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Full transcript of an interview with

PEG MALIN

on 29 April 2005

by Helen Miller

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Yes. We knew them because my mother was born in Murray Bridge and we'd known them always. And she dissuaded Dad. I wanted to be a librarian you see but I didn't get my Intermediate. I didn't get English which was my best subject and I missed it that year. So, Dad thought that would be a good thing for me to do and I thought it seemed. I was always interested in children so I decided to do that.

So you would have known about kindergarten teaching from the time you were quite a girl.

Yes probably.

What influence did you and your school friends have on each other because there's a whole bunch?

None. None whatsoever, because you see I was only sixteen when I started and Liz Matters was two years older and Joan Lawrie was probably two or three years older. They were all a bit older than I was. We were all in different forms at "*Woodlands*" and Joy and Liz were probably in the same form.

And Diana Crawford?

She was in an older, older class, too, yes. Yes, there wasn't anyone in my class that joined. I really didn't know them. I knew of them but like you do at school. But, I didn't really know them personally.

Now, you say you were sixteen, had you done your Leaving then?

No, only Intermediate. And I didn't pass it you see. I was absolutely devastated. My best subject that I'd been top of the class right through the year and I didn't pass. But never mind I did an extra I went up and did

a sort of a had to write a few essays and things and then they accepted me.

Did you have much to do with the kindergarten at "*Woodlands*", because Mrs Bartlau would have been teaching then wouldn't she?

No, it was, it was Miss Berry and Rachel Clements. I can't remember. Miss Berry was in at Doris Beeston for a while. Yes, what was her, I can't remember what her Christian name was. But they were the two teachers when I was at "*Woodlands*" at kindergarten.

Did you spend any time down there at all?

Do you mean as I got no. No, no I didn't.

So, when the time came did you apply to the Kindergarten Training College?

Yes. It was probably the biggest year for a long, long time. There were twenty two of us. It was the year Hazel Harrison started and they put all the Montessori stuff in the storeroom. It was called free, free play, free kindergarten. They were called free kindergartens.

So when you started in '39.

Oh! No it was 1940. War broke out just about three months before we.

Yes, you're quite right. At that time until then it appeared that Montessori was still being taught to the students.

Yes, I think so.

Then Miss Harrison came and she moved on from that.

I think so.

That's interesting, I wonder when that happened.

Mm. Yes, because there were lots of things when we used to go to the storeroom to get things. There were all the Montessori measurement things. A lot of equipment which we didn't ever use.

Can you tell us a little bit about your routine as a student? What was in the first year for example? How did.

There were so many students that I think they had a bit of trouble fitting them into different kindergartens because I was at Lavis. It was Joyce Goode and Peggy Lee. No, Peggy Shaw, were the directors. And Di Crawford was there and Dorothy Hutton. Gwen Isam. I haven't heard of her since we left College. I can't remember the others. There were two older ones. I think it might have been Winifred Sobey and I can't remember the other one. But there were five of us and I think Joyce Goode had a bit of trouble finding work for us to do because, well we used to put out all the equipment and clean up the toilets. Actually we did all the things that the, what do they call them now? The people who go in and help, you know.

They're called Early Childhood workers. They used to be called the assistant.

Oh! No, these weren't assistants. No, they'd just do the getting cups of tea and all that sort of thing and mixing the paint.

Pauline, when Peg and I were teaching, the assistant was the trained teacher.

Right.

There was the Director and the Assistant and other staff weren't having to.

This was different to the seventies.

The other staff were the students. Actually, we cooked and did everything.

We had Director, Teacher and Assistant.

Yes, they changed the titles.

Yes, but, that's the person who cleaned the toilets.

Not the Assistant, No. The Director and the Assistant and the untrained. Because it was after the war that they had that. They stopped. It must have been after the war that students were not allowed to do any of that. They just went to kindergarten and observed and they didn't really do what we did.

We still did it in the fifties.

We did. Oh! Yes, this would be the fifties. Yes, that's right. Yes. I guess you did. I know that when I went back to teaching after I got married and my children had started school that I was amazed you know that they had this extra woman to do all of the dirty work.

Make the paints.

Yes. Because we used to do all of that and we cooked. It was really.

Tell us about, about some of that.

Well, you know. To cook for sixty children it was quite a daunting task because I was only about sixteen. I think it was the second year we had to start cooking. The first year we didn't. We just helped – we cleaned the toilets and did all of that work and tidied everything away. Put equipment in and out and did all of that. There were, we used to go to lectures in the afternoon and worked all morning at kindergarten. We worked hard. Yes,

and we had Hazel Harrison used to give us lectures on kindergarten work and we had Miss Allan, Lois Allan was it? She used to give us lectures on Psychology and we had a gorgeous English lecturer, Miss Yuille. She was beautiful. Scottish I think she was.

Yes, she was lovely and then we used to go to the Art School one afternoon a week. We used to go to Lady de Cresp, who was Mary Jolley when we were there. We used to do eurythmics once a week and what else did we do? Art and eurythmics and I suppose the other days were lectures. And yes, we used to be racing to get to lectures you know, because we had to have a quick lunch then off to lectures and sometimes they were quite a distance away from College, you see, at Palmer Place.

So whereabouts were your pre-school placements?

Well, I was at the first year at Lavis, the second year at Barker with Rhonda, actually. We were there with Mary Lee and Mary McGilp. Mary McGilp used to have the most beautiful long nails and wear the most beautiful coloured smocks and high heels and she would be the last person you would imagine who would be working but she was beautiful. And that was the year that second year that we had to start cooking for the children. We used to have to do a week's menu and go out and buy it and then cook it. It was really quite an experience for me because I'd never done cooking not in large, you know, when you have to do custard and things like that for sixty children. Mince meat and things like that, vegetables, so actually, it was a wonderful experience for training to be a

mother and a wife, actually because we had to do all those things and cleaning up and looking after children .

So, how many students would there be cooking at one time? Two of you?

Oh! No. No, one.

Just one?

Yes, we didn't ever have two. No, you took it in turns. You didn't have to do it every week, you just took it in turns.

And somebody kept an eye on you?

I can't remember anyone catching you. No, the Director and Assistant were too busy doing their things. So we just did it. I don't know. Yes, I suppose I sort of, I could cook biscuits and cakes and things at home but I hadn't done any things like cooking.

And were you responsible for setting the dining-room tables and cleaning up afterwards?

I think we got the children to help with that. Yes, you had to set it all out.

And, yes, usually the children used to take it in turns to help. I think we had housekeepers, we called them, I think, and they just used to help with things like that. Yes.

And what about the washing up?

I think we did that too actually. Yes, yes we did. I mean there was noone else to do it.

So what time did all that finish and what time did you have to be at College? It seems.

Yes, well we just had to do. Often we were running all the way to catch trams. I can remember when we were at Bowden, we ran up that hill and oh yes, we used to have a real strife getting to lectures on time. Yes, you did have to clean up the kitchen and do all the washing up and everything. Yes, there wasn't anyone else to do it.

Did you ride a bicycle in those days, by any chance?

No, not up to Lavis which is in Wright Street. It was the West End Baptist Mission actually at that stage. Yes, I used to catch a tram, a bus – it was an open-decker bus actually. They didn't have buses like they have now. Yes, they were funny open-deckers. Yes and I used to catch it - we used to live over near the Holdfast Shores, actually when I was learning at College and I used to catch a bus from St Leonard's up to town.

Mm. Up the Anzac Highway?

Yes. It cost threepence in those days.

But then, you'd get on a tram up King William Street, King William Road?

No, I used to get off on West Terrace and then just walk down to Kindergarten and then we used to have to catch a bus or tram. It's hard to remember how we used to get to College from there. It must have been a tram I guess. We probably walked down to King William Street from there. I don't remember how we got to College but nobody ever had cars, because you see, it was wartime. Joan Lawrie was the only student who ever had a car. She had this red sports car and actually there was quite a mixture of age groups. We had Elizabeth Geschmay whose parents had come out. They were Jews from Czechoslovakia, I think, during the war

you see because of the war and we had Elizabeth Rowe who was from the country. They were, they were boarders. And Olwyn Kerr, there were quite a lot. Viv Mitchell, I think, was a boarder and Dorothy Hutton was a boarder. There were quite a few boarders. They used to sleep on this outside verandah at the back of the College. Yes, it's rather funny.

I suppose you would have been carrying lots of things too, on public transport.

Yes, yes, you could say that.

Can you tell us a little bit about the kinds of equipment you had to make or provide for your teaching practice?

Yes, well, the second year, no, it was later than that I think. Because of the war, we had to make a lot of the equipment and the West End Baptist Mission had a carpentry place at the back of the Church. We used to learn how to do it by, I can't remember Reverend Tuck or someone who was the Baptist Mission's minister there. He used to have prisoners. I suppose they were good, well-behaved prisoners. They used to work in this carpentry shop at the back, just right next to the kindergarten. We used to go there and take carpentry lessons.

Did you enjoy that?

Oh! Yes, yes, it was fun. We learned to make quite a few things and we had to make a lot of the equipment in those days. It's hard to remember what we, yes, you just sort of had to well, just make things.

Did you have picture collections in those days?

Mm. Yes and we also had what they called a Child Development book that we started at the beginning and went right through to the third year I

think. The third year was when we started directing. The following year a lot of us did an extra year of nursery school training with Hazel Harrison.

This was in your third year when you?

Fourth year.

Oh! Fourth year.

Yes, the third year we went to colleges. I went to Walford and we spent six months working with sub-primary.

Right.

The first certificate we got was for kindergarten and sub-primary. And then quite a lot of us did nursery school training. The second year we used to, we were usually Assistant Directors at various kindergartens and they used to give us time off to go in.

So, after you graduated, after your three years and you had a job you then could part-time.

Yes, once a week, we did it for a bit with Hazel Harrison.

And was that a separate qualification? Have you got a.

Yes, yes the certificate that you get the first year we got that and then the second year we got a certificate for the nursery school training. I think that was new. I don't think they had nursery schools before Hazel Harrison came from, she'd been running one in London I think it was. And so that was quite new. And Grey Ward nursery school was right next to Lavis.

Yes.

Yes. So we used to go there to observe when we were learning. Mm.

So what happened when you graduated? Job-wise, did you?

I applied for Lavis again, actually, because that was the closest. I had so far to go you see and but unfortunately Lavis at that stage was put on a war-time, it was called a war-time centre. And it was one of the first I think. They had two or three in various places. I think Hackney might have been one too, but and you were on you had to be there at seven o'clock in the morning and you knocked-off at about half past three or four o'clock in the afternoon. Then the one who came on later stayed there 'til half past seven. Actually, when you think of it in those days to be going home late at night and then you'd walk home and it was dark and through areas like Wright Street. It's amazing that, you know, that nobody ever got attacked or anything. It was amazing.

You wouldn't have thought about it.

No. Nobody, you didn't lock houses up or anything like that. It was amazing how times have changed in that direction and people were too busy winning the war to be bothering about doing anything here. Yes.

Peg, you said you applied for Lavis. I take it you got an appointment there?

Yes I did.

Can you tell us a little more about the war-time centre and how Lavis functioned?

Actually, it wasn't any, any different. You still carried out the whole kindergarten program and then you just repeated it in the afternoon. Of course, we had hot meals you see which you don't and you also had a sleep. I'd forgotten about the sleep. Yes, you see, all the children went to

sleep on little stretchers. Yes and they had a hot meal beforehand. A lot of them had very nasty sores and nits and things like that which we had to dress and look after and get rid of and whatnot.

Peg, during the extended hours period, as that centre was, would there be some children who stayed from the time it opened until the time it shut or wouldn't they be permitted to do that?

Yes. Oh! Yes they stayed all day. Yes.

So you were giving breakfast?

Yes, they did have breakfast.

And then lunch and then something to eat late afternoon.

Because a lot of their mothers were working in factories you see, then.

They tried to get women into factories and working for the war effort actually, and so up to that time mothers didn't really work but I think it was probably during the war that that all started because women had to do almost everything. You see there weren't men around – not many anyway, able-bodied ones.

I think you're right.

Yes. It was a very actually, we came from the Depression and then we had the war years right through. Actually, the war didn't finish until I was directing at Bowden and that was '46, '45. And all of our brothers were away at the war you see so actually it was, yes.

Do you have an impression of how the Depression, followed by the war, might have affected people of your age?

I think it made us used to managing with not a lot because my father worked for the government. He was a surveyor and during the war. I suppose, yes, he took over the Taxation Department. He started the Land Tax Department in Adelaide. And actually, just during before the war, he was half of his salary during the Depression. He had to live on half the salary. They just halved all the government workers, yes, so it did mean that not a lot of people had very much money. They had to and actually, when we started College, Dad had to pay a salary. I think it was £7.00 or something a year for us to go to College.

To be students?

Yes, each year, it wasn't very much. And Brenda Millington was the secretary of Hazel Harrison yes, and later it was Mrs Ridgeway, yes. So, actually, we did Pygmalion during that with Miss Yuille. We acted it.

The students?

Yes.

What role did you play?

It was dreadful because I'm no actor – actress – I had to be Miss, Miss, his housekeeper, the Scottish housekeeper, and I had two Scottish grannies but I couldn't manage a Scottish accent. It was a terrible trauma for me.

It would have been lots of fun though.

Yes, it was fun doing it. Yes, yes, Miss Yuille was very inspiring you know, very light-hearted.

Had she come to live permanently in Australia or was she?

She was here for a very long time. From, she came from Trinidad actually. She was Scottish. I think it was because her brother was working in Trinidad and then she came here. She stayed here for as long as her brother's family were here. Then she went back. I don't know whether it was to London or to somewhere back over there.

Yes, well that was a very interesting time at Lavis, really. How many children would there have been?

It's hard to remember now. Yes, because you had to take everyone who needed to come. I know the Grey Ward nursery school was pretty busy, too because you see they had children there all day too. So yes, we must have had to. As far as I remember, we just did the usual. Of course in those days, kindergarten teaching I found that when I went back to it years later that there were lots of things that we weren't told about.

Teaching numbers and colour and you know, concepts of things which the students later. It was quite a revelation to me when I used to just go down to work part-time when people were away and I was working with a younger student who'd gone through later than I had. They learned a lot more about education in where ours was just free play and teaching children just to get on and more or less giving them a meal. And we, they used to, there are some things that we did a lot of course they've cut out almost a lot . Everyone had to play the piano and we had music every day – songs and music and movement every day which the children loved. I find that that is missed I think a bit, what I see in kindergartens today.

Could you play the piano? Or did you have to?

I had to learn from scratch – I hadn't ever played so I really had to practice an hour every day. Yes and I was very nervous too. I'll never forget in the Doris Beeston when I was doing my final end of year training with a group of teachers. See, they used to have a kindergarten there too and I was playing and actually I used to learn things off by heart and I didn't I was very bad at reading the music. I started high-stepping horses and I suddenly froze and Hazel Harrison was sitting there with her book and I had left that music downstairs and I had to leave my group and go downstairs and come back and finish it. It was dreadful I've never forgotten it.

It didn't make any difference to the end result though?

No, I guess not. Yes.

And what about story-telling?

Yes, we used to have a great big group and often we were not allowed to use books and we just had to tell it. Yes, yes that's right, I hadn't thought of that either. We didn't have so many books in kindergartens in those days. No, no, and we used to and that was something that we were sort of given advice on how to do it but I think it was mainly just practice, too.

I agree with you there.

So Peg, how long were you at Lavis?

I was there, I think it was for a whole year, and then the second year I got very tired of shiftwork and we had to work on Saturday mornings too. I'd forgotten about that. And because I had to catch a bus up to town on Saturday mornings it cost threepence and I was paid a shilling a week

extra for working on that Saturday. And I really thought well, I got fed up with being on not having a normal kindergarten program. I just got tired of the shiftwork and the different children there for different times. So I went to Miss Harrison and said – I think it was probably the end of the middle term – and said that I really wanted to have a break from this. And coming from Glenelg, you see, it's a long way to get there at seven o'clock in the morning. So I said I really wanted a change to a different kindergarten. And I don't know that this had better go on the microphone though.

Do you want me to pause?

Yes, I think so. ...it's not wiping it.

You mentioned that Hazel Harrison was involved in some way with your placements at kindergartens.

Yes. Always.

And this was when you had graduated?

Yes.

So why was that Peg?

Well, she made all the decisions about where you went actually. You applied for jobs and then she made the decision about where because I wanted to work with Yvonne Neate who was Eve Symons in those days. She was one of my best friends and she was at Lucy Morice so I wanted to work with her and Miss Harrison decided that she said that it wasn't good for best friends or friends to be working together. So she sent me to Eileen Thomas at Bowden and I was Assistant there until I got married

actually. So I loved it working with Tommy though. We got on very well and I loved it at Bowden.

How long were you at Bowden?

It's hard to remember now. I suppose it must have been one and a half or two years because Tommy joined the Red Cross and was sent to Malaysia. This was towards the end of the war and so I took over as Director when she was sent to Malaysia and I was there until the end of the war. Actually, the day war broke out, no the day the war finished we had, I think it was a group of sailors – my brother was in the navy and a couple of his friends came down to garden at Bowden. We grew, we tried to grow our own vegetables and they were digging and then we heard when we got there that war had finished. There was peace and all the milk had been delivered and we sent all the children home and we went into town carrying this great big can of milk. I'll never forget it. We were in Franklin Street and everyone went mad that day. It was so crowded and everyone was cheering. It was a wonderful day.

What did you do with the milk?

I never remembered that. That was something I just don't. Yes, it was in a big can. I can't imagine why I didn't just give it to somebody at Bowden but I didn't. I suppose it was just because we sent them all straight home with their parents but we.

When you sent the children home, you would have known that there would have been a parent there to receive them?

Oh! Yes. Definitely. You couldn't send them home without. Yes, in those days usually the parents always usually used to come with them. Yes, they did always come with them and they were just as excited as we were to think the war had finished.

Do you recall the same level of poverty around Bowden as there was around the central city around Lavis?

I would think it would be much the same, yes, they weren't, yes they were very poor. Mm. And yet, actually you see I got married it was just three months after the end of the war actually. One of the Bowden mothers lent me her wedding frock because you see you had to pay points for all of your clothing. I didn't have a hope of getting a wedding frock and she said "Oh! Look" and so I wore her wedding frock.

How very nice.

Yes.

What a lovely thing.

Yes, I was married about three months after the war. Mm.

And did you teach the next year?

Yes I did but I became pregnant pretty soon after Christmas and I carried on until I suppose it was the end of the second term. But I can remember Hazel Harrison. I said I really thought I would give up then because I was just getting fairly big and Hazel Harrison said "Oh!" she said, "It's easy the last three months of the pregnancy. She said, "You'll be all right. You'll be far better." Because I can remember vomiting and being sick before I went up in the mornings. So I said "No, that I'd decided that my

baby needed to be cared for the last three months". Because it was quite hard work actually catching a bus and going up there and working hard all day. Yes, so I worked until the end of that term. Mm.

And when did you next go back teaching?

It was when Merridy was four and went to the kindergarten. It was North Brighton and Somerton. But it wasn't called that then and it wasn't a Kindergarten Union kindergarten and when I sent her there the children used to have to stand round in a circle and they looked at their nails, and called the roll and they had to say present and I was so and they had two grown up toilets to use and they all had to wash their hands in little bowls, three bowls of dirty water. I was so horrified that when I went to a meeting very shortly after I'd joined there. Oh! During that first three months that Merridy was there because they were all completely untrained teachers there, they asked for my help because they found out I had done kindergarten training. So I used to try and give them ideas about cutting out. They didn't have painting or any of those things so I was sort of giving them help in that direction and then they had this big committee meeting and it was run by a Progress Association, mainly men. They said it was one of the best kindergartens in South Australia. And that was just too much for me. I just got to my feet and I said had any of them visited a Kindergarten Union kindergarten. They hadn't. And I said, well really this kindergarten has a lot to be desired and I gave them a few points that really needed and I said you know, for completely untrained teachers running sixty children you know it wasn't the best. So

the committee of men were very upset about that and actually a few of the women were very keen to get – because at that stage they were affiliating kindergartens so one or two of the women. I told them about being affiliated with the Kindergarten Union because you see you had to they had to raise enough money to pay the salaries at this kindergarten. You can imagine what that was like! So I pointed out the fact that if you became affiliated with the Kindergarten Union that they would pay the salaries. So one or two of the mothers got very keen and we were working on that and Kath Mellor, she was the pre-school advisor during that time and she rang me up and she said she thought it was dreadful to think I was working. Oh! I took over as Director. They invited me to be Director and you know even though I was Director, there was so much that needed doing and we needed more space and we needed toilets and everything. So Kath Mellor said that I think it's dreadful to think you're working in that kindergarten with all of that, all of those children and things so dreadful so I said look I really felt that that was right where I was needed. Actually, so actually we worked we had we ran a Queen competition. My husband and all of the men, the Progress Association and we had it in the Glenelg Town Hall. Each group raised money and we raised enough money to build a lovely big room and put in toilets and started all that, so.

It was a real community spirit wasn't it?

Mm.

Good on you Peg, that sounds fantastic.

Yes! You know they got really excited about it. I was there I suppose it was about two or three years then I just felt I needed a rest. So I just retired.

Well Merridy would have been at school anyhow, by then wouldn't she?

Yes. She went to "Woodlands" you see. Yes, that's right.

So did you teach again after that?

Oh! Yes I went back. They seemed to be very short of teachers. Oh! My golly! Yes, that's OK. I have to pick up Merridy at, I mean Julia her daughter, at half past three. Yes, they were very short of teachers. They kept ringing up and saying would you start teaching again. So I used to often relieve when people were away too and I quite enjoyed that. I didn't like working all the time, so I just used to have rests whenever I got tired of it but I worked at the Crippled Children's Home for five years too. You know Mary Purslow?

Yes.

Have you been in touch with her?

Not recently, no. We'll talk to you about her and get her address.

Yes. Because she ran that kindergarten for years and I took it over for three months to start with. I didn't think I'd be very good at that. I loved it so much I stayed for about five years.

And this would be round about the early 1950s?

Oh! No! No, this was in 1970.

Oh! Right we haven't checked our facts properly.

Yes, well it was just before 1970, yes. Because I gave up in 1970, so that was a long time later. I've sort of worked. Oh! I think, I went to Cumberland Park for just a year as an Assistant there for a while.

That's a half day kindergarten. Yes.

Mm. Yes. Rhonda did too. Oh! And Seaview Downs, I worked there for a little while too.

That's such an interesting career isn't it?

Yes, well it was fun, you know. I didn't like working too long I liked to do other things in between.

Peg, that's most interesting. When you look back at all that, at your professional life, is there anything that particularly stands out?

Well, I've always been very glad that I'd done kindergarten because I think it's very versatile. It teaches you so much doesn't it? You know you learn how to, well we did, we used to go to Mary de Crespigny's. Eve and Claire and I used to go at night there and have private lessons with her at night, during the week. This is after we'd finished our training and we went to the Art School too, which was wonderful. Yes, and then you learned how to cook and do so many, and be with children which is handy when you get married.

Which you enjoyed very much.

Yes. I've always loved children and working with them. So, yep, it was something I was glad I didn't become a librarian actually. Yes, I don't think there's anything I would have rather done. You know, looking back.

It's a wonderful thing to say isn't it when you're retired to say that? The very best thing I could have done.

Well, I think so. It suited me anyway.

And do you know what Peg, I think the children were very lucky having you teach them.

Peg says thank you and then laughs!