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**Interview with Sister Patricia Pak Poy recorded by Alison McDougall on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> May 2010 for the Eminent Australians Oral History Project conducted by the National Library of Australia and the State Library of South Australia.**

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**This is an interview with Sister Patricia Pak Poy, who will be speaking with me, Alison McDougall, for the oral history collection conducted by the National Library of Australia and the State Library of South Australia. On behalf of the Director-General of the National Library and the Director of the State Library of South Australia, I'd like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this program. Do you understand that the Library owns copyright in the interview material and that disclosure will be only subject to any restrictions you impose in completing the rights agreement?**

Yes, that's my understanding.

**This being so, may we have your permission to make a transcript of this recording, should the Library decide to make one?**

Yes, certainly.

**We hope you will speak as frankly as possible, knowing that neither the recordings nor any transcripts produced from them will be released without your authority.**

Right.

**This interview is taking place today on Tuesday, 4<sup>th</sup> May at the State Library of South Australia. First of all, can we start with your full name?**

Patricia Geraldine Pak Poy.

**And your date of birth?**

16th October 1935.

**And where were you born?**

I'm told I was born in Darwin, and I believe that's so.

**And that's where your parents were living at the time?**

Yes.

**Tell me your parents' names.**

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My mother was Alberta Chee Quee, and she married my father, William Pak Poy, and they lived in Darwin, where my father had a general store that had come down through the family. And we were all born in Darwin, the six children, and moved to Adelaide at the time of the War, the Second World War, just prior to the bombing of Darwin. [except my sister Winifred who was born in Thursday Island]

**We'll come back to that move for the family. How did your family come to be in Darwin in the first place?**

Well, as I understand it, that my father's family was there, and we don't know the full history of that side of the family. My mother was born in Thursday Island and married my father, but they had already come to Darwin to live; so, as I understand it, they met in Darwin.

**And the cultural background?**

Chinese by race and nationality, three generations ago. My mother's people came originally, as I understand it, from Canton – 'Guangdong', as we say now – and my father's people were from Fujian Province.

**And was there much of an extended family there in Darwin?**

Not in Darwin itself, but some of the family was in Thursday Island, still, and many of them had migrated to – well, not migrated, really, but had moved to Sydney, so there were some; and there were others in Sydney. At the time of the War, in the '40s, I think most people had left Darwin, most of the families.

**And what form of employment were your parents involved in?**

They both worked in the business, that is the big store that they had there, and when they came down to South Australia they had lost a good deal so that the only thing to do was to find work for themselves in the support of the family, and they moved into a similar business, but much smaller.

**Okay, so in Darwin there was a family business?**

Yes.

**And what kind of store was it?**

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Well, as I understand – again, from being told, more than memory – it was a general store. I do have images of the store itself; it seemed to be very, very tall, with shelves and glass cases right up to the ceiling, and seemed to have all manner of things on the shelves. That's a childish memory, but it's remembering not only the sweets and the lollies and groceries but also bolts of material and I suppose what we'd call 'drapery', so I think it was quite a big small store.

**Did your parents have any particular religious affiliations in Darwin?**

My mother was a convert to Catholicism when she was in school, about the age of 14, and my father would have been – had the remnants of Buddhism, but he became a Catholic when he married my mother.

**And did they have any community or other involvements beyond their business in Darwin?**

Now, that I can't really tell you, except, because of the business, and maybe because of [family] connections – because the Chinese community, I think, was quite well-bonded, but that I can't say from first hand, but as I understand it – so there was quite an active social life up there and, as I hear from other people talking about it, I think the community life was quite strong.

**You mentioned that there were six children in the family.**

That's right.

**Can you tell me about your siblings?**

My sister is the eldest of the family, and she went away to boarding school and so I didn't know her all that well, because when we left there I was about six years old – five, going six. And my three brothers after that – Wilf and Reg and Patrick – were all in the Catholic school there. I may have gone there to be in the part of the kindergarten or the equivalent, but I don't have strong memories of that. I have a younger brother, Doug, who is now in Canberra.

**Do you have any – I know you were quite young at that time – do you have any specific memories of your time in Darwin?**

Yes, I do; and I did go back to see whether in fact I had made up some of those stories, and I've tried to check them out with my siblings to see if they were just

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dreams or invented, and it seems that the few memories that I have – that are quite clear – were, in fact, accurate. Strange things, little things, like sitting on the back of a truck swinging my legs and being given a hot fish sandwich to eat at the beach. Now, that's quite specific, and I thought, 'How could I have made it up?' And they tell me no, that they used to go to the beach, and yes, they did have meals down there – well, like tea or a snack – and hot fish was a favourite.

**Lovely.**

So it gives me confidence in when I'm remembering some of the other things. And I did check that the jetty from Cavenagh Street was at the end of a long path from Cavenagh Street, downhill to the beach side, but my memory was of coconut palms, and when I went back to look there were no coconut palms and I thought, 'Now, I've got this all wrong, so everything might be wrong; or it might be a solid memory, so I don't know about this.' So I went round looking, and I did ask somebody up there, and they said 'Yes, yes, there were coconut trees,' but when I went to look there's nothing there – except the stumps, and I found the stumps. They'd all been cut off, almost to ground level. But I found the remains of them, so I felt vindicated.

**Was there anyone else significant in your life then as a young child, beyond your parents?**

I had an aunt and her husband and two cousins who lived nearby, I think almost opposite where we lived. We used to call her 'Auntie Gert'. She would have been a stepsister to my mother, and I do remember her quite clearly. She and her husband and our two young cousins, who were about the same age that I was but younger than I, and the younger brother, so he would have been about the same age as my younger brother, so I do have memories of them being there; and of some of the neighbours – and that's quite an extraordinary thing, too, because I wouldn't have seen much of them. But I do have some visual memories of the old man who used to walk around the street wearing a long, black, I presume Chinese gown, that seemed to be floating behind him all the time, and he had the terrible nickname of 'Dying Goose'. I'm not quite sure where Dying Goose came from. (laughs) But it's a visual memory, more than anything else, and a memory of characters and just individual people that stays in your mind.

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**Would these have all been Chinese people?**

Most of them, if they were in the area, because it would have been part of Chinatown, where we lived. But there were others around, like the dentist lived up the street and over the road a little bit; and there were the people who had the big department stores, which are just not far from there; and the old man who used to be near the church. He was crippled in some way so he got about in a wheelchair. But one of his pets was a python or a snake of some kind, a very big one – or seemed big to me at the time – so there are those little memories that fix things in your mind even when they're not all-important.

**Now, in December 1941, you moved down here with your family – or your father stayed in Darwin, I believe?**

Yes.

**Can you tell me the events leading up to this move happening?**

I don't have any strong memories myself, except some of the haste around it. But, as I understand it, it was all the people were being evacuated from Darwin because of the threat of invasion by the Japanese. And we left by plane before the actual day of evacuation, or I'm not quite sure how they did it in those days, but we would have come down about the 12th December, and we came by plane with the five or so other families through Alice Springs; and it was women and children, and, as I understand it, most of the men stayed up there, and including my father.

Later, as I read, most of the people were evacuated by ship – and some, I presume, by bus, but the ones I've read about were by ship – and that always puzzled me because it would have meant that they had to go east and west out of Port Darwin, and if the threat was from New Guinea and coming down across from the Pacific or the Indian Ocean and coming from the north, that seems a strange thing for them to do. But it's true that the bombing of Darwin didn't take place until 19th February, so they may have done it ahead of time, well ahead of time, when there was some threat.

**So you went to Alice Springs and then on to Adelaide –**

Adelaide.

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**– and why was Adelaide chosen for the family?**

I think it was where the plane went. (laughs) I don't think there was anything else, and it may have been – and it's a question I didn't ever ask – I suppose, because they just presumed that you went where you were told and that was the place to go. But we would have been one of two Chinese families that came down on that plane, the other family being the Lees, and some others – Mrs Farmer; and there were two or three other families who came – the Hay – and stayed here in Adelaide.

**Do you have early memories of that journey or your first few days here in Adelaide?**

Not much of the actual journey itself, except that it was hot when we came. But the day we arrived in Adelaide I do remember very much because it was like a dust storm and everything was red. And in those years there were dust storms, and in the years following, too, and I think – it doesn't happen now, and I suspect it's because most of the topsoil has been ruined – so it's the first day and the second day it was red dust and very hot.

**How did that make you feel?**

My only feeling, my only memory of it, was that it was hot and irritating, like it seemed to get to your skin or something. That's my only memory of it. And we came down to Adelaide and, by whatever arrangement, we ended up in the Grosvenor Hotel, which is just opposite the railway station, and we stayed there for some weeks – thinking, I believe, that it would all be over soon and people would be able to go back to Darwin. But a week went by and two weeks and three and four and five weeks, and that war didn't end.

**So what did your family do then?**

After two months we moved out of the Grosvenor and moved up into the Hills because it was very, very hot and one of my brothers was affected by the heat and the dust, and the doctor, I presume, advised that we should go perhaps to the Hills to have a more comfortable climate out of the heat and the dust. So we did; we went to Mount Lofty, but it got so cold there we couldn't stay there, it was too terrible.

**So used to your Darwin humidity – – –.**

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That's right. And it got very cold there, so by April we couldn't stay there any more. And the War didn't finish, so my parents arranged for a house down on the plains out at Tranmere and we moved there.

**And did anyone provide assistance for your family?**

There were some very, very good people who helped my parents and who stayed friends with them over a long period of time. As a matter of fact, I just visited the daughter of one of them yesterday, it was just lovely to see her, on Sunday. They were the Rimes family, Mr and Mrs Claude Rimes, who were members of the Methodist Church – lived themselves in Henley Beach, but it seemed that they were worshippers in Pirie Street or the Methodist Church there in Adelaide, right in the heart of Adelaide – and Mr and Mrs James – now, I think he was Brigadier James – from down in Glenelg; they were very kind to us. And we had friends in the doctor who tended us, Dr Charles Duguid and his family. He's been very famous for his work with Aboriginal people.

**How did you get in touch with these people, or how did they know about your situation?**

I really have no idea how they became not only helpers; they were friends, really, friends and supports. And, yes, so it's remarkable, and I'm presuming that it was charitable works of their churches, or it may have been that they belonged to some other kind of service club. I was a bit young to be asking, and I don't think I ever did.

**How did your mother deal with this situation of being in an unfamiliar place with six children and her husband back up in Darwin with the threat of bombing?**

I don't know how she did – or how any of those women did, really, because the ones who came with us all would have had younger children. But I guess it was something they had to do and they did it. And, when I think about it, you know, I am amazed at the remarkable strength that they showed. I knew some of those women later on, too – just, again, still as an adolescent and as a young person, knowing that they were friends of my parents – and I looked at them with great gratitude, but not only gratitude but amazement that they were so welcoming. Because it wasn't easy, I don't think, for that kind of openness, because Adelaide, as I reflect on it, was quite

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a closed society at that time, on the whole. We would have been one family of three – that's the ones who came with us, the Lees, and the Sym Choons, who were already here and had the shop down in Rundle Street – and I understand that Gladys and that family, Gordon and his family, had come from Tasmania so that they may have been here longer; I don't know their history, really – but it was a very unusual thing, and my memory is of there not being many [Chinese families] and being stared at a lot.

**What was that like for you?**

Well, I got used to it, I think, or I must have become hardened to it or not noticed it very much, or had compensation in the kind of friends at school. But I do know that when I first went to Asia, when I first travelled in Asia, the sense of freedom to get off the plane and go out into the street and not be stared at – – –.

**When would that have been?**

My first time I travelled overseas wouldn't have been until the '70s.

**So well into adulthood?**

Yes.

**So were you aware of any other racism or any issues like that?**

Not strongly myself. I suspect my brothers may have encountered it more. My sister has never spoken of it and I don't have any memory of that. It was more – the conflict with one's contemporaries was more to do with religion; you know, it was more like 'Catholic dogs leap like frogs,' not about the 'Chinks' or whatever. Every now and again you would hear it, but on the whole, no; and certainly personally I didn't suffer from that at all.

**So where did you come across this feeling against Catholics?**

It was generally in, like, other children who would be going past and they would be coming from another school, or they would be in the neighbourhood and knew we were Catholics; but mainly, I suppose, because we were at school and we had uniforms, and it was known it would be a Catholic school and so forth.

**This was later on, or in your primary school?**

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Yes.

**Did the family then, when they were settled in Tranmere, did you then form links with the parish church?**

Yes, we did. Tranmere parish was further out than where we lived, but that was our parish and we went there to church. My parents were very hardworking – as all parents in that era had to be, particularly if they'd lost everything or mostly everything, in the bombing of Darwin – so life was very hard for them, because they had to work hard in their own business to be able to generate enough income, and it meant that only Sundays were available, so they weren't strongly churchgoing, but – it was very interesting – but strongly Christian and very loyal Catholics, so that they knew what was going on, but they weren't the churchgoing people. And [they were] very highly-principled people, which must have come from their own upbringing, is my understanding; you know, like it's a background of quite – well, I suppose you'd call it 'good' living, and care for others.

**So how did you see their principles reflected?**

It was the way that they allowed us or didn't allow us to speak about other people. That would be one – you know, they didn't like us to gossip at all. Now, that may have arisen from their knowing that people talked about them – I don't know where that came from – or it came from their parents or their parents' parents. But it was always quite strong that we shouldn't be talking about other people: 'You don't know their story, so don't be talking about them.' So (laughs) it's good enough for me. So it's genuinely, I think, an understanding of others and it may well be that they were witnessing to the need for understanding, I'm not sure. But we had friends who were of other races and friends who were Aboriginal people, and, you know, I'd seen kinds of troubles for them. So I guess it's part of growing up, if you're into a so-called 'foreign' family – though, now we talk about it – and, like, our people have been here – I'm the third generation, and a lot of my friends are only first generation, having come from Scotland or Ireland or England, or the ones who came over from Germany after the War. So it's interesting to be in another particular situation like that.

**Did your parents consider themselves Australian?**

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Yes, I think, because they were themselves second generation.

**How else did your parents' outlook perhaps influence your world outlook and the way you respond to people?**

They were themselves very tolerant people, I think, and that may be a function of who they were as individual people, but it's also that if you are business people I think you have to be tolerant, or you've got to learn to be it, or else you just pretend it. And I don't think they did; I think they weren't given to gossiping about anyone else or telling stories or anything like that, so we didn't hear very much. And when we were first in Adelaide there were United Nations functions going on, activities like for refugees and activities for — — —. There was all the war effort, of course, that we would have got with the schoolchildren having to raise money for the troops and the Christmas hampers and so forth; but there was also a consciousness of other people and other races who were at war, and some of those whose descendants and relations were here, so that even in the '40s there would have been people who we knew who were from other countries, even though Adelaide was very much British.

**I'm interested that you mentioned your family were friends with Aboriginal people, and I'm wondering how that came about.**

I think it was because they were friends from Darwin. And I do remember we had some Aboriginal people who worked, you know, as part of the business; but my mother would have had friends among the people there from Darwin, too, so when they were down here we got to know them — not a lot of them, but they were Darwinites, so that's a bond; that was a bond, anyway. But I do remember Eileen. Eileen was a wonderful pianist and she visited quite often, and when we moved into our house the first thing we got, I think almost before anything else, was a piano.

**[Did] your parents have a love of music?**

Yes, my mother in particular, so that was like the — and she was quite a good pianist; and my sister became a very fine pianist.

**And how about yourself and music?**

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I learnt music for a long time and I played and I passed many exams, but I wouldn't say I was a concert pianist. (laughs) My sister may have been. Yes, she was; she was a fine pianist.

**When did your father come down, then, to be with the family?**

It must have been like around '44. We came in '42 – no, it might have been earlier than that; must have been '42.

**December '41 when you came down.**

Yes, so it must be '42, '43. And he went to Sydney first to see about work, and that was not – see, those years are a little bit vague and I didn't ever check them up, because he'd been and gone and it looked as though it might have been easier, because there are relations in Sydney, too. But my mother was quite happy to stay in Adelaide, even though she would have had more support, I think, in Sydney.

**So when did they start the business? Was your mother doing that on her own to begin with?**

No. No, she used to go out to do a little bit of work with another man who had a shop in Hindmarsh. But no, she didn't then. My brother was still quite young; the young brother was still a babe, really.

**And so when your father came, tell me about the business they set up.**

It was only a small business. Like I do remember the big business, the big shop. But the business and the size is probably to do with my lack of height and stature, so I remember it as being very, very high. So this shop in Adelaide was not high like that, and it was ---.

**We're just going to pause while there's a beeping machine going past. (break in recording) And we'll try again. Yes.**

The business they took over in Adelaide was only small. It was actually a baker's shop; it was a bakery, really, predominantly. But I do remember it had a big glass case in it, free-standing glass case, containing all manner of things, mainly handwork, like knitting and crochet work, embroidery, and like drapery in the middle of the baker's shop. It all seemed always very strange to me. But when they took it

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over they turned it into a general store so that they could put shelves in and sell groceries, and then other things that went with it.

**And where was the shop?**

Just in Tranmere. And it's still there, but it's different now. I'm really not quite sure what's in it. I think it's had a few changes as a little suburban shop.

**Did the children have to assist in the shop?**

Yes, we did. I did as much as any, I think. My brothers were good sportsmen and they were older, so they were busy in the school at weekends; and I wasn't so good at sport and so I didn't have such heavy commitments at the weekend, so I could help them. And that was – spent quite a bit of time there, particularly in holiday time, we all did bits and pieces there to help.

**Now, I just want to wait just a little longer to see if that beeping will cease. (pause)**

Sounds like a big delivery. (looks through window) Ah, there it is.

**Now, you have an idea that you went to school before in Darwin, but when you came to Adelaide where did you go to school?**

I went to Saint Aloysius College in the city.

**For the primary school?**

Yes, yes. When we came down from the Hills and went down onto the plains, I don't know how my mother heard of this school, but she knew that there was a school in the city and it was on the way to where my sister went to Muirden College, business college, so she thought that was handy, so I could be taken to school each day. So I went into the city every day. And I had a friend, another little girl who lived about three or four tram stops down towards the city, and we used to go to school together. We were only age six and there are some good memories that I have of that time – all kinds of explorations of the city. I only went with my sister probably a week, and on Wednesdays we got out of school early because it was the music day and there were theory classes, music and theory classes; but I didn't know that it was early, but my sister didn't come for me so I went home. And then they

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said, 'Well, if you can do it once, you can do it every time, so you can go to school by yourself,' so ---.

**So this was as a six-year-old?**

That's right. So the two of us – my friend from down the road and myself – we used to go to school each day by ourselves and come back. But then I was only marvelling at that the other day, that we were only two six-year-olds. But we weren't the only two, because everybody travelled to school with their friends or by themselves, and it was that kind of quiet city that you could do that. It's almost unthinkable now.

**What was your parents' attitude to education for you children?**

They thought it was probably one of the most, if not the most, important contribution or acquisition or aspect of life – that we needed to be educated, and well-educated, so they would have wanted to choose good schools and to make sure that we had access to a good education.

**And was it important to them that you went to a Catholic school?**

Well, I figure it was and it must have been, because they sent me to a catholic school. They need not have; there were high schools, like primary schools, around the neighbourhood. My brothers went to Rostrevor. The tramline might have had something to do with it, because they could go straight up in the tram, go further out on the tram, straight into town. So I think the choice of school may have had something to do with how easy it was to get to, but the fact that it was a Catholic school was important to them.

**So what did you, in your early days particularly, enjoy about school?**

In primary school it seemed to be always good fun. And I had very kindly teachers. And it's interesting that I don't have any kind of particular thing about it; it's just that it was a very full life, you know. It was a very rich education, when I think about it, as I reflect on it, even in primary school, so that we did have pastel drawing – it's interesting that I remember being able to use pastels; we used drawing books; I learnt music, so I did music from the time I was seven, learned piano and

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went to theory classes; and we had sport, even though it was only in – we had a tennis court to run round on, but it was a sport program; we had singing and we had verse speaking, so that we learnt all about speech and poetry and singing, and it was a very rich education, when I think about it.

And it's, I suppose, a tribute to the sisters, too, who were fine women, well-educated and fine educators, you know. And I've just been recently thinking about them, about who they were and where they'd come from, and it is interesting that in my very early years there that all the sisters who taught me were women who had joined the order later in life, so they'd already been trained and had university education. And when I think of them I think Sister Teresa Dunleavy was the head of the school – very upright woman, she used to make us all stand straight; Sister Carmel Bourke and Sister Ignatius Kelly – they were all already trained before they entered. They had good experience out in other schools and, having come through teacher training, they would have been educated in teaching and actually practised teaching in state schools, too, so they'd have a very broad understanding of education.

**What about discipline at the time?**

Well, I think it was a very well-disciplined school, and it was just – it was a very good place to be. It wasn't harsh at all. I hear stories of primary schools being very harsh places; but we never, ever had that, I've never experienced it. I think the worst thing that I would have experienced – and I think my friends too – was, you know, when the teachers, who had big classes, got a bit frazzled. They'd say, 'Come out here and put your face to the wall,' and that'd be about the worst; or, 'Come out here and put your hands over your face,' so that was a good one (laughs) because you could always look through your fingers.

**Then you moved on within the same school into the secondary school.**

Yes, I did; I stayed on there and did secondary schooling at Saint Aloysius, too.

**And what particular values or attitudes do you think were being instilled in you during that time?**

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I think the thing I appreciated was the acceptance of others. I suppose I felt it myself and it was then instilled as a value, to build the relationship with other people and to be able to accept them even if they were different. And while at that early time there weren't a lot of so-called 'foreigners' or people of different races, like there were no other Chinese and no other – and the European migrants hadn't yet come – yet there was – just even, you know, the mission collections for the children on the mission stations. And I know that they used to call them 'black babies', because they were for the Aboriginal missions and any foreign missions, because it was for the foreign missions, and, you know, we used to spend all the pocket money – a lot of the pocket money would go into collections for the missions. They did actually stress that, now I come to think of it, so that it was like always thinking of people who are different and who don't have as much as we have, even though it was wartime and people didn't have a lot. But the mission collections went on. I mean it wasn't great, but it was – the principle, I suppose, was instilled in me, even in those early years.

**Were there particular – were they all nuns, the staff?**

Yes, at that stage they were all sisters.

**And were there particular nuns that stand out in your memory as being important in your development, in your education or yourself as a person or in your faith, during that secondary time?**

Well, when I was in secondary school, they were all very fine women. I think that they were different and quite individual, when I think back on it, so that it was not – the religious life had not in any way, seemingly, had not crushed them in any way and made them more uniform – – –.

**We're going to pause again, just because of the exterior noise, unfortunately. It's gone again. So it hadn't crushed them?**

No, they were strong personalities. I was talking about Ignatius Kelly, who taught us when I was in senior school, and she was a wonderful woman. She had done her training before she entered the order and she had done a lot of work teaching down in Port Adelaide, so she had great – she still had contacts of people in Port Adelaide, including the footballers, and so that (laughs) when the – she barracked for Ports. Now, that in itself is quite an interesting thing to be able to say about a religious

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sister back in the '40s and '50s, isn't it? And I can remember at one stage that we actually had two footballers who came to visit the class. It's a kind of unheard-of thing, really, but in fact it was the kind of thing that went on as just a – it happened, you know; it wasn't every day, but it did happen and was a good thing, good fun thing to have happen. But it wasn't a surprising thing, if you know what I mean. So they were individual characters whose personalities seemed to me to be quite unharmed – not only unharmed, but cultivated. So they were very fine women with wonderful expansive consciousness of other people. And I suppose the order itself, with the ethos of mercy, which we were all, I suppose, encouraged to explore in our own understanding, and the kind of motto that we all wore, which was always being taught to us again and again and again, of 'Loyal in all things', which is like being able to trust people and to care for people, including loyalty to one's principles and, you know, what one believed. So I think all of that together went to shape the kind of thinking and the consciousness of the students.

**Now, I know the word 'feminist' wasn't around at that stage, but –**

No.

**– can you see where they might have fitted in?**

Well, they probably would have fitted very well into the feminist division, but there was never any sense of it being rejecting the men in our lives or the male concepts at all, you know. It wasn't that at all – and certainly not in my experience. And it was – Sister Carmel Bourke was another one; she had been – her family had been a family of teachers in the state school system, and she herself was a wonderful teacher and a very forward-thinking woman who had done a lot of work in Montessori kindergartens. And certainly, when I first started there, there was a Montessori kindergarten already there. I didn't get to stay there long because I went into the grade two, but I think the principles were all there.

Sister Gertrude Pierce – Kathleen Pierce, as she was known later – she also was a trained teacher and full of artistic ability, too. They were well-trained, and they were good examples of well-educated and whole personalities. So we had good models.

**And what do you think their hopes were for you as students?**

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All students?

**Yes.**

I think it was that we would be the best people we could be. So they didn't attempt to push us into any mould or anything. That's in my experience, and I presume most of the others would have experienced that because, you know, I look at those who joined the order at the same time as I: we are all very different.

**And did anybody in particular mentor you in any way?**

Each year we had class teachers, so that was good. When in my final years, Sister Carmel Bourke was a very important figure for many of us as a headmistress, and Sister Deirdre Jordan, who's well-known in education circles here, was also very influential, I think, for many of the students because of her own – she was on the kind of edge of – – –. I suppose it's like an openness – I suppose with the whole order, where there's not an enclosed sense about them. And so she was – a lot of people had a lot to do with her, because she was also sports mistress as well as being a teacher. And Sister Monica [Marks] was also one of those of a kind of ebullient intellect, and charming into the bargain, you know, so accepting of everybody. So I suppose that's one of the strengths of the place as we knew it.

**Were there priests involved with your education as well?**

There was a chaplain who was appointed as part of the – it was somebody who was on the Cathedral staff would be also appointed chaplain, so we didn't see a lot of them because they were very busy; but yes, there was a chaplain appointed every year and they would help with the First Communion class and the Confirmation class and training. But we didn't see a whole lot of them; it was not as if they were there every week or even every month.

**Do remember your First Communion?**

Yes I do, I do. They made a big fuss about it. We were only in grade two at the time, so we might have only been seven. It would have been in my first year there, and it was Sister Kath Pierce, Sister Gertrude, who actually would have prepared us all. And I suppose we were part of the Cathedral parish as a school, although we had

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our own parish elsewhere, but we made First Communion as a class in the Cathedral parish, and it's all got special significance and made to be seen to be special, you know, by having – we had all long, white dresses and white veils and all this, and all very pious. (laughs) When you think about it, you wonder how we ever could sift out what was the reality and what wasn't. But it was, I think, a well-integrated practice of religion. You know, like there were many practices that were peculiar to the school and are not essential, but I think they were well-enough integrated into our way of life that it was all right.

**For instance?**

Well, we used to have May Devotions, for example, and the whole school would gather at the end of recess, or the beginning of recess – you know, the bell would go if it's a start for having a break, but before you had a break, in May, we all went down and we had a particular prayer together before the break started. You know, it took us – like it would have taken us five minutes to get ourselves down together and to be all lined up ready to do the next bit, like the devotion in the time, but it was not too much and not too little. So it's that kind of practice that some would decry now, but I think that it was culturally acceptable at the time and it was actually well-presented in that it was not overdone, to be so pious that you could only laugh; it was much more moderate than that, and so quite well-respected.

**Did you see the nuns perhaps living out their faith in a practical way?**

Yes, except I suppose there was also some mystery attached to them because they used to go over to the cloister, you know, when the school was over, and they weren't around a lot; they had other things to do. But they did all the things that they needed to do, like they took charge of sport and they were there all the time for all those things. And so it was just a well-integrated school program, I think, on the whole.

**Well, we're nearly at the end of this sound card, so we'll pause there and continue after our break.**

END OF DISK 1: DISK 2

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**This is sound card 2 of an interview with Sister Patricia Pak Poy conducted by Alison McDougall for the National Library of Australia and the State Library of South Australia on Tuesday, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2010. We were talking earlier about your schooling and particularly about the nuns and their attitude to schooling, and I'm wondering if you could share with us how you came to feel that you wanted to follow this path of being a nun.**

I suppose the notion of joining the Sisters would have been with us all the time because we would have been taught by them our whole school life and knew them personally, and it was always put as an option for students to think about it – sometimes people joked about it and said, 'Oh, watch out, you might catch a vocation' (laughs) – or some other kind of possibility put before you each year because of the retreats. We had spiritual retreats every year, where it would be two or three days of silent reflection that the senior students would have had; and that was always a very helpful exercise, I think, because it was not so strict that people were overburdened by the silence, but it just gave people time to be quiet if they wanted to be quiet; and we had priests or other sisters come in to give talks about things of interest to us in the development of a spiritual life, or the development of the personality, or possibilities for careers and so forth.

**When did you start having those retreats?**

Well, the school would have had – everybody would have had a retreat, either half a day or one day, but the seniors would have had full retreat for two, three days, that sort of thing – year 11s and 12s, it was a possibility. And I think that it was just like part of the education, really, to become a little bit more reflective in how we approached life and to look at all the pros and cons of choices and so forth. But it's mainly in the year 11 and 12, I suppose, that the vocation and the professional training and the career choices are being made, anyway, so it's just some way of helping people to come to some kind of clarity about what they wanted to do with their lives. And I would have thought of that – everybody would have thought of it, I think – but it was quite a constant thing for me to think about. But I know that when I ever discussed it at home they would have thought it was not – well, couldn't see that I would ever go that way.

**Why was that?**

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Well, it all seemed a bit mad. (laughs) And I think that there were too many other good things that you could do, [so they], ‘Why do you have to choose that?’, you know. And I think for my parents, too, that it was not well understood. Though my mother certainly – and I think my father, too; but my mother, certainly – had good friends among the Sisters who had helped her when she was young and in Darwin; her teachers, too, though she wasn’t always at a convent school, but she told us the story of how her father sent her to the convent school because she was too much of a tomboy and she needed to become a lady, so she went to the Sisters (laughs) and instead she became a Catholic! So that’s one of the myths and stories of our family.

But the notion of marriage and family life, I suppose, is very strong in the Chinese culture and the notion of going into a religious order was not very strong at all and not well understood. On the on the other hand, it could be understood and rejected, you know. So we had difference of opinion about whether this was a good thing or not.

**When did you start talking to your parents?**

I didn’t talk a lot to them but I did mention it when I was in year 11 as a possibility, because lots of people talked about it as possibilities. But I knew that they wouldn’t have been very happy about that, so we didn’t discuss it very much at all. I became a lot clearer in year 12 that I thought it would be a good thing to do, but I know that when I came to discuss it my parents thought, ‘No, you’re far too young,’ that ‘You need to get out and live a bit of life first.’ And anyway, you’d think it was not a particularly good way for a girl to go; [she] should get married and have a family. And so we left it at that and I went off to study. I came to the University of Adelaide to do a degree in arts, first up, and then I’d see what else.

**Did you discuss your thoughts with any of the nuns at the school?**

Yes, I did, and I suppose that was just par for the course, too, because all of us would have had opportunities to speak to the teachers – or a teacher, anyway – about whether this was a good thing or not. And they’d have some sense, too, about whether you could be a community member or whether in fact it would be too hard on you or too hard on the community. (laughs) So it was like any career choice, but I suppose it has a different dimension when you’re talking about it because of

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needing to know about a commitment to celibacy and about a commitment to the community and so forth.

**And what sense did you get from your discussions with the nuns?**

That I'd be all right; that it would be good, but you need to be clear about it and give yourself enough time, and maybe – I suppose they, at that stage, would have on the whole encouraged people to come relatively earlier, even though all the ones that had taught me all had come later, which was interesting. But I guess it was a new generation. The younger ones of that group would have all entered pretty well straight from school, maybe would have had one or two years, and sometimes they think if you wait another four, five years, you know, well, you might forget about it.

However, it was seen to be the best thing to do was to do studies first, and that's what I did, so I went to the university to take a degree and then to begin studies in education.

**And what did you study in your bachelor of arts?**

I did the languages, mainly, just the English and Latin and French, and I took Physics – Physics and Psychology for my subsidiary choices. I had to have a science unit and Physics was a good one to have. I had done Physics at year 12 and so I was happy to do that.

**Did you have interests beyond school or the church, or beyond university, that you were pursuing?**

At that stage, when I was studying, well, life was very busy when I was studying - supposed to be studying - and I was quite active in university extracurricular work: I was on the Student Council and the Women's Union, and that kept me quite occupied outside; plus the church activities in the parish. And then, when I started teaching, like in the fourth year out I was teaching, but I also was – like earlier I had been doing art classes at the WEA and then [I did] – I was active in the Therry drama society and did play-acting, and even took a part in a play. So there were all kinds of things that were available and which I was happy to do.

**Being involved in the Women's Union, I'm sensing you had a certainly amount of activism in you then.**

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Well, I suppose I must have had. But it was the Women's Union at the University and that was – well, it was an important little committee to represent the women on the Student Council, but not only on the Student Council but also in other kinds of consultations to do with students and where the women should have had a say, needed to have a say and actually be consulted about various things.

One of the things that we consulted [about] at the time was the building of the Union Hall, and I'm just interested that now it's been the subject of debate about being knocked down and rebuilt in another form. So it was a full life at university where I was concerned.

**Did you see that you had to push for women to be heard at university – because you entered in 1953; did you feel that you had the same opportunities as your male counterparts?**

No, it wasn't as easy to get onto the Student Council at that stage, but the Women's Union actually was set up, you know, to be a voice for the women, so it was a good committee to be on, and as a university club it had representation on the Student Council, so it was a good little committee to be on. It didn't do high-flying things; you know, it was active enough, but it wasn't a big affair. But I was with the Aquinas Society as well, so that was [like] the Catholic group that used to meet for reflection and discussion. So, between those two commitments and the Student Council itself, that was quite enough to keep me busy with the study.

**And just wondering if there were any influential people that you came across during your time of study, either with your extracurricular activities or – – –?**

Yes. Just the studies that I was undertaking, I found some of [like] the professorial staff and the academic staff, some of them were very admirable people. I suppose I remember people like Professor Cornell, who was Professor of French at the time, was a most admirable person, you know, a very fine – – –. The English people, the lecturers and staff, seemed to change frequently so you didn't get to know them so well. And they were all very different, you know. Prof Fitzherbert, who was the Professor in Latin, used to live out our way, so I used to see him on the way home and the way to work and so on. But they were quite human people, which is really nice to have, but I suppose it was more I would have got to know people at student level probably better.

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**And the University Chaplain, Father Golden?**

Father Golden was chaplain for most of the time that I was there, and I got to know him; but not as well as some may have, and that's probably because I didn't attend all the meetings and all the activities that the society ran. I used to go to the discussions but I didn't go to – some of the things I didn't go to.

**How do you describe yourself at that time? Were you an outspoken person, or did you like to speak out, or were you shy?**

I wasn't shy but I also was not voluble. I suppose it's as I am now, that when I need to speak I will. But it was like getting the thing done, rather than speaking about it. And, now you ask me, I suppose I do have that as, like, a preferred method, but as a way that I have found to be more successful than public comment, is to be able to see who I need to talk to and then to go and do it. And, now that you ask, I think, yes, that's probably the way I do still work. Like I do write press releases and I do make some comment on policies, you know, in this time that I'm working with the issues that I'm dealing with now; but I have found it much more effective to go and speak to the person involved and so I would tend to do that more.

**Now, did you have continued interaction with the Sisters of Mercy while you were at university?**

Yes, but only through the Old Scholars' Association. We used to go back for a meeting once or twice a year and, you know, help them, help the school. The Old Scholars had a fête – not a fête but a stall at the fête, the annual fête, when the Old Scholars would have a reunion, so it was only through the Old Scholars, really – and keeping contact personally with them for their feast days, because that was like a traditional thing: they didn't have birthdays but they had a feast day. So on the Feast of Mary of Mount Carmel you'd go and see Sister Carmel; and, you know, on the Feast of Saint Ignatius you'd go and see Sister Ignatius. So you kept contact that way. And otherwise it was through Old Scholars.

**And what was your sense – you moved into doing secondary teaching; did you see that you still had that calling to become a nun?**

Yes. I did think of many things before. Had to rule them out – like I couldn't be an air hostess, though I thought that would be wonderful, but I couldn't be that because

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I just didn't quite make the grade in height (laugh) and I wouldn't have been able to help anybody in an emergency, let alone lift a door out of the plane. And I thought about dietetics and my brother was encouraging me to go into medicine, and I really did think seriously about that. And I thought that what I should do is do the arts degree first and then I would see, and by the time I'd finished the degree I thought 'Now, if I'm going to enter the order [then] I should do education training, teacher training, and education would be better. So that's why I did that, but I had the options, all the options open, it's true.

**And you started teaching at Saint Aloysius in 1956?**

Yes, that's right.

**Had you considered teaching elsewhere?**

Yes, I did. Some of my friends went to teachers' college and I thought that would be a good thing to do. But I thought, 'No, if I'm actually thinking that I might not even go teaching, or if I go teaching I might join the – if I join the order, teaching would be useful,' so I thought, 'Well, no, I could do education first,' and I suppose in that choice was saying 'Well, no' to medicine or social work, which were the other two that had gone through my mind at some stage there.

And there was a position coming up at the school because it was just beginning to take on lay teachers, and so I was offered a position there if I were willing to take it, and it was teaching my subjects and teaching year 9's on the whole, but also taking the English classes. And so I said yes, well, I would do that while I was doing the study, continuing to do the diploma work, and use it as the base for some of the diploma studies which called for methodology.

**So how was it to have been a student at Saint Aloysius and then coming back as a lay teacher?**

Well, I enjoyed it immensely, and I still see some of the girls (laughs) who were in that class, that first class that I took. And in fact some of them have entered the order, so it's really very interesting to see them in a whole different light. But it was fine, really, and I was – there were only two of us as lay teachers – three: two in the secondary school and one in the primary school – who were lay teachers at the time,

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and that was quite a new thing for the school and for the order – no; mind you, even in my day, there was one lay teacher. She was a specialist history teacher who taught year 12s or the Leaving Honours class and took special people in the Leaving class, but she was an historian.

**And did you feel comfortable being a teacher, did you feel that was a good fit for you?**

Yes, I really enjoyed teaching, so I was happy about that. I didn't miss not being a dietician or a nurse or a doctor; I thought, 'No, I don't have to do that.'

**So in 1957, when you were aged 22, you made the choice then to join the order, the Sisters of Mercy?**

Yes. Yes. '56 was a good, busy year, and I'd also joined the Therry Society so I was acting in one of the performances that they had on. And it was a full year, too, of music and art and things like that, so just having a good, full life.

But towards the end of that year I thought, 'Well, now it's time. The decision has to be made.' But I would have been quite happy to put it off, but then realised, 'Well, if it's not now it might never be, so I've got to make up my mind what I'm going to do,' and thought, 'The time has come for a decision.' So I said, 'No, I could be trying the community and see how I go with the religious life,' because I was actually drawn to it. It was the community life, but it was also pursuing a little bit the – I suppose in some way it was religious formation and theology that had been helped along at the university and through university connections with the Aquinas Society and going to the national conferences with the other universities where they all did – always had a kind of religious content in theology at the conferences and it was presumed that you really did know a bit more and that you were interested in it and, if you weren't, why weren't you? So it was – in a sense, it was fostered by that kind of intellectual activity, and so I decided that that was time to make that decision.

**You were feeling a real calling?**

Yes. It's hard to actually pin it down, but it was like an invitation to follow another way of life that gave priority not just to teaching but to a way of living and a community life that would have the vows as the foundation. Now, I didn't understand fully what all that was about so it was a matter of reading some, I

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suppose, influential study of people like Frank Sheed and his tome on *Theology and sanity* was very helpful in understanding, I suppose, the nature of belief and faith and the theological underpinning of the way we live. So there was an intellectual challenge in it all, as well as knowing that it was an option for a way of life. So that decision was – I said ‘Oh, well, I can only give it a try.’

I think my brothers were a bit askance at it, but they thought, ‘Well, if that’s your choice that’s your choice,’ and they would have understood too that there’s a freedom: if you don’t want to go on, you don’t go on. You can always change your mind.

**Is that up to a certain point?**

Yes, but like I suppose it’s a free choice and you can go any time. But there was like three years before you took first vows and another three years before you took final vows, so it was a good six years there. So they thought, ‘Oh, it’s sensible enough.’  
(laughs)

**And your parents?**

My parents weren’t so happy about it. They thought it would be much better to make a good marriage and they can have grandchildren too, you know, so that would be a much better way to go.

**Was that something that was part of your thinking, was foregoing that kind of life?**

Yes. I thought, ‘Well, no, that’s not a priority for me,’ at that point. I mean it might have been after, and if I had left and then could be it’s the next – you know, another choice to be made. But at that stage it wasn’t such an important thing for me – but had to be a choice, because I had lots of good friends and lots of friends who were making that choice for marriage, and, you know, did say, ‘Well, yes, it’s possible,’ but I was leaning the other way.

**And was it always going to be with the Sisters of Mercy? Had you considered other orders?**

I did, but not seriously in the sense that when you came to look at them the only ones – like it was just a natural one if you wanted to join an active order. And I thought, ‘Well, what about an contemplative order?’ And I didn’t think I was made

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for that, in the sense that that would not have been a wise choice for me to go into a contemplative order. I mean, it could have been, but not at that point; I didn't see that that was a calling.

**So [in] the contemplative order you wouldn't have been out working amongst people at all?**

No. No.

**They were closed?**

Closed, yes, it was a closed order. But the Sisters of Mercy were always – well, they were founded as the 'Walking Nuns'. I mean it was part of the wish of the foundress or what we'd call the gift or the – I'm not quite sure what it is, but it was her insight into an apostolic life, and that seemed to be fitting with the modern time.

**So you made that decision. Then what did you have to do to enter that stage of preparation to becoming a Sister of Mercy?**

Well, I had first to negotiate the family, but I also had to negotiate – I had to apply and be accepted to try, because, you know, I would presume that if they thought I was completely unsuitable they'd say, 'No, no, no; come back in 10 years' time,' or 'Don't come back.' (laughs) But they said, 'Yes,' so it was a matter of finding out when was the day for they were accepting a group like to begin, because they said that there were others who were wanting to enter at the same time. So nine of us entered the same time: four about my own age and five who were younger. And then we went through the training, started the training for three years, and then after the three years could take the first vows. And several had left before that happened, so out of the nine I think maybe five of us went on.

**So you had your teaching position as well as your training?**

Yes.

**So you had a very full life at that point?**

I did. I did. It was very busy because we had – first year was teaching and having more kind of lectures and being introduced to the way of living; and then the second year was no teaching at all, it was what they call a canonical year where you actually spent more time for reflection and study and really looking at the choice, the life

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choice that was about to be made. And then you had another year before you actually committed yourself. So it's a good process, really, because people feel quite free to come and go if they didn't think they fitted it, and that's three years.

**Where did you live at that point?**

We lived in Angas Street, in the big convent in Angas Street.

**And were you able to visit your family regularly, or -- --?**

No. No – well, regularly we had a visiting day once a month. It's probably hard for some but easy for others. And there was always – on the whole, I think – though I hear some terrible stories about some things, some places and so on – you know, that if there were need then you could go home to visit, or people came in to visit every month, the family came in.

**So it was probably a big adjustment for your family.**

That's right, yes.

**So after the three years then you took your vows – [your initial vows]**

Yes.

**– then what was the next step for you? Were you back into teaching again?**

Yes. So I was back into teaching. And I went back into Saint Aloysius to teach there; in fact, I taught there all the time, because we only had three secondary schools and we had many primary schools, but it was the secondary teachers who were needed. And so I stayed at Saint Aloysius all that time. The others moved around and I couldn't quite – you know, they used to say, 'What's wrong with you, that you don't get moved?' And I'd say, 'Well, I don't know. I don't know why I don't get moved,' because all the others were out circulating round, but mainly – they were mainly primary school teachers, so they had a number of schools to be moved to, whereas I only had three possibilities within the order.

**Within Adelaide?**

Yes.

**And had you hoped to move?**

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No; I would have been happy to go, but it was all right to be there too, and, you know, if the need was for the subjects that I could teach, well, that was fine.

**And you had Sister Deirdre Jordan as part of the staff –**

Yes, she was.

**– and became the headmistress, I believe, in 1954?**

Yes. She was the principal by the time I got there for teaching. So she was always having interesting things that she wanted to experiment with, and that was one of my challenging classes, when I finished the novitiate, to come back and teach a special group of second years – that's the 14, 15-year-olds. She was beginning a new course, like an alternative stream, so I had those to look after.

**So you had some particular challenges then?**

Yes, they were – but very, very lovely young people. And I still see some of them, you know, after all these years. So it was good. And it was an educational challenge as well as every other way, you know, that I was a relatively new teacher. And I taught the English students at year 12, so generally it was English and Religion – and that was interesting too, to be able to teach young people the Religion course, not only the 14-year-olds but also the 16-year-olds, because that's quite a challenge.

**So what were you trying to impart to your students?**

With the school, I suppose the whole emphasis of the school was that people should be – I suppose it's like caring for others, I suppose it's the Christian Commandment to love one another. That all sounds grand, but it was like finding ways of assisting them to see their own worth and the worth of the community and to build the community where they were, which was their families and their classmates and to get to know something of the teaching of the Church and to get it straight. (laughs) I mean it to get a good understanding of it! So that was challenge in itself. And taking the senior students was a good thing, too, you know, was a challenge for oneself, to actually think it through and to be able to think the arguments and to work with them in their belief.

**Because they would challenge you?**

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Yes. Yes. I do remember that we had an inspection – so-called ‘inspection’ – of one of the priests of the diocese came to, you know, visit the school and to talk to the students and to ask them when they understood by this and this and this and this, and one of my students, who was about year 10, stood up and said, ‘You know, I don’t know that I believe in God,’ when they said, ‘Who is God for you?’ She said, ‘I don’t know I believe in God.’ Well, there was such a hullabaloo about that. (laughs) And for me it was like a very good statement of a position. Like ‘I don’t know if I believe in God now, just yet, or still.’ Well, we had such a to-do about it. So that was one of my professional challenges, saying, ‘What *am* I teaching these young people?’

**So what form did the ‘to-do’ take?**

‘What is going on in this class?’ You know, and ‘What kind of doctrine’s being taught and not taught in this class?’, you know? So out came the programs of the lessons and the description of courses and the monthly and weekly plan of lessons, and I said, ‘Here it is,’ you know, ‘they’re all taught this,’ I said, ‘But, you know, they’re adolescent young women and they’re thinking for themselves. She doesn’t say she’s rejected God; she’s saying she’s not sure whether she believes or not. What she believes,’ I said, ‘is perfectly normal, and if you haven’t done it, haven’t gone through that, there’s something odd.’ So we all had good discussions about religious education. (laughs)

**So you were perhaps a bit under pressure from that?**

Well, yes, it was at the time. But it was – I mean, I suppose it’s par for the course, too, that it was good to have to defend what you were doing and to actually think through whether in fact you were undermining or promoting the growth. So yes.

**Were you involved with social justice issues particularly, at that point in your life?**

We had the Young Catholic Students association, the YCS, as part of the school, had been part of the school for a long time, even when I was at school, and I think that that was all part of the growth in awareness, I suppose, of development studies and underdevelopment of some countries and the need for greater justice in the world – even at that stage, you know, in the ’60s, after the Council in the Church – the

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Vatican Council – so that there was room to move on all these social issues, too, as well as the – well, development, and that was a move outside the actual classroom; it was happening in the Church at that time.

**Yes, so the Second Vatican Council started in 1962.**

'62, yes.

**What did that mean for you and the Sisters of Mercy in what happened over the next three years, four years?**

Well, prior to that, Deirdre Jordan had been with the other group of principals – co-principals in her time – and the religious education development had actually set up what was called the the Christian Education Association, and that was where all the teachers from Catholic schools who were teaching religion used to meet together and have seminars and so forth. So there was all of that intellectual activity going on, even at that time, and people having a bit more specialised training and it was just not something you imbibe through your skin but it was actually a course, really, of further education for us in theology, and that was a very beneficial thing that was going on in the early '60s and emphasised at the time of the Vatican Council and the new ways of thinking about the Church and about life in the Church and the spiritual life and theological belief and so forth. So I think that that was a very, not just busy time, but a stimulating time for teachers then, and of course we were all involved in that and caught up with it. And it made the religious education programs quite a challenge right round.

**But I suspect a challenge is something that you enjoy.**

Well, I did, myself, yes, because it was great to have an opportunity to pursue it, because earlier – like late '50s when I entered – there still wasn't enough theology teaching – in this State, anyway. And I suppose it was feeling the need for assistance without ... the Sisters started – like, as a community, we were organising our own courses and joining up with the sisters of the other orders like the Dominicans and the Loretos and having some sessions together, and then seeing that it was a need not just for the convents to do that but that the whole – all the Brothers and Sisters

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needed to have a bit more, and the lay people too, so it gradually became quite a movement in religious education.

**Because it had been perhaps quarantined too much?**

Yes, probably; but also I think it was time in the Church for a renewal of understanding of theology and what the teaching meant and what the structure of the spiritual life was and how we actually lived it in our communities – not in the religious communities, but in the Catholic community and in the Church community.

**And after the Second Vatican Council, what were the effects on the Sisters of Mercy and how they lived their lives? Because they had lived in institutions at that stage.**

Yes. I suppose the major shift was in theological understanding because it was like a shift from that theology which put sin and the Fall, you know, as basic, when the basic thing is really mercy and redemption, you know, so that it was a shift there, and I think that that was what people were beginning to see or had already seen and were trying to implement in the Catholic community. So it was a whole new theology, a new emphasis in theology, and we were just on the edge of the shift, you know, so it was good. Like when we were in the novitiate, we were doing a lot of it ourselves and were relying on some of the stimulus that had come from being at the university earlier and then being able to share that with others and work together on that, but it was just after that time that the whole movement came in for much more rigorous study of theology for all, not just for the priests.

**Were you encouraged to question?**

Yes. Yes, we were. I don't know that anyone in my strata – like I'm just thinking of my family, my brothers and sisters – I think we weren't ever told, 'Well, this is what the Church teaches so like it or lump it,' but that, 'This is some of what is taught, but you have to always be thinking it through yourself.' Yes, I suppose we were encouraged to question. There are always lots of glib answers. Like one of the books we studied was apologetics, and that was a whole book of questions with the answers (laughs) so we had to study the answers. But I think Frank Shead probably did a service in putting the book together, to have all the frequently asked questions and challenges for people studying the Catholic religion.

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**So your teaching career continued and you ended up studying a master's in theology and psychology in New York in 1969?**

That's right, yes.

**How did that come about?**

Well, that was I was being asked to – in 1966 I was helping with preparation of the younger Sisters for final vows – you know, I only made my own final vows in '63, so '66 here was I being asked to do this. And I did it for a little while and I said, 'Look,' – I said to our council, 'Now, I have done this and I've helped these with the training of these younger Sisters, but really I'm not well-trained to do this, so someone needs to be sent to train, and I'll hang on for another year while someone goes off to do a bit more specialised study on this.' So they said all right, they'd consider it. And the next thing I know they said, 'Well, you can go and someone else will hold on until you come back.' So that's when I went to New York to do some studies.

So I went to do an overview of formation, as it was happening in the States, so I took a month of visiting communities right across the States, both men and women, to ask what were they doing with their formation programs for young people who were entering the orders. And then I stayed on to do theology, really, and psychology was what I went for. But I didn't have enough time – I didn't have a year, a whole academic year, so I just took the best things that I could, and it was a great year. I went in summer to New York first and went to Union Theological College, which was just fantastic because it was an ecumenical – I mean it was what they called a Protestant seminary but it was ecumenical, really, and their summer program was wonderful.

**And I understand it was theologically liberal.**

Yes, probably they'd call it that. I don't know what they call it. (laughs) And because I'd been told to find myself the courses, I thought, well, the the Catholic university, there was Fordham, and I looked at Fordham summer program, but I had actually met a young priest on the plane when we were going over and I said, 'Where are you going?' And he said, 'Union,' and he said, 'Where are up going?' And I said, 'Well, I'm not sure yet. I'm doing this study of the orders right across, but I'll

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end up in New York and probably to go up to Rochester.’ And he said, ‘Well, try Union,’ and I said, ‘Oh, well, I’ll have a look.’ But as I went across the States and I could see that really it was good to go to Union because it was ecumenical and the people – the lecturers they had for the summer were fantastic: Moltmann. So I thought, ‘This is all right; I’ll go here,’ but I didn’t talk about that too much; I just went.

**You thought it might not have been quite approved?**

Well, they told me to – the Sisters said to me, the community said, ‘Well, go and get the best things that you can find.’ So that’s what I did.

**And who was the person you mentioned just then?**

The one who was on the plane?

**No, your lecturers.**

Jürgen Moltmann, who had written *The theology of hope*.

**And what did he do for you?**

Well, his book is amazing, you know, and at the time it was a wonderful explanation of a theology that knows now and not yet, you know. And the other one who was teaching and also the book there was – I forget his name – but he also had written *The spirituality of hope*, [Daniel Day Williams] he’s a Protestant theologian. And I think that’s one of the things that I found so challenging, that it was a Protestant seminary and the teachers were Protestant and Catholic and it had Paul Lehmann teaching ethics – you know, like you couldn’t have picked a better faculty if you’d tried, just for that summer. And so I was – it was just wonderful.

**And what did you take away from that time?**

Well, it was such a broadening of the theological understanding. And they had a Jesuit there also, who was teaching on relationships and was really like a historical Jesus. So it was across the board, and I suppose that exposure to an ecumenical take on theology and a theological take on the ecumenical movement that was so good. And then, because I didn’t have an academic year, a full academic year, there was no point in worrying too much about the degree; I could pick and choose. I did the

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psychological things; there was a good formation program being done at Rochester, so I went up there and they did it all in – like they did eight lectures a day, so I went up early in the morning and stayed till the evening and you did it all in one day, and then you went home for the week, went back for the week and did the reading and the study and the questions and the papers.

**So very stimulating for you.**

Yes, it was. And I could also get into a couple of courses at Fordham University, so it was a very broad spectrum of study, as well as exposure to the New York culture.

**Quite a change from Adelaide?**

Well, it was, because it was a hard time for New York at that time. It was just at the time when the American Negroes, or 'Blacks' they were calling themselves at that stage, you know, it was their time of uprising there, so it was a hard time, but very stimulating time, too – like such a good time to be there and to know some of the social problems that they were facing, which we too, in a much smaller way, have had to face. So yes, the year was good; and I thought maybe I could stay for a bit longer and finish off the degree, but I was recalled to take over the school.

**Ah! So yes, indeed, you became the headmistress in 1970, that's right. I think we'll probably need to explore that a little more at our next meeting; I don't think we have the time to look into that now. But I'm just wondering what did you bring back with you that helped your future career or interaction with the novices, with the students, with the staff?**

Well, I thought – 'I can't believe this,' is what I thought. 'I can't believe that I'm being asked to come home, fast, to take over the school,' because that wasn't (laughs) what was on the plans at all. But, you know, religious orders have that kind of reputation (laughs) for your ending up, you know, not where – – –. Then I thought, 'Oh, well, that's all right, I can easily go home quickly and they'll have changed their minds by the time I get back there,' so I wasn't too hassled. And I said, 'Now, look, I'm planning to come back with Margaret McGovern,' who was coming back to Sydney, 'and we had planned to have a little time travelling across. What's the timeline? Can I scrimp any time?' So they said, 'Yes, take some weeks; you can have three weeks.' So I had three weeks in Europe, which was really good.

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**Is this something that you had ever aspired to doing?**

To ---?

**Being the headmistress?**

No, no. No; it was doing formation work. I was really doing things for the novices and the new candidates coming in.

**So this is a very sudden switch. How did you accommodate that?**

Well, you probably should ask staff about that. But one of the things that I remember myself is when I came back, that I saw straight away: I thought, 'Oh, we need to do something about this curriculum and this program in the school. Like we're off the beam.' And I thought, 'Hmm, have to think about this.'

**So that was based on your experience away?**

Yes. And I thought, 'We need to do more about integrating the curriculum. We need to be able to work so that the students can get an understanding of the wholeness of their lives. At the moment we're all so compartmentalised and, you know, the classes are striated so that you've got general and commercial and specials,' so it was like needing a different structure. So that was what was one of the first reactions that I had when I came back into the school after having been away for a year.

**Well, thank you for sharing your journey with us this far, and we'll continue at a later date.**

Yes.

**Thank you very much.**

END OF DISK 2: DISK 3

**This is sound card three of an interview with Sister Patricia Pak Poy conducted by Alison McDougall on the 10<sup>th</sup> May 2010 for the National Library of Australia and the State Library of South Australia. Welcome back again.**

Thank you.

**At the end of our last meeting you talked about being recalled from your studies in New York to become headmistress of Saint Aloysius College, and you talked about**

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**the need for integration within the curriculum to give the students an understanding of their lives. Can you tell me briefly what you did to achieve this?**

The return to Saint Aloysius was a salutary thing for me because it was helpful in bringing me back into education after the year of searching and looking and examining and interviewing, and to settle down again with a classroom routine, and looking to see what needed to be done for the students was quite a challenge. And the first thing that struck me was the need to have some integration for the students in their studies. It was as if the subject structure of the curriculum for them was too – well, we'd call it 'itsy-bitsy', but a little bit disintegrated or unintegrated, so that General Studies became quite a project for us to think about.

And I'd heard that there'd been some work done in Victoria, so we thought we would work with the Victorians to see if there were something there that could be offered to our students, too. So we worked on a structure of General Studies for the year 8's, 9's and 10's to see what we could do for the curriculum.

**And was this approach welcomed by people already at the school?**

The two women who were looking at the curriculum anyway, and had charge of it, thought it was a very good idea and thought that they needed to do some discussion about it and some thinking and to investigate it, so that was Anne Rivers and Glenda Condon, and they put their minds to that and we did some research across the country and overseas just to see what other people were doing and saying about this shift, really, from that subject structure to an integrated structure. And that's what went into progress.

Now, it was a bit difficult for the parents. Some of them – who were very much embedded, I suppose, in the original structure of exams and public exams – thought that that might disadvantage students; but we worked through that. And many other schools thought it was a good idea and so wanted to enter into it, too, which I was happy about in one sense, but very unhappy in the other sense because I said to them, 'You need to work carefully through your own school structure to see whether it's suitable or not, and not to take it on just because somebody else is taking it on.'

**So what did the structure look like, compared to before?**

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It wasn't so radical; it was simply that we had General Studies – maths were not part of that. Some parts of mathematics were, but it was actually kept aside. But it was mainly integrating or trying to integrate social studies and the sciences, history and geography, the rest of the curriculum, to give students more say in what they learned or what they would study, and where their own research would take them. But that meant that staff had to be quite stringent, too, in their own preparation.

**So it created more work or reflection for the staff as well?**

Yes, it did, and it meant that they worked together in teams rather than as individual subject teachers.

**So you were headmistress until 1976. Looking back on that time, can you rate the success of those changes?**

It's very difficult to do that, but I think that it was quite successful in that it did bring about an awareness of the wholeness of knowledge and the design that flows out of the way we look at the world, I suppose that's what I'm thinking about. But in terms of the preparation for public examinations, I think that was quite satisfactory, but a lot of that may have been because we had teachers who were well-prepared or who prepared themselves and each other for it. So I don't think examination results were affected; they may have been improved, even. But the interest in study I think was improved.

**Did external events such as the Vietnam War at that time and the subsequent arrival of refugees, or 'boat people', as they were known then, did that have an effect on your approach and your work?**

The school is in the city and it did have – all the events around us have an effect because a city school will tell that more than any other school, I think. And we did have to look at that. But in terms of actual effect it was no different, really, from earlier migrations, when we had European migrations, and specifically the people from the Ukraine and the people from the so-called 'Catholic' countries, and big influx from Italians and so forth. So the school, as a city school, has always been wide open to outside influences, in that sense.

**There was a Bishops' Synod in 1971, which was about work for justice in the world. Did that impact on you, yourself, and how you went about your work?**

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Yes, because it was quite a mind-blowing document, really, because it asked people to put a different priority on study and education... in the sense that our awareness was to be as citizens of the world and not confined only to our patch of the earth or even to our way of thinking or even to our believing. And I think that that broadening of awareness in the Catholic community was a very important move and certainly had its effect in education – to the degree, I think, that we allowed it to – and I put that rider on it because it isn't always easy to change a structure.

**And you then became Executive Director for the Conference of the Sisters of Mercy of South Australia in 1977. How did this change in life and work come about?**

In the period when I was headmistress there at the school, I was also on the Council of the Sisters of Mercy for Adelaide, and the work was going on apace to see how the 17 congregations of Sisters of Mercy around Australia – that's three and a half thousand Sisters – could move a further step towards unification of the whole institute, as we might call it, of the 17 congregations to become better-unified. It had already been unified into eight groups of the Union and nine groups of a Federation, so it was almost an expected step to move forward. But they had come together in a conference, called a 'Conference of Sisters of Mercy of Australia', and I was asked to consider how I could help to bring further unification. And to do that it was to work with the Sisters in what was to be called the Executive Director role, to try to bring about further unification if it was suitable, and that's what I did for the next four years.

**So was this of your choosing, or did it happen a bit like becoming the headmistress: that you thought you had a particular path and then it went off in another direction?**

Yes, that's how it happened. I suppose that's one of the things that happens in religious orders – certainly among some of my friends, too. It's like a part of the calling. You don't know what the next step is and you don't know what other opportunities there are besides what one sees oneself. And so it is part of – well, I suppose one could call it a 'calling'.

**And how have you felt about that process?**

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Well, it was a very exciting time, really. I had left the school and was wanted to undertake some work in social analysis, and just from interest, really, but also there was a visit of Canon Houtart and Madeleine Lemercier, both coming from Belgium, and that was a series of seminars that were being made available in the Catholic Church in Australia – and it wasn't immediately in Australia; the one I heard of was in the Philippines. And that came at almost the same time and it was all fitting together that, if I were to take on the new position that was being offered, then this would be very helpful. And we put it together and that was made possible for me to attend that, and that was a very fortuitous seminar, really.

**What did you gain from that?**

Well, it was three weeks of social analysis, some of which was quite new in terms of looking at the political and the economic and the social structures in society, and that was a very good background to any kind of theology that I had been doing, and it was another challenge really to think differently about religion and to note that in that analysis religion was not playing any specific part, so that the structure of society as it's affected by religion and philosophical belief, I think, needed even further work, so it was a continuing challenge.

**So you were open to these challenges?**

Well, they seemed to be quite realistic and evident that it was needed. So, yes, I was.

**Tell me a little more, then, about this move to form this institute. You were working with a wide range of Sisters across Australia. What reflections have you got on that time, working with your colleagues?**

It was a great time, really, because there was a readiness for the Sisters, in the Sisters, among the Sisters, to work together and to see how we could help one another and strengthen the Church by becoming more unified ourselves instead of being two groups, Union and Federation, or 17 groups being individual congregations from different towns and cities. And it gave us a strength – – –.

**I'm just going to pause because we have an interruption here. (pause) We'll now resume. I apologise for that interruption. Please continue about the process of bringing those congregations together. What did these women bring to the process?**

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I spent the time looking at, again, our constitutions and reading about the foundress and what she was wanting and then knowing that we had to be better acquainted ourselves, socially and as communities. So I thought the obvious thing was to try to hold a conference that would bring together people from all the congregations, but, knowing that we were three and a half thousand, it was not saying that we'd be three and a half thousand together. Just at that time, too, there was a survey going on for all the religious of Australia, there was a survey in the Church, and I was involved with some of the work that was involved in that. But the main attempt to bring people together was to say, 'Well, we need to have a common project and we also need to meet one another,' and so I undertook to try to explain some of all of this at a conference when we came together, which was in 1977, which we called an 'assembly', and we had representatives from all the groups at the conference.

But, specifically, we brought in people from each of the 17 groups to meet in various spots to have conference about themselves, about particular areas that we wanted to look at, and it would be like our community life and our apostolic works; and including specifically education and where we thought we needed to go with that, given that there are so many State systems and there are also preschool and primary school and secondary and tertiary education that the Sisters were involved in.

So it was that, with the work on our social apostolic works like hospitals and the social work agencies and our work among the poor, as it's called, sociologically, but specifically about women in need of any kind, that we built the conference that would have, we hoped, some impact on the way we did things and how we worked with people and what would be answering best the needs of the time.

**And how do feel that that process went?**

Well, I thought it went very well, and people were really happy with it, and I think it was quite influential in bringing us together. And we did have 200 in the small groups. We had the influence of my having visited all, nearly all houses of the congregation, all 330 round the States – plural – and we also were able to look specifically at the role of the Sisters of Mercy as women in the Church, so that the influence is really quite wide. As well as that, we had attached to those smaller

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groups, or the groups that added up to the 200 Sisters, we held a three-day assembly and brought another 800 Sisters in, or they came. So it was a great event, really, for the whole Institute of the Sisters. You see, I'm confusing – getting mixed up in what I should call them, because then it was 'Conference' of Sisters with the Union and the Federation, and it became the 'Institute'. So we now refer to it as the Institute.

**And it is still the Institute?**

Yes. And that was, I think, quite a success. One of the canon lawyers said to me – because we had two canon lawyers there; really, we had three who would be advising us, but two main ones – who said to me after, 'Well, it was a great success,' he said, 'But you wouldn't do it again, would you?' (laughs) I had to say, 'Well, we might. We might.' In fact, we haven't had an Institute like that, as large as that, again.

**And assembly?**

Yes, the whole assembly. But we have had – really, I suppose, because we haven't needed to, because we've put into place the Institute, which then allows for all kinds of consultation and group work together.

**So what you set up then has stood you in good stead up to this day.**

That's right, and it's now 20 years down the track – it's 25 years, really – of life as an institute that we're looking again at the structures to see how or what we need to act, given that there is a decrease in numbers and a need to look at our structures as being suitable or not so suitable for the coming time.

**That was something I was going to touch on later on, but we'll perhaps talk about it now, and that is the falling numbers, I imagine, of young women wanting to join the order.**

Yes. It's quite a question for us. And I'm saying 'Question' because it's not a problem in the sense that we could look at it as a problem, but it's a question as to where to from here, or why is this so, because it's not because young people lack any kind of missionary zeal or desire to do work with others and for others, or to be of service or to do further work for the Church; it's more, I think, that the society has changed – that's true. But one of the major influences in the Church, I think, has been the education and the appreciation of the lay people in the Church, and I think

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that we are a lay church, and I think that that's a great thing to rejoice in, and we need to provide the opportunities for people in the Church to act and work and serve in the best ways that they can. So we need to have a variety of structures. But there's no doubt about it that the Church is a lay church, so that we need to find ways of enacting that.

**So what would be your vision for the Church perhaps in 10, 20 years' time, when there are fewer people such as yourselves?**

Well, when you say, 'fewer people such as ourselves', there'd be fewer people who might be following this particular form of community life, but they'll be following other forms of community life, which would be probably more like communities built around parish, and they would be lay people. And there'd be encouragement, much more encouragement of lay leadership, and it would be not only encouragement of lay leadership but growing out of the lay leadership that is so wonderful at this time. And some of that is because of the great opportunities now, greater opportunities, that are given for lay people to enter into the study of theology and philosophy and ethics and biblical studies and all those forms that seem to have been, from ages back – certainly the Middle Ages but probably before that – confined more to the clerical groups and also, because the clerical groups are men, to men and not to men and women, so that now we do have a more holistic and wholesome, I think, opportunity for different leadership in the Church.

**During this time – we're talking about the late '70s and onwards – who were the writers that were influencing your thinking and what journey were you taking? I'm thinking perhaps of some of the Gutierrez in Lima.**

Yes. When we were working on justice in the Church, the document was coming, it's about that time there'd been quite an upheaval, I suppose, in the Church, all over the world after the Council, the Second Vatican Council in the '60s. And it was followed by a conference in Puebla, also, so the Latin Americans were becoming quite vocal as well. So there was a great ferment around the world, really, and that is some of the stimulus and the excitement that came after the Council.

And I suppose I was reading in those areas too, and that's true. Gutierrez was quite a challenge, about the role of the Church and its role of service or domination and the choices that needed to be made there, and the work of lay people as in like a

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so-called 'Apostolic' way, that is as service in the service of people, and their rightful place in the Church and their rightful say, really, as to how things would be in their own communities. So it was a great time for reading out of the Latin American experience as well as what else was happening around the world.

**Teilhard de Chardin – I'm not sure that I'm saying his name correctly: a palaeontologist and theologian.**

Teilhard, yes. Well, he was another great influence in the – I suppose it was late '60s, too. He was a palaeontologist who gave a lot of thought to origins of the species of man, like just as we've been reading Darwin, you might also read another way of thinking about it. And he was influential in my own reading, I suppose, because I hadn't known a whole lot about palaeontology, so it was great to look at that. But he also wrote poetically, so we had wonderful insights from his theology in his little books, like *Le milieu divin* – the divine milieu in which we move; his *Hymn to the Universe*, which was really in praise of all Creation. It was really like an opening up of our minds to other ways of looking at the world around us, and that was quite exciting, too.

**So you've then worked with the Conference of Sisters of Mercy and then from 1980 to '85 you became Vicar of the Congregation here in Adelaide.**

Yes.

**So what did this role mean for you, then?**

Well, the role of vicar is simply to be second to the leader of the congregation – they are called 'provincial of provinces' or the 'superior general' if you were like a congregation within your own right and not joined up with others and so forth, but we needn't talk too much about those peculiar structures of – it's really structures of governance in the Church. But for us the vicar was like the second-in-command, if you like to say it that way, but it's not really a command position, but it's to assist the superior and the one in charge, or to act in her place if she were not there or not able to be active in that role.

**I imagine that wasn't as quite a demanding role as the previous position as Executive Director.**

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No, not quite as demanding, and it meant also that you could take up other things and assist in – like take up part-time projects, so that in those years when I was vicar I would have been doing some other things too.

**I've got the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace.**

Yes. I had been invited to be on the Justice and Peace Commission at the national level, so I did serve on that, which was a great experience, really.

**Just briefly, are there a couple of highlights from that time that you could share?**

Well, one of them, on that Justice and Peace Commission, was a concern for the people in the Philippines and what was happening there, and it was really looking to see how development was affecting the poorer communities. And the Government down there had been working on road-building and really opening up, I suppose, the areas in some of the islands where the people themselves had not had much experience of that kind of city life and the effects of roadworks and the effect of the cutting down of forests, and the sale of their wood and the conditions under which it was sold. So there were all those kind of economic and social problems that were arising. But one of the visits I made was down to Negros to see what was happening there for the particular road project, that was a highway that was being built and was cutting off a lot of people from their land.

**Did the Government, Philippines Government, have any issues, or people that were driving these projects have issues with you or your organisation going down and monitoring this?**

No, not really. I think they would have had so with their own Catholic Commission, possibly. But I was only one person just going down and looking and I was a tourist as much as anyone else could be a tourist, and there was nothing big about it, so it was really just going to look to see what was actually happening and to see what the highway was actually doing and how it was affecting the people. So my visits were like that, just as when I visited the Palawan when the refugees were there: it was to help but it was also to note what else was happening so that if the people were being maltreated or disenfranchised or whatever, we would know that if necessary there would be another voice to take up the petitions in their favour.

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**In 1984 you went to the Jesuit Refugee Service [JRS] in Bangkok. You were invited to facilitate their meeting, I believe?**

Yes, and that was a great opportunity for me, too, to go and work with this group of men who were building a refugee service which is now really all over the world; it is international now, and I went at the invitation of Father Mark Raper, who was being – he was a JRS convenor – or coordinator, really – here in Australia, but also moving it into South-East Asia, so it was bringing some of their men together to work out what was the best way for them to go as a group. So it was a great privilege, really, to go, and also a great learning for me; and gave rise to my thinking about what the Mercies were doing with the refugee question and the refugees in our area. And I was quite happy to come back and say to our own Sisters, who happened to be working in a chapter at that time, just to say, ‘Look, I’d like to tell you where I’ve been and tell you what I’ve been doing.’ So they said ‘Come and tell us.’ So I did, and out of that came the Mercy Refugee Service, which we’re still working on now and works right through South-East Asia, and really trying to keep alive the – well, I suppose it’s the question of how we best help those who are forced to flee their own country for one reason or another.

**So you came back to Adelaide and spoke with the Sisters here about setting up this service, did you?**

No, I spoke to the whole group of leaders of the congregations, speaking there as part of the Institute.

**Okay, and so then it was something that was –**

Yes.

**– adopted Australia-wide.**

That’s right, yes.

**And then they’ve built up connections with counterparts in the rest of the South-East Asia region?**

Yes, there are connections through the South-East Asia region, but we’re not very strong in South-East Asia. The groups in South-East Asia would be the two groups of Mercies in the Philippines, one lot founded from America and one lot founded

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from Ireland, and really they're the only other Mercy congregations in the area, except for Mercies in Tonga, and in Samoa, who are attached and have grown out of the work of the Sisters of Mercy in New Zealand. But since then we do have Sisters of Mercy who have worked in the refugee service and we've people, like Sisters who have gone and worked in the Philippines or worked in Thailand or worked in Cambodia, assisting refugee people or the people who have returned to their country.

**And so the rest of the congregations here are working with refugees that come to Australia.**

Yes, we have Sisters working in the 'detention centres', so-called, or in those places where refugees are accommodated before they are better integrated into the society, if they're accepted as refugees. And we do have people working in the camps in the other countries as well.

**And do you advocate to the Government as well as having direct hands on with the actual refugees?**

Yes, well, that's part of the role, I think: that we must speak with them and for them when they don't have a voice themselves.

**And you've also been involved with the Australian Catholic Relief, which is now known as Caritas, is that correct?**

That's right, yes.

**In what capacity there?**

I was on the national committee. Australian Catholic Relief had a CEO, had a local group in Sydney, but it was really under the board, a national board, and that's the group that I worked with as a member of the – well, I suppose it was the board, or 'National Council', I think it was called, of Catholic Relief.

**So you've had a broad experience within the Church of reaching out in social justice areas.**

Yes, I have. Yes, it's been a wonderful experience in every case, you know, to have a chance to serve in that way, and I've been really very privileged.

**You were congregation leader then, from 1985 to 1989.**

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Yes, that's right, too. (laughs) I had been the vicar in two terms so, it was a request or request of the congregation to be voted in, I suppose, at chapter, to take on the leadership for a five-year term, and I was able to do that.

**And what sort of things were you able to achieve or were presenting themselves to you at that time?**

In '85 to '88 – I might have to think about that, of what – – –.

**I understand it was an administrative role, to some degree.**

Yes, it was, and I'm trying to clarify what actually was going on in that time. Mainly it was like moving the Institute further forward, because the Institute had come into being, really, round the early '80s and it was – had one term, like the first five years, and now we were moving into the second five years as a national institute. So it was working on the local level here in Adelaide, but also supporting the national work that was going on. So it was more like a steady role or a consolidation of what was happening around the nation. We weren't doing a whole lot of other new things in that time. People were really getting used to being part of the national group, building in the structures that helped us to work with one another across – – –.

**Had there been dissension at all about the way the structure evolved?**

Well, I suppose – you wouldn't call it 'dissension', but certainly a fair bit of vigorous discussion that always was going on then, because in fact we were not yet – we were an institute but we were not one single congregation; we still had autonomy to a fair degree. And so the discussion of how do we get to be unified was a major discussion of the time. It had been worked on fairly closely for those first five years; the second five years were also a time when people were consolidating the changes and knowing that we couldn't just do things here but we needed to be consulting with other people interstate, and so it was putting those structures into place.

**In 1989 I think your term ended, then, as congregational leader, and I'm just wondering did you have a vision then where your life was going, or what your next role might be?**

No, I didn't. But in 1990 I was able to take a year to – well, really, I suppose it was like take some time to see what the next move would be. And so in 1990 I had – I

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suppose people say a 'sabbatical' year, but it wasn't really quite a sabbatical year; it was going away and working with the refugee service and for a – I did six months.

**You went to the Philippines –**

Yes.

**– to the Jesuit conference of East Asia for six months –**

That's right.

**– with a Father Day?**

Yes. An then did six months with the refugee service out of Thailand. So it was, really, doing some work with the South-East Asian region, was what it was, and it was an opportunity that had been offered, I suppose, because we could see that there'd be advantage on both sides, and maybe that was why it was a good thing to do. With the Jesuit Conference of East Asia, that's where Father Day had his – that was his role, and he was situated in the Philippines. It meant that I could do some work out of his office, and part of that was a fairly good and solid kind of time working on the possibilities for interfaith dialogue and exchange, because the Jesuits were building their own conference right through South-East Asia and were working with the Muslims, starting their work with Muslims and with Buddhists, and people of other, smaller groups, and with differing beliefs. Some of them were animists and some of them were following their own local tribal beliefs, and others were with the more organised forms of religion. So that was like an opening of my mind, too, to other possibilities.

**Such as?**

Well, that you could actually work with Muslims. You could actually work with Buddhists. You could have good exchange with Muslims and Buddhists and not be considered to be losing your own faith or something. So it was great to have that opportunity. And the second half of the year then I went to Thailand and worked with the Jesuit Refugee Service there, and that was a good opportunity, too, to see what they were doing in the various camps around Asia.

**And I think it's at that stage that you came across the effects of landmines for the first time.**

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Yes. And it wasn't a big thing in one sense; it was just that I was working with the refugee service and their staff there in Bangkok, and Bob Maab, who was an American Jesuit student at the time, was working in the office too, and he had a friend out on the border, towards the border: he came in one day and said the friend had had his leg blown off and his arm affected by landmine. I said, 'What was he doing up there in that war region?' He said, 'It's not the war region; it's Thailand.' 'Oh.' So that became quite a surprise for us that this should happen, and it was in Thailand, not a war. But the border had changed many times, the actual border, and so there were mines laid and some of them were actually further in than would have been known. And I suppose that's what provoked my interest in how this possibly could happen.

**Now, much of the process since then, of achieving the banning of landmines, has been documented in a book you edited: *A path is made by walking it: reflections on the Australian network to ban landmines 1991-2006*, and also documented in your previous oral history for the Honoured Women's Project here in South Australia in 1990. So, in the rest of our time, I'd like to just gain some of your reflections on some points along this journey, and I've read you thought, 'Someone ought to do something about it.'**

(laughs)

**And who did you feel should do something about it at that point?**

That phrase comes to my mind so often, I have to admit that: 'Why doesn't somebody do something about it?' And I do remember saying to Bob at the time, 'Oh, what a terrible thing, that Suwin had this! Why doesn't somebody do something about it?' (laughs) And he said, 'Well, we are doing it. We're trying to help him get himself fixed up and look into whether it was' – trying to find out the cause, you know, like how it could happen that civilians could be subjected to this when you're not even part of the warring factions or warring nations. And that was quite a challenge and it certainly provoked me to ask questions, and that's what I did.

**Do you think that's what you're good at, asking questions?**

Well, I'm certainly good at reacting and saying, 'Why doesn't somebody do something about it?' (laughs)

**But it seems like you don't let it go, though.**

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Well, no, I don't, if I think it's affecting people in such a way and there's something I could do, like provoke someone to take an action: yes, I'm quite happy to do that, if I can. I can't always do it myself, but I can provoke and ask and cajole and suggest that somebody take an action on it.

**Did you have any understanding of the enormity and complexity of that, the landmine issue?**

I had no real idea of it at all. I did think – and as I questioned other people about it – I realise I did know that armies used landmines and, like armies everywhere, were accepted as military forces who had certain rights and obligations for the defence of their nations and then that gave them certain rights to use weapons. But it certainly provoked me to think more seriously about warfare and the military rule and the laws of engagement, rules of engagement. And that started me on another little journey.

**At the beginning of that journey, though, you actually went to Oxford to study.**

Yes.

**Can you tell me a little bit about how that came about and what you were doing there?**

Oh, I had heard that there was a summer school being offered by the Refugee Service in Oxford and they were offering a six-month course, and I thought that could be a very good thing to do. And I was being offered assistance to do that, and was being told to apply for this scholarship, (laughs) so I said, 'They wouldn't want me for a scholarship.' They said, 'Oh, but just apply, because if there's money being offered then you could do it.' Then they said, well, it's not really a scholarship, but it's like an award of some kind that they were offering. And so I applied for that and they accepted that I could go and do study at the same time as being partly working for the Refugee Studies Centre.

**So when did you get to Oxford?**

I finally got there in the beginning of '91.

**And I have it listed that you were doing postgraduate work in refugee law: is that the case?**

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Yes. Well, that's what part of it was. I was needing to know something about it and that was why they said, well, Oxford would be the place to go. And all things worked together, really, and it was a very good thing for me to do.

**You then, at the same time, met up with Colonel Colin and Sue Mitchell of the HALO Trust, I believe.**

Yes. It was because of the landmines, really, when I was trying to find out what could be done, having said, 'Something ought to be done, or somebody ought to do something about it,' and it happened really at my niece's wedding that they said to me, 'Well, you should contact the British Army.' And I said, you know, 'How would I contact the British Army?' They said, 'Well, look it up in the phone book.' (laughs) So that's exactly what I did. Because I left from – like a week after the wedding or some days after the wedding, and when I arrived in London and got myself organised I did ring up the British Army and said could they tell me who to contact about landmines. And so they gave me the contact for Colin. And that's what I did: I just rang up and said could I talk to him or could he tell me who to talk to about the use of landmines and the Halo Trust that was now working to rid the world of landmines. They were doing mine clearance.

**Was that under the umbrella of the British Army, or a separate organisation?**

They were all former military men and they had finished their time of service – and thereby hangs another tale, the whole of that story of actually moving into some consolidation of work, of our work, with the British Army, but mainly through the Halo Trust, which was former Army men.

**We're getting towards the end of our time for this card, so we'll pause it there and resume shortly.**

All right, good.

**Thank you.**

END OF DISK 3: DISK 4

**This is sound card four of an interview with Sister Patricia Pak Poy on the 10<sup>th</sup> May 2010 being conducted by Alison McDougall for the National Library of Australia and the State Library of South Australia. Now, we have been talking**

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**about your time in Oxford; then you returned to Adelaide and I believe became the Executive Officer of the Adelaide Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission.**

Yes, I did, and that was a very good place to be to follow up some of the work on the issues that were concerning me at the time and over the years – and one of those issues was actually the people of Cambodia – and I could pursue the problem of the landmines in Cambodia, just knowing that there was such a problem with the people returning.

**You started networking with groups.**

Yes, because that short journey back from Oxford was when I was in Thailand, passing through Thailand, and wanted to see a friend in Cambodia but only had – she was going back that night and they were having a meeting. I said, ‘Well, I’ll just come back that night and see how the set-up is for you,’ and it seemed – because it cost very little – because the ticket was precious – when I went back with them – and it just happened that that night they were having a nongovernment organisation meeting in Phnom Penh, and all the NGOs would be there. And so I was able to speak to the whole crowd of people there. I said I only needed two minutes and they said I can have the two minutes, so it was possible to be able to speak of the problem of landmines and people returning before clearance had taken place.

**So was this something that other NGOs perhaps weren’t concentrating on so much at that time?**

That’s right, they didn’t have such a concern about it because I suppose they didn’t know sufficient, and if they had known they might have got the same answer as I got when I wrote to one of the representatives there – and I think he was in fact a UN rep – asking about the problem, like stating the problem as I knew it and my concern about people returning and needing the clearance of mines, and that was when I got that reply: ‘Madam, do you not know there is a war on?’

**What was your response to that?**

I wrote and said I did know there was a war, but I also knew that people were going back and nothing was being done to clear the areas where they would be going, like, to monitor it.

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**So your two minutes at that NGO meeting had quite a flow-on effect, then.**

Oh, it did. It was a most extraordinary happening, really. Some people would call it providential because one of the people from an NGO – and I don't even know what it was now – came to me after the meeting and said, 'Look, we didn't realise that that was happening and we're bringing people back and they're going up into that district.'

I said, 'Well, you really need to search it out and see what the situation is before you bring people back, and I know they don't want to wait until the war is over; they know that the war is going to finish, and they'll go back without being taken back.' But, you know, all the organisations need to know that: that they will go spontaneously and the problem will be even greater.

**So, needing to do your background research, getting a whole idea of the complexity of the problem is so vital.**

That's right, that's right, and it's – well, I can understand people wanting to move back without asking the proper questions, like the Cambodians themselves wanting to go back, and the organisations trying to help them to go back, not knowing also all the questions to ask, so that it – – –. And I suppose that's happening all the time, and it's one of the reasons why we've got to have good communication systems in place.

**And so that two minutes was somebody doing something about it.**

Oh! As I said, providential that I could even get there for one night and have [a] two-minute slot on a meeting when they were all there.

**Otherwise the whole process could have taken much longer or – – –.**

Yes. I'm not saying that that did everything, but it certainly alerted a few people to the fact that there were complications.

**And then you came back to Adelaide and continued the process from there?**

Yes. It was needing to find work at that stage, and then I was invited to take on the work of the Justice and Peace Commission for Adelaide; it was just starting up. And that gave me an opportunity to pursue that issue of landmines in Cambodia.

**We won't go through the whole chronology at this point. I've picked out just a few points along the way. In 1991 there was a petition presented to the Parliament,**

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**Federal Parliament. Yes. It was presented in February 1932 and it had very little effect.**

Well, it was a very small thing, really, because it was just the people that we were in contact with on that issue of landmines, and was more – I suppose it was specifically Cambodia, too, but it was Mr Scott who agreed to present it for us, but 1400 signatures is not really very great, but I thought it might just get on the agenda somewhere, and it was presented and received without comment. And I thought, ‘Well, that’s going nowhere.’ (laughs) So the next one we did was 290,000 signatures, and that was a bit more effective.

**Well, things did progress, because in November 1993 there was a symposium, ‘Landmines, a human rights issue’ at Parliament House, Canberra –**

Yes.

**– and I think that’s where the formal campaign began, and you were asked to become the full-time coordinator of the Australian Network for Banning Landmines [ANBL].**

Yes, that’s right. And friends – Chris Sidoti was a lawyer I’d worked with on the Justice and Peace Commission, really, and he had started up a group with some of his friends called the Human Rights Council of Australia, and I had asked them for some help – like I said, ‘We seemed to get nowhere; what should we do?’ And he said they’d help with it, and I said, ‘Fantastic. And what will you do?’

They said, ‘We’ll have a seminar.’

I said, ‘Oh, great. Where would you have it?’

And they said, ‘Parliament House.’

Well, I couldn’t believe it. But that’s what happened. And it was a very important small event, if you know what I mean. A small seminar of 30 people, mainly people who were representatives of nongovernment organisations in Australia, and it was Chris’s own group, the Human Rights Council of Australia, and there were the Community Aid Abroad people and the Oxfam people, so they were the main organisations that had sent people as representatives. And we were able to get Jody Williams, who was just starting up as the coordinator of the international campaign, we were able to get her to come out. And we had asked Gareth Evans, who was the Minister at the time, to speak too, so that it was enough stars (laughs) in

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the firmament to attract some attention. And it was a very significant meeting at which the nongovernment groups decided that they would pursue the campaign and asked if I would take on the coordinating of it, which I was happy to do.

**What did that mean for you?**

It just meant that I did more work on the campaign itself. But I had to also have a living, and they made a donation that would have kept me going for six months and so I was able to move on that, and then it was a matter of getting donations from various groups and orders to assist for the next while.

**So you moved away from the Justice and Peace Commission then?**

No – well, I had to leave the Justice and Peace Commission because I was being asked to take up other work for the Order, and so that's what I did. And so it was a matter of finding a way to have enough money to live on, as well as do the work for the Order and so forth. So it was like doing a part-time job, really.

**So, when you're part of the Order, do you have some kind of income just by being a Sister of Mercy?**

Well, if it's the work of the Order, then it would be because they would have made arrangements for that or have calculated if we had enough money to be able to do that, so that was fine. So to take on the formation of the new members, that would be part of our normal budget; but to do other work for free is not always possible because somewhere there's got to be some room for movement, so there's got – sometimes there's money available and sometimes there's not.

**You mentioned previously that your approach to change is to find the person you consider to be in the best position perhaps to assist that change. Is this the approach you used during this campaign?**

Oh, now, I don't remember actually having said that, but that's true. It's the way to move, I suppose. Yes, well, with this particular campaign, knowing that the Justice and Peace Commissions were in a good position to assist – and that's a group that I would have had a fair bit to do with, as with Catholic Relief – and earlier I had done some work with the Children's Interest Bureau, back in the '80s, and while that didn't still exist it just meant there were some people in government circles also that

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I had contact with; so that it's like knowing where there are people who have an interest and can assist: well, that's true, I suppose that's a strategy, yes.

**And do you ever take 'No' for an answer?**

Well, yes, I think – I'm trying to think when. (laughs) I'd have to think – well, if there's nobody else I would go back again and say, 'Well, look, I've looked for somebody and I can't find anybody. Do you think you could just do this little bit?' Yes, I've done that.

**What qualities or skills did you bring to this role of coordinating the ANBL?**

I suppose it's having been a good organiser and having been in charge of, well, organisations like the Justice and Peace Commission and having been on the Council and having been head of a school; even just being an adequate classroom teacher, you've got to be a good organiser for being a teacher. So I suppose there's some of that that was already skills that had been acquired, so I didn't have to worry too much about that.

**How easy or difficult was it to coordinate so many individuals and groups in building up that program?**

For the group here in Australia it was a matter of finding people who would have an interest in it. And the Justice and Peace Commission work had already put me in touch with with a few people, and I would have known people in other organisations through my other work and nongovernment organisations and various contacts, so it was a matter of finding people in each State so that we could have a network, because there was no way that one person could do it, and there was no way we could do anything in government without a national network. So it was trying to find people who would have the interest and were willing to take on some of the organisation, and to ask them to build up groups, which they all were able to do.

So it was mainly church groups, because they would be my main contacts, and they all had agencies in their own cities, and they worked on forming groups who would support the campaign. So it was a very helpful network – mainly church people, Catholic and Uniting and Presbyterian, so it was very very effective – easy enough to have people – provoke enough interest for people to take on some of the

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work. But not always easy to have it maintained, so that probably was the challenging part of it: to maintain the interest in it.

**I've read Cornelio Sommaruga, who was the President of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, and his commendation for your book, *A path is made by walking it*. He refers to the courageous steps undertaken by Australian civil society in the early 1990s. What was it about Australians, do you think, that made those steps possible?**

Well, it was like people recognising there was a problem, but not always having the wherewithal to get support for it. And, well, one has to say the church network is there if you can use it and if there are people who are interested in it, and if the church people are not interested in saving lives then I don't know who's going to be. So in that sense I had already had experience on a national level and of networking on the national level, and the Sisters of Mercy themselves were a network, so in one sense you could say that I already had a network that could be effective.

**But it grew beyond the church network.**

Oh, very quickly, because it's a humanitarian problem. It was just that that was one place to start. And then there are people who were members of other organisations which were not church organisations, and they also took up the issue.

**Why would he have used the word 'courageous', do you think?**

I have no idea why he would have used the word 'courageous'. (laughs) He was probably being very kind; he's a very kind person.

**He also mentions you specifically as a person who gave him courage to continue the struggle for a mine-free world, and I'm wondering what you were doing or saying that gave him that courage.**

He was at one point there, when we were starting the work on it, he was in the – I'm not quite sure of the exact title, but he was what I would say in charge of or the head officer for the international committee for the Red Cross in Geneva. And Geneva, the Red Cross was always non-political and so they wouldn't, at the beginning, accept to be spokespersons against the mines or anything because they said that would be too political an issue. But their conversations together and their committee meetings came to the position that it was a humanitarian issue and they needed to be

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there behind it. Now, I don't know whether that's what he was meaning, but I saw the change of policy as something very, very important to us. And the international committee of the Red Cross is an extraordinarily influential in getting things moving.

**My impression is that you were obviously providing some support along the way to facilitate that change in approach?**

Well, yes, I suppose we were, in that we were there and we'd call and visit, (laughs) and we'd talk to the people who came and so forth; and certainly encouraging because they were a very, very influential voice in the work for peace and disarmament.

**Now, in the beginning of the '90s and forward you had the Hawke and then the Keating Governments and then John Howard came into power in 1996. So you were dealing with a number of different administrations. How did the government of the day affect your work?**

Well, it was an interesting journey, really. I'm not what you'd call highly political in that sense, party political, but for me it was like whoever was in charge of the issue or the business and had the decision-making power, then they were the ones that we had to work with. So it was a question of asking about it, raising the question, raising the possibilities: would they work for a ban? That whole question. And, well, I know that it looked somewhat unrealistic to bring about an international ban on a weapon that had been used for years and years, like right back to the turn of the century, and internationally; and nobody ever banned weapons, much – I mean gas might have been banned at some stage – so there weren't too many bombs that had been banned; in fact, they haven't even yet banned the atom bomb – I mean it's only done by the horror of it all – so it was that kind of background in which we were working. And I suppose that's why the ban, the first ban on anti-personnel mines is significant, because it actually rules out one particular weapon. And, as people said, 'Well, you could be banning all kinds of weapons,' and I said, 'Yes, we could.' It's not likely to happen or, if it does, as people would say, 'Not in my lifetime.' (laughs) So that's a question for the whole of civic society, I think: to address the kind of legality of weapons.

**I'll just pause while that aeroplane goes over. (pause) I assume it was useful to have a specific focus of a particular area of weaponry to get banned, initially.**

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Initially, it was that particular weapon, yes. It's a landmine. And not all landmines, even; it was really the anti-personnel landmine. We weren't successful in getting a ban on anti-vehicle mines – not even the small ones, let alone the bigger ones which were blowing up buses as well as tanks. So, you know, while you could say a tank was a war vehicle, you can't say that about buses, necessarily, and that's the shame of it all.

**In 1995 you were a nongovernment member of the Australian delegation to the UN review conference in Vienna on the Convention of Certain Weapons and Protocol II, and for the development of what is now known as the Ottawa Treaty of 1997. How did that come about? Because the inclusion of NGOs and the international campaign against landmines, that was vetoed on the grounds of national security at the time.**

Yes. It was an invitation to be a part of the [Australian] delegation that came from the government at the time. And it was because I suppose it was already known that we were working on the issue and wanted something done about it, and it was quite a surprise, really, that we were invited to join the delegation. On the first time I was there, it was a preliminary meeting and I couldn't be contacted because I was already over there for something or other, and so I didn't get the invitation. I had gone to a meeting in Rome where the nongovernment people had come together from around Europe and Jody Williams from the States had come and we had a meeting in Rome to say, well, what were we going to do about all of this.

And when I got back there was a message to say that they'd been looking for me: 'Where was I?' (laughs) And I thought, 'Well, nobody told me I was being looked for.' So when I contacted them they said, well, now, what is the possibility of their doing something about it? And it was then that I was invited to join the delegation.

**And what voice did you have in the delegation?**

Well, I had said that I wouldn't be – I'd be happy to join the delegation but of course that they would know that I would have a different position, so maybe I shouldn't be on the delegation. And they said, 'Oh, no, you can come on the delegation, but nobody – like no person from – like civilian or representative of the civil society would be there, able to speak in their own right; you could only speak with the approval of the delegation leader.' And I said, 'Ah, well, if it gets me into the

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meeting I'm happy to go on the delegation, because how else would I get in?' (laughs) because they didn't have observers then. And on the first meetings the international campaign was not yet allowed in because it was under the UN CCW, that's the [Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons], and China had vetoed nongovernment people. So the only way in was to be on the delegation. So we agreed that I would go on the delegation so we could get in.

And in the beginning they got the permission for six nongovernment people to go on it. The first one was not, but after that they had six people from different delegations were allowed in.

**Did that include you?**

Yes, I was on the Australian delegation. And at one of the early meetings I was asked to give the statement on behalf of the delegation. Now, that was kind of a risky thing for them to do, but it was very privileged for me – and it was quite a surprising thing for everybody else, including the other nongovernment people who were sitting on their delegations watching what was happening.

**Who invited you to do that?**

It would have been the head of delegation at that stage.

**For Australia?**

For Australia.

**And that was?**

Or one of the members who was actually organising it all. And I said I would do it, but of course I'd have to put our position.

They said, 'Yes, but you put the Australian position.'

I said, 'I'm happy to put the Australian position, but I would have to say what the nongovernment position is, too.'

And they said, 'Yes.'

So I said, 'All right.' So I did. I was able to say what the Australian Government delegation position was.

**Which was, at that point?**

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That they didn't – that there was no ban on them; they were looking at the problems that they give rise to, but they certainly weren't banning them. And they put forward, you know, that people needed to use them very carefully and to keep all the rules about warning signs and how to demine areas that had been mined, you know, the obligations for that kind of thing. And the nongovernment position, of course, was to ban the lot. And it was easy to say, 'But of course there are nongovernment organisations that are working for a total ban: this is what it would mean.' And that seemed to be acceptable to them.

**And what was the outcome then, of you being able to state that position?**

Well, I think nobody ever told me what they thought about that, in terms of the other members, but I think the outcome would have been a consciousness that there were two positions and that there was a question about it.

**And do you think that would have filtered through, then, to other delegations and influenced their thinking?**

I don't know whether it did or not. I mean it's one small voice. But it's on record, so I would presume that people would be saying, well, that there was a voice for civil society and it didn't agree with the use of these weapons. It was calling for a ban on them. But nobody ever said anything to that effect, so I really don't know.

**This would have been a very intense number of years for you. Was there a personal cost? Did you ever become discouraged?**

No, it wasn't a discouragement. I suppose for some years there were, like, three meetings in the year, and that's a quite a hefty load. And it was not only a load to carry but it was a matter of funding and would you get sufficient funds to be able to go? Because even [for] those on the delegation the fares were not paid, except in a couple of instances. Government paid a couple of times, three times, so it always had to be weighed up about the effectiveness of what we were doing and the money that was involved, and if and when we would be compromised and how to upset that, and that kind of strategic considerations.

**Has your faith ever wavered along this journey?**

You mean my faith in the issue?

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**Well, faith in the issue and your wider faith.**

Well, not faith in the issue because that's – well, I think we've got to be careful of one another, and to be putting mines there without even the excuse of warfare, I mean that's a bit grim. (laughs) So no, I didn't, I still have that position. And in terms of faith in God and faith in the community and faith in the work of churches and nongovernment organisations: no; I think that we all have a role to play in that. And my own faith was that, if you've got a call to work for justice and work for mercy and for the good of people, then that's one way I can do it. I can't do it in lots of other ways. Once upon a time I wanted to be a doctor and I could see that I would never be able to do that, and if I even tried to be a nurse I wouldn't be able to do that easily – can't lift enough, you know. (laughs)

**There's a photo on the back of *A path is made by walking it* of you watching the then Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer signing the, I presume, the Ottawa Treaty. Can you describe your feelings at that moment?**

I thought it was a good thing he was doing, and I was really keen to be there to see him do it. And he said, when I told him that, he said, 'What else could I do with you standing there behind me?' (laughs) So it was at the change of government in 1996, it would have been, that he came into office as – in the Department of Foreign Affairs, and I approached him immediately, because with the change in government we had to more or less start again. And he had made a slight improvement on what the government, the previous government had said, but they weren't on for pushing it time-wise or for the total ban. And I said, 'We have to have a total ban on this,' so would he consider it? And the wording changed slightly, so we approached him again and said, 'No, we need it to be a bit more definite than that.'

**So you, yes, didn't let him go.**

No, no. This is for the people, so you can't kind of let it go. So, no, we persuaded them to rethink the total ban and what it meant. And I had been talking with the military and had the advice of military lawyers, too, and had been discussing the issue with them, because it was like the country's military law and the country's kind of peace and war operations have to be taken into account. But they could see that there were other ways of doing things.

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**So you're constantly educating or trying to get them to view things differently.**

Well, yes, and to see if there were other ways around it. Now, they would have known, of course, even though I may not have known, that, well, you've got – if you don't use landmines, so if we ban the landmines, it's all right because we've got cluster munitions. I presume that's one of the things; you know, there are other alternatives. (laughs) They probably didn't realise that once we found out there were alternatives we'd want those banned, too!

**So the Ottawa Treaty was enacted in 1999. Can you describe your feelings and those of your colleagues then?**

People were really so pleased that they'd actually got sufficient people to sign on. And there are 156 ratifications out of the possible 200 or 190 or something, so it's a very good representation. And it meant that those who have not signed have a very strong pressure on them not to use mines, because the other 156 countries have signed on. Now, that's not universally true; I know that, since that signing, there have been a couple of countries who have used mines in their own so-called 'private' activities in their own national activities, like Russia and Burma used them, have used them in the meantime; not constantly, but for particular times and crises. And that's a great shame. I mean it's great shame to them – it's a shame for the people, but shame to them, too, that they would do that.

With cluster munitions there are only 32 now, 32 states, parties: so that the moral pressure is not nearly as great as yet, so we're still working on that.

**Yes, so the chronology in your book continues beyond 1999, so there's obviously been a need to keep this issue alive –**

Yes.

**– to be alert. There've been annual review meetings of treaty member states; have you been involved with these?**

I have with some, but not in the last two years. I keep a monitoring watch, but we've had other members go to the meetings and that's been a good thing. Mark Zirnsak went to some of the meetings for the four years that he was the national coordinator.

**Yes, he became the national coordinator in 2004, took over that role from you.**

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Yes.

**By that time, you were 69 years old, and many people perhaps would have decided to slow down a bit or perhaps have a slower pace of life; but it appears this is not the case for you.**

Well, I don't know about a slower pace of life. I think you can't do as many things as you used to do. But I've had good health, which is a great blessing, and it means that I can continue to do work of this kind. How effectively is another thing; but, as I said, I'm only sitting on the – being an honorary president and stirring the pot every now and again. (laughs)

**So some things don't change.**

No, well, that's right, that's right.

**So what have you seen as being the main objectives since the signing of the treaty for nongovernment organisations, grassroots community groups?**

Since the signing of the treaty, the work of victim assistance or assistance to the survivors has increased in its – I suppose its importance, and countries have been called to work on that issue and on the clearance of the lands that have been affected by the laying of mines. So those two aspects of the work continue. And they're very important still. With the work on cluster munitions, which arose out of the work on the landmines, that still needs a lot of work because even though the ban is in place and the 32 countries are members of that – States Parties to that treaty – – –.

**So Australia?**

Australia not yet. There's still work to be done in getting the non-signatories to actually sign on. We're disappointed at that stage that Australia's taking so long to ratify this treaty or at the moment – we signed early enough, but haven't ratified.

**What do you think is holding up this process?**

One is domestic legislation, that is what we've been told – but it's now at least a year and we should have got the domestic legislation in place. Like when I say it's at least a year, it's at least a year since we had drafts of what was coming; it's not maybe a whole year since the actual thing, the actual treaty, was actually actualised. But nevertheless, I think, with the treaty on landmines having already been in place,

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we should have been able to do it sooner. However, I do understand that because of the exceptions in the treaty, that the legislation becomes a little bit more complex, the actual writing of the laws. But I don't think it should have taken this long. I'm disappointed that it is taking so long.

**You mentioned Burma earlier and you've had dealings with that country or visits to that country –**

Yes.

**– and under what jurisdiction have you done that?**

When I went to Burma first I did take information to the government, to their Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister – they have another portfolio in there that's not actually foreign affairs; it's like for international organisations or something – and I've left information for them and I've met with them briefly. And then I wasn't able to get a visa to go into Burma any more for a while. But the work there is really trying to get them to put a hold on using landmines. And, while they still continue to have the effects, I suppose, of what originally would have been some kind of tribal warfare, they've had a military government now, a military junta in power, and they're not really willing to deny themselves certain weapons, so it continues to be a problem for the people.

**You've been able to perhaps build more relationships in Cambodia, and you had a project that came out in 2003 called 'Claiming the future'. Can you tell me a bit about that project?**

With Cambodia, we have a Sister of Mercy, Denise Coghlan there, and the Jesuits have quite a strong work there, which is helping the survivors of landmines. And one of their members is a bishop in Battambang, which is one of the worst-affected areas, and he's Bishop Enrique (Kike) Figaredo. So, in terms of our network, we've got a way in there and it's supporting them in their work of assisting the survivors, because Cambodia has signed and ratified the treaty, and that's been very good to see. But it's a hard thing for them because the number of weapons that were spread around there has been very great and so that they have to work constantly to clear the land properly or well, and it's not easy.

**And that affects the economy –**

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That's right.

**– locally and more broadly, I assume.**

Yes. Yes.

**And do you still have direct links there yourself?**

Personal links, more, and so that it's good to go and visit when I can, but it's not always possible – hasn't been for a while.

**One of your main focuses now is with a group called Hope Adelaide. Can you tell me how that came about?**

Yes. Hope Adelaide was a little organisation that we have growing out of what, first up, was Burma Action, because when I had started to visit Burma it was really after the student action that had taken place back in '88 and there were some Burmese students out here in Australia and we had been writing letters about that situation and about the, after that, the imprisonment of Aung San Suu Kyi after the election, which from our point of view seemed to be quite an illegal action. And we continued to do that work, really, which was supporting the Burmese community here, because then that was all that we could do at that stage.

Then some of the members asked if we could help them look at this question of AIDS, and I have to say that when I looked at it and when I saw the size of the – I suppose it's the pandemic, really, across the world, and I also saw that there was a global fund, I thought, 'Well, we have no way of doing that,' a little group that used to meet down in Mile End. (laughs) So I said no, I didn't think that we could, after I'd looked at it all and I thought, 'Well, if there's a global fund, there will be funding coming to them.' So it's one of the few times I've had to say to these young students who asked, I said, 'No, I don't think we can,' as what we were then, just Burma Action. I said, 'No, I don't think we can. We don't have the wherewithal.'

**So how has the group now evolved? It's a very broad group, I believe.**

Well, it's not a – it's a small group. And when I said, 'No, I don't think we could,' – in fact, I said to the young man, 'No, I don't think we can. You know,' I said 'getting money's very hard. We'd have Buckley's.' And he looked at me and he said, 'Bockley? What is Bockley?' (laughs) And when I told him what 'Bockley'

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was, that it meant ‘--- no, we wouldn’t have a chance, ‘Oh,’ he said, ‘But will you try?’ Well, I couldn’t say, ‘No, I’m not even going to try.’ I said, ‘Well, all right, I will try. But I wouldn’t be very hopeful and I don’t think you should get up your hopes too much. You might need to find another way.’

So I did do as I said: I asked around to see if there were people who – you know, organisations that would help, and I got ‘no’ for an answer, and I thought, ‘Oh, it’s just as I thought.’ But then I asked Caritas about it and they said no, they didn’t have any funding for this particular issue. Then they came back and said, ‘Now, wait a minute: we’ve got 10,000 set aside for Burma and it’s hard for us to get in,’ because it was still under pressure, ‘And if you can get in, you can use that for a pilot project, but we can’t promise anything more. So if you do a pilot project we want reports on that and ways forward.’

So we undertook to do that, and when we were doing that we said, ‘Well, we should call ourselves something else, too, like it’s not just Burma Action and writing letters; we need a constitution if we’re going to handle other people’s money at all.’ So that’s how it came about.

**And it’s continued. And you talked to me earlier about your members perhaps going to visit areas –**

Yes.

**– you’re supporting and what it means for them.**

We have two big projects: one inside Burma and one in India across the border. We concentrated on Chin State because that’s where it was possible for us to work and where our contacts were, but we didn’t think we could work in Burma itself. And we worked first in India, in Mizoram, and that is in AIDS education, really, because that’s what they’re saying: ‘Our people don’t know what AIDS is; they don’t know how you get it; they don’t know what treatment is; so could we help?’ And that’s as much as we could do. So we did that.

And there also have been refugees, which is also part of our work on the refugee committee. So we looked into the group of men and women and children who’d moved over from even Mizoram and were seeking United Nations help, and that office is in Delhi, so there was a group in Delhi, too, and that’s how we come to be

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having some projects in Delhi. And then we were asked could we help the people, the Chin people on the border, to get education about it.

**Once again, it grows –**

That's right.

**– from small beginnings.**

That's right.

**We're getting towards the end of our time. The majority of your adult life has been as part of the Sisters of Mercy. What do you think you've gained by being part of this Order?**

Being part of the Order has got many, many benefits, I suppose. It's not just joining on organisation. But I suppose at base it's like a sense of calling to work beyond oneself and beyond myself with a group of people who have a similar ideal; and the ideal I suppose is based in a belief in a God who acts for the world. It's a Christian organisation, so it's following the teaching and the modelling of Christ, Jesus Christ, and it's working with the Catholic community as a jumping-off point, and that mission is for the world. So that all sounded pretty good, and I think that in terms of idealism of youth, I suppose, that's one kind of calling.

And as I've worked through this particular order that was founded by Catherine McAuley, who was an Irish woman in the 19th century. It was for her to work with those who were, as she put it, 'the poor, the sick and the ignorant'. She herself was quite a wealthy woman, having been left a lot of money by her foster parents – I suppose by what was left from her own parents, too. But the order was founded for the work with those who have less, really.

**So have you been able to achieve things by being part of the Order that you might not have otherwise?**

Oh, I think so, because it's very difficult to work in these projects without sure support. That's not financially, but it's moral support, too, and a support to a way of living. And so I think it's that kind of calling. Mind you, I do think that other people who are not members of the order can do just as much, as you measure out what people do, so it's not as if it's "better than..." But I suppose if you think that there's

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a calling there that gives an added meaning or specific meaning or a special meaning for one's own history, then it's got an added strength.

**So what do you think you've learned about yourself and perhaps about other people on this journey that you've been on?**

Well, the journey itself is a journey in the spiritual life, as well as what we would call ---"the apostolic life or the work of 'works of mercy' among others – what it means to be a follower of Jesus. It's like one aspect, I suppose, of what we call the 'works of mercy' and that gives a fairly wide scope of the actual work that we might do or principles we might follow. But in terms of an integrated way of living, I've found that helpful. It's helped me to live an integrated life. What other people think about that, of course, is another thing altogether.

**Do you have any other brief reflections that you would like to have on the record?**

My great hope would be an understanding of mercy among us in civil society. And my own understanding of saying – well, the other side of mercy is justice, so that we see the two things together. And for assistance in living this out, then the Order has been a great gift.

**So thank you very much for sharing your reflections with us over this time, and we very much [appreciate it].**

END OF INTERVIEW