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## South Australians at war – transcript – OH 550/6

**Interview with Melva Guyatt recorded by Karen George on 4 May 1996 for A Place of Their Own: Oral Histories concerning War Service Land Settlement at Loxton after the Second World War**

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TAPE 3 SIDE A

**Okay so last time we talked, the War had finished and you had come back and married and I was going to go on from there as to what happened after that. I think you mentioned that Len initially had to go back overseas.**

Yes he had another two years to serve in Navy so nine months was spent up in Brisbane. Had I spoken about that?

**No I don't think you did, no.**

No after I - actually I was still nursing and we rented a flat in Brisbane and then after I was discharged from the Army I just simply stayed on as a Naval housewife and lived a life of leisure, which was quite interesting because of course I didn't know Brisbane very well so there was lots of exploring to do. Although Len was supposed to be on duty I don't think he worked very many hours during that time because the Royal Navy base was a fairly small one, there were only two or three people there so it was a good life at that time. And then of course he was sent overseas again with the British occupation forces in Japan, so I came back to South Australia and nursed at the Children's Welfare Home at Somerton, it was called Seaforth.

**And up to that point had you heard or talked about soldier settlement up to that point?**

Oh yes. Well I think when I came back to South Australia that I heard about that and so applied. And then wrote to Len and asked him did he want to apply and so that's how that came about.

**Do you remember how you heard about it at all?**

No idea. I expect I read about it. I'm quite certain that I was not told about it in the - on discharge I was offered a chance to go on to do my nursing training if that was what I wished to do and of course I thought the option of going back to music in a serious way and then decided that because I was here there and everywhere at that stage, I didn't do any of those things.

**So where did you live when you came back to South Australia?**



Oh I was at - stayed with my family for a week or two and then lived down at Somerton in the Nurses' Home there.

**Tell me just a little bit about that job.**

That had its moments. It was very interesting actually, but a complete contrast of course to the other. I suppose, at that time, it was considered that it was far better for children to be removed from unsatisfactory homes and placed in an institution. It was a modern place but next door was a two-storeyed building and that housed the girls who were, at that stage they were called the uncontrollable girls. They were girls that had had lots of traumatic experiences in their life. And they were actually our servants I suppose you could say in the home. They had to work in the laundry, the kitchen and as wards maids and so on. Not always easy to deal with those girls because they were full of hate for either one parent or the other, sometimes both, and as for the younger children well of course they were always upset or you know there was something. Their lives were shattered actually in lots of ways and very often they were just simply waiting there until they could be fostered out. And then of course the Police used to bring down all the children who had been abused by their parents, either physically or mentally or whatever. So I started to think about which was worse, working down there, or working up on Bougainville. One I thought was you know adults doing things to each other, but this in a way it was worse because it was children that were in trouble. So it isn't a new thing to have abused children and so on, but I suppose as long as history it's been happening.

**Did you have any trouble yourself settling down after coming back from overseas?**

No no, none at all. I don't know perhaps I must have, maybe I live each day as it happens but no I quite enjoyed being at Somerton, you know apart from the on-duty, off duty I spent mainly listening to music, writing letters, exploring Adelaide again and of course I had family in Adelaide, so that I wasn't lonely at any time, except I was lonely as far as Len was concerned of course.

**And he went on to Japan?**

Yes he went back to England first and then from there to Japan so he spent some time and then I think he went back to England again before he came out to Australia. He did a fair bit of travelling around. I do remember, I have just remembered actually that when he was first sent overseas it was supposed to be to Hong Kong and so we looked around to see if there was any chance of getting transport to Hong Kong. Of course that was almost impossible at that time. Fortunately I didn't because had I done so, I'd have arrived in Hong Kong as he left probably because he didn't stay there very long. He went to England and then to Japan.

**And I think you mentioned he was a sort of affected by his experience in Japan.**

Oh yes.



### **In what ways?**

Oh well that was Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It had a - I don't think he ever lost that feeling that, he felt quite strongly that there was no justification to do that to end the war because of the dreadful devastation that that wrought. I think he felt that that was a blot on our handling of the war probably. I'm not sure I realise that a lot of people weren't affected and thought well it saved some of our lives, but you would have to think about the value of life, don't you? Whose lives, which lives are the most important?

### **So you were writing to each other all during that time?**

Oh yes, oodles of letters. (laughs) Yes we - oh before we - when he was in the Navy of course we were fairly good correspondents and they always seemed to be long letters too so, apparently we just sat down and talked I suppose, via the pen.

### **How did he react when you mentioned about the soldier settlement. What did he think about it?**

Oh yes he was - I didn't actually ask did he want to I just said that you know this scheme was available because he had talked earlier of not going back into his field because there was so many developments during the war and he said "oh I'd have to go back probably go back to university or you know get into a business where there was lab work" because he was actually - I am not sure what they called him. (laughs) I do know that he worked in the lab in England on the radar business, not developing - oh he was doing the hands-on work I guess but - and of course he was fairly shattered by the war and felt that an outdoor life would suit him, going back to his childhood no doubt. But of course as we all know, it wasn't really very much of a rehabilitation scheme. We didn't know that at the time. Very trusting I guess.

### **In what ways was he shattered by it?**

Oh it was the - you see he served in the Med the time the Panza division was trying to get across to Africa and of course there were, it was pretty hectic there, and being a destroyer he was very close to the sea if you like. I think that was probably the worst part of it. He did do some work on Russian convoys, but as far as I remember that didn't have that personal affect on him. So that oh there were constant nightmares and so on and he felt that if he could live a peaceful life out in the country, that would heal all of that but I don't think it did, not really.

### **So did he know that you had already applied yourself?**

No, I didn't actually apply until I had written to him about it. We both decided that that might be a nice way to live so. And he was more interested in growing fruit than the farming side of it.

### **So were you aware that you were probably the only woman applying?**



No, no.

**You'd just gone ahead anyway?**

Yes, I just did it. No, I was not aware of that.

**Do you remember anything about the interview that you went to in Adelaide?**

Oh all I can remember of that interview was that they seemed to spend a lot of time trying to persuade Len to go back into the work that he'd been doing because they were so short of technical people in Australia at that time and suggested that that would be a good move for him. But I think that's the main thing I remember about it. But I expect they talked about you know what experience we had had and so on.

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**So do you remember coming to Loxton when Len chose - did he choose his pieces, his choices of property?**

Oh yes I remember that because I do remember that we had to be pushed out of sand drifts several times with our little van. It just didn't like the sandy hills. We weren't the only ones because we went around in convoy to look at all these blocks. Yes and of course it was all very raw and -

**What do you remember about?**

Oh the dust I think and the sand. That seems to be in my memory. And of course once we'd got the block there was still lots of sand because - I think that is my abiding memory of gritty sand which is probably why I don't like beaches very much even now. We had more than our fair share but yes I remember that - and interestingly enough I felt that we were we would drive to one of the blocks and everybody would get out and have a look at it, and there seemed to be a very good feeling - there wasn't sort of you know all - I want this one and I'm not going to talk to you about it. There was none of that attitude, it was just a general discussion about the properties and that's my memory of it. Whether I am being selective I'm not sure.

**What was on the properties then when you went to look at them?**

Oh just sand, nothing else. There was just a bare - this one in fact had some blown out sand hills on it, but it had a good aspect and it wasn't our first choice, but it was the one that we got eventually.

**Do you know how far down the list it was in terms of your choices?**

Oh it was the second one. So we did actually because Jack Cheraton had advised us, you know, to try and get one that faced east, that was always the best blocks to



have if you possibly could and to try and have a gentle slope on it. Oh we had lots of advice. In fact I remember going down to have a look at the place that's now the Cadell prison farm. That was offered for sale whilst we were still at Jack Cheraton's. We went down to have a look at that with a view to purchasing it perhaps - you know borrowing money and purchasing that. But it was at that stage we felt that it was too run down to be worth or at least, we probably decided that we could have purchased it, handled that, but probably not had enough ability to borrow more money to really re-establish the whole place, so we gave that a miss. But I fell in love with the view and when it was purchased as the Cadell Prison Farm I thought, oh how terrible that the only people that can enjoy that view are going to be the prisoners and the people who work there, because it really is a very lovely spot down there.

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**Did the Department provide anything for you?**

Oh just this weekly allowance, but nothing in the way of implements and this two bags of sulphate of ammonia to fertilise our young trees. I wonder what would have happened if we'd just used the sulphate of ammonia on them? Not very good results I would think.

**So you were talking a bit about the allowance, the Sustenance Allowance. What was it like to try to live on?**

Almost impossible. Len actually went out to work. He did some cleaning at the club at one stage as I remember and of course he - no I think that was about it, that he did that. But then I was able to work you see in the first of all in the Eudunda Farmers and then at at Bradkes. That was interesting too.

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**In terms of the previous residents of Loxton, the existing population. What was the relationship between the new settlers coming in and?**

Well I remember once being told by a farmer's daughter that I would not ever be accepted into, not only I, but all of us people on the soldier settlement, that they were the old aristocrats of Loxton and we were the newcomers and we would find it pretty hard to sort of be accepted into their community. And I didn't tell her that my great aunt was a resident in Loxton and had been one of the pioneers in the Loxton settlement. She was one of the first few families to arrive in Loxton, but oh I didn't say anything to her about it and even now I sometimes see this woman waddling down the street and I think well there go the aristocrats. (laughs) But that was just one person and for the rest, they were friendly. It - there was no - or at least I was not aware of it, but maybe I was just not sensitive about whether I was being accepted or not, because I just had my own life to lead and certainly we made a lot of friends amongst the settlers themselves, because we were all in the same boat and tried to help each other. That happened quite a lot, as you would be aware.