a participator in women's affairs, I think.

Yes; I was going to ask that kind of question: that you have written about many activists –

Yes.

– and what you think the relative importance of information-gathering, which is what you have done, and action is.

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Oh, that's a big question, isn't it? Well, I think that to uncover historical information that sets the scene so that people can, if they wish, see what's gone before, perhaps learn from experience – perhaps! – or at least trace threads of lines of action; and for the intrinsic interest of what people have done earlier; and to show that women with force of character have been active, not just since the 1970s or the 1950s, but well back in history and of course in South Australia since the later, particularly since the later nineteenth century, where they did have an impact – there was no doubt about it. Not just with the suffrage, but in regard to other legislation, such as the age of consent and many, many pieces of legislation – and yet I think by uncovering their conditions at the time, and the fact that their pay was always less than that of men except for the very, very few professional women who could earn the same, and there weren't many of them, and that wasn't until about the 1890s – they were able to earn little, and they had few privileges: school teachers had the holidays, that was their main privilege; and the whole emphasis of women being subsidiary to men, subservient not necessarily, but subsidiary under the law – was – – –. The change from that status to the status today in *law* – even though it's not necessarily in *fact* in many cases – I think that to *know* that is not only interesting, it's almost a necessity and a right for people to *know* where they're placed in the succession of change. Because if you know that, then you can go back and use arguments that have been used before, and to show outcomes that have come from these arguments that have been used before; and you can feel comfortable in that you are not alone; you are not just a very unusual person, but you are one of many who have done similar things.

And there is a great need for women – always, always for there to be women – who will stand up and talk, speak publicly and write publicly and acknowledge that there are wrongs, and not just say, 'Everything is beautiful,' just because one has a happy family life or a satisfying life. It's so short-sighted, as some people I know think that everyone is capable of it, and it's not so; it's not so for various reasons. But it's not so because some of them are so poverty-stricken, *so* poverty-stricken, so influenced by family surroundings, so perhaps influenced by alcoholic members of families – and the domestic violence is something that has been happening always, we think, it seems to be, always; and it is the weaker one who suffers. And girls have

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to be taught about the facts, that this isn't something new – it hasn't just happened now and it isn't just a terrible thing that's happening now, it's been there and it has to be fought all the time.

Yes, that's important, isn't it? You referred to 'writing publicly.' Writing is a public act; it is as public in some ways as standing on a stump. In fact, you reach more people that way –

Yes, yes.

– than standing on a stump.

Yes. You meet the readers –

Reach.

– you meet the readers, you reach the readers. But standing on a stump – well, I suppose, thinking back to the women who did, the Labor women in the Botanic Park stood on a stump but there weren't a great many people there. But there were people who perhaps wouldn't have read. But I think both have a place, and people who can speak and can put over a message well on television or radio have got an enormous influence in our society – or can have an enormous influence. So – – –.

But it can also be ephemeral, and people have very short memories about radio and television. I know – we tend to think it is *the* enormous influence, and it *is* an enormous influence.

Yes.

But – well, it might be a matter of speaking too soon. One thinks of how concerned, I suppose we were, with the way in which the media and Pauline Hanson forged what I consider to have been a very damaging relationship – damaging for us on the bus. But that recedes. Whereas the writing –

Remains.

– remains.

Yes. As long as people go on publishing books, and (laughs) – – –.

People are encouraged to read!

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Yes, indeed. It's a continual struggle, I think, to reach social justice. We have reached social – some forms of social justice, probably, but it's continually evolving, changing. New generations think new thoughts – or they think they're thinking (laughs) new thoughts and present things in different ways. Anyway, I believe that writing is valuable and action is valuable too, but it's not a way that I've pursued.

You haven't exactly been a passive, lethargic individual, though – – –

(general laughter) I mean, I haven't gone round making speeches.

No, I know.

I've been asked to talk about certain subjects and I've done that.

What about disappointments?

Disappointments? Well, let me see.

You've done all this work.

Mm.

You've laid it before people.

(laughs) Well, I must say the books – well, the last book, the 1994 *In her own name: a history of women in South Australia since 1836* – it sold very well at first, but it limps along very much now, and I believe that's the story with a lot of these books that were – very substantial work's gone into them, they've been well presented and edited and so on. But I think the University of Queensland Press one was a limited edition, and that sold, that one, *Nothing seemed impossible*. But that's really all – I've written a lot of journal articles and reviews and so on, but that's another matter.

I was very interested in the appendix on the historiography of women's suffrage.

Oh, yes. Yes.

In *Nothing seemed impossible*.

Yes.

Because you are, I would describe you probably as, a very moderate (laughs) – – –

(laughs) Objective I think I was trying to be.

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That's right. But you do, of course, allow yourself just a titch of impatience in this appendix when you consider the manner in which the suffrage movement and the movement forward for women has been documented by other people. And various repetitive sentiments, you say, which have marked the studies of women's suffrage campaign in South Australia, and 'to which few have applied searching enquiry,' I think are your closing words –

Well – – –.

– and I'm wondering whether you think matters have improved? Because you say your book is now 'limping along', but do you think generally matters have improved, that people are better informed, or that they *want* to be better informed –

I think – – –.

– that they have a *will* to be more critical about the way it's been reported?

I think some people are better informed, and I think perhaps the tapestries that were done in 1994 and which now hang in the House of Assembly chamber have attracted some interest, especially when they were being worked in the National Bank chamber. And there were – people have gained something of knowledge of the past from that source. But when I say that, I also think of the fact that in schools there are very few students learning Australian history. I was asked a couple of weeks ago to agree to have some of my publications in the *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia* reprinted in *Insights* and if I would kindly condense two of the shorter articles so that they could all go in together, which is a big task. And the person who asked me said that in this *Insights*, which they hope will go into schools, there were 450 schools approached but I think only a hundred and something were studying Australian history. So nobody in schools is going to be reading this book unless they're studying Australian history.

And furthermore, the syllabus of Australian History is being reviewed – or about to be, as we speak, on the 6th of July of 1999. And when I heard that I wondered whether that splendid alternative on women's history will survive. One hopes it will.

I haven't heard anything of it. I hope it will, indeed, yes.

Because that was absolutely the most wonderful advance and potential for history teachers –

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Yes, yes.

– that particular part of the course. Not taken up very much.

And in fact my book could have been used in Legal Studies, and I prepared a whole lot of class notes, but Wakefield Press attempted to get them to the right sources, but they didn't get there.

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Yes; you say that the book didn't make Legal Studies.

No.

Even though, of course, it is actually a study of law relating to women.

Yes. And it was very useful, I was told by Alex Castles, in his writing of his history of law in South Australia. So that was nice to hear.

I dare say it's quite useful to quite a few other people, too, actually: people who've written histories of women's welfare, and so on. Asking about disappointment, and while we're on this theme of achievement, 'These admirable sentiments showed an official appreciation of women's contributions which has yet to be translated into practical terms,' you say. You're actually talking about Phyllis Duguid here in your book, 'Women's Work to the 1990s,' in *In her own name*. And I'm wondering about that: how impatient do you feel?

About the fact of the delays? Oh, it just seemed tragic to me, as I uncovered more and more stories of women's failure to be able to achieve what they'd hoped to achieve in the way of reform and modification of the law. Is that what you're asking me?

And also, even with achievement – because you are saying here, 'official appreciation of women's contributions ... yet to be translated into practical terms.' Well, we could say, couldn't we, that now we *have* got the law changed, and yet people talk about the 'glass ceiling'.

Ah, yes.

We look at the fact that your sister Jennifer is still very much in the minority in terms of political life in this country.

Yes, yes.

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And there seems to be a lot of congratulation about the fact that there are women there *at all* –

Mm.

– rather than continual –

Yes.

– criticism about, well, what proportion there is. We were talking a little earlier, before we started this recording, and talking about your family of hockey players, about the relatively *faceless* nature – *relatively* faceless nature – of women in sport, not just in this country but internationally.

Yes, yes.

So do you have any thoughts to offer at this stage about how one takes it beyond having had the laws changed?

Well, it's largely a matter of education – in the home, in the school. And one could look at the teacher training courses, teacher preparation; and the fact that there is so little preparation for boys concerning home responsibilities as they grow older; that girls – and boys now – do study Home Economics, I believe. But as far as children go, both sexes are fairly ignorant unless they've grown up in a family with younger siblings or cousins or something like that. And there's a terrible need – a crying need – for more education which I think can only happen through formal channels, or organisations which set out to do it. But the voluntary organisations are so busy trying to keep going and keep the wolf from the door for the poverty-stricken and others that it's very hard to see how anything practical can be done, except by making the point that – for people to make the point – that child life is so important, so precious, and that children need to be valued and cared for and in an informed way so that the proper surroundings and structures are in place, and that there's harmony about them. But that is an ideal, and each family's different. And it's something where I think there should be more formal – there should be facilities for formal learning of looking after children.

On the part of men and women.

On the part of men and women, yes.

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What's this fellow's name who writes a lot about boys and bringing up boys?

Oh, yes, I know who you mean but I've forgotten his name.

Steve Biddulph. What do you think about that kind of emphasis?

Well, I haven't read a lot of it, but he's trying to create a balance, I suppose ---.

Because the argument is that, well, you know, the feminisation of educational --

Yes.

-- thinking, you know, too much equity -- that the girls are gaining on us, the boys aren't doing as well.

Yes.

The boys are having psychological problems, they're committing suicide in huge numbers.

Yes.

This is because girls have got the ball and are running away with it.

Yes, well, in fact it would depend on the kind of community, the kind of school, that these children were in; and it *is* possible to have a good outcome with co-education, but it *is* possible to have what the men are complaining about, where the girls have been given opportunities because they had previously been frustrated and put to one side while the boys who are more vocal and stronger and pushier in the laboratories to get to the best equipment and all of that sort of thing ---. It's a matter of common sense, moderation and informing people that the girls are -- the girls and boys are different and have different needs, and sometimes lumping them all together isn't the best thing. But sometimes it can be done skilfully and it's good. It's a matter of having very good teachers in schools, and good parents. But good parents aren't ready-made: they need help.

And all the more difficult in times of economic difficulty.

Absolutely. Absolutely. When tensions are great in the home and in the school, and it all comes out in the classroom. And some become withdrawn and some become obstreperous and it all has to be balanced and handled by one single teacher who is

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overloaded. So it's a – everything in that regard is difficult; but I do think education is a very key factor in the broadest sense.

At the time that you were young at university and involved in discussion about the post-War world – and you've said it was a very scary time, end of the War, onset of the Cold War, the Bomb being dropped in the middle of that – do you feel that the world is just as scary, or that there is more potential for achieving more for more – mostly women and children – now?

In some parts of some countries there is more potential, but it is scarier than ever with the recent events in Kosovo and the surroundings. And the cruelty and the inhumanity is so frightening and it's on such a large scale and the events have been transmitted around the world, and children know what's happening and know what humans are capable of and this is a very sad thing: that they can't look forward with hope – *know* that there is the possibility, that these things have happened in the '30s and '40s, now – along the way up to this time and now, so dreadfully now – that humans are capable of these terrible things. But certainly there's a lot of information that can help people make life more fulfilling for young children as we grow up, as they grow up. The information's there; it's a matter of whether the people who have it are going to use it. And it's something that just has to be worked at at all levels if it can possibly be worked at with, one *hopes*, governments that will always remain sympathetic to the needs of children, babies, mothers, fathers and families. Because that's where the future lies.

Now, you've documented advances for women in our community, in the community of South Australia, and you've done that more in the context of developments in Britain than elsewhere – although there were, of course, mentions of the American movement.

Mm.

But given your broad knowledge of history, your travelling – you've been to China quite early, for example, and many other places – where would you rather be a woman than in Australia? Is there a place? Or are Australian women relatively fortunate?

Yes, I think so. I don't know a lot about the Scandinavian countries: possibly they're more fortunate in some of those areas. But I do think that in Australia, if one is able to have a decent standard of living and is comfortably off, this is a very good

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place. Because it is possible to influence matters; it *is* possible to work away in chosen areas to influence matters for the better, and women *can* reach – as Dame Roma Mitchell shows us – can reach the highest level to which anyone in a State can reach. But – – –.

So people would think that it would be more important to be a Margaret Thatcher?

Oh, would they? (laughs) Yes. (sighs)

To lead a political party, to lead a government.

Yes, well, maybe they would, and maybe it is, and maybe more Australian Premiers and a Prime Minister might come; but it's possible here, it is possible – although it looks as though it's a long way off. But it depends on the person, the personality. Thinking back to the women I wrote about – the personalities of people. Catherine Helen Spence, Mary Lee, Lady Colton, Rose Birks – their personalities made an enormous influence on people. And I think that in leading the way, so to speak, Dame Roma has done it in a civic manner, legal and civic manner, a political manner. We haven't had those leaders, but we have had people who have not reached the top but people like the two women in the '50s, Jessie Cooper and Joyce Steele, who were pioneer parliamentarians; and Anne Levy, and Jennifer who did struggle very hard to get into Parliament and then to do what she could there with absolute integrity. And that's what is perhaps the way – like Dame Roma, I believe, has absolute integrity. And I think integrity combined with many other skills is what a woman needs to come right up to the top. But it's not something – I don't know that it matters so much at this stage to struggle to be at the top, because there needs to be a pretty good foundation to back up that top person. Margaret Thatcher was a mixed blessing.

I think you're being very generous in your remarks about Margaret Thatcher (laughs) in the same way that you've been extremely – not cautious, but generous too in the way in which you present the research in your books. And maybe you shouldn't have had quite so much integrity: maybe you should have slammed into it and written a blockbuster and then it'd be selling very well (laughter) about some of those amazing women and taking a few liberties here and there!

I think it's not in my nature to write a blockbuster, so there we are.

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Even though the subject, of course, is deserving of blockbuster treatment.

Well, others can – Marilyn French can come along and do similar things in Australia, I guess – and have to a point.

There's one question I have to ask you – it's on the list of necessary questions – and that is that I must put to you what effect winning your Award had on you, how you felt about that, whether it's had any particular impact on you.

Well, it was something that I was extremely surprised about, and I saw as a tribute to the *work* I'd done, to what I'd been able to write. And it was an exciting event when I heard, and when I received the Award, which I was very happy to receive from Dame Roma.

So being Dr Helen Jones, AM, received from Dame Roma Mitchell –

Mm, yes.

– was really – – –.

It was lovely. And all the family were there, my husband and four children, so that was great, mm.

Is it a family Award?

(laughs) I think it perhaps should be – certainly my husband as well: he's been very supportive and helpful, and he's read the two major books in manuscript form, and made very useful comments.

And you mentioned that your daughter helped you do some of the research for the – your daughter Jenny – for the last book. Do you hold out fond hopes that your grandchildren will take the struggle forward?

Oh, I think they're very conscious of the equality question. I have two – well, I have two natural granddaughters, [a grandson] and an adopted granddaughter who is a very new adoption and a Chinese child, and I'm sure she will feel the same in the way of equality. And as for what they do, that's entirely up to them, but they can work it out from a fairly – a basis of a certain amount of knowledge, I think.

And a certain amount of inspiration in their grandmother. Dr Helen Jones, thank you very much indeed.

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Thank you.

TAPE ENDS