Port Augusta then and now – Full transcript: Not proofread of an interview with Melva Waterman - OH 326/27

Perceptions of lifestyle and leisure or rural women in South Australia

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Full transcript: Not proofread
of an interview with
MELVA WATERMAN
8 July 1994
by
Neil Baron
for
PERCEPTIONS OF LIFESTYLE AND LEISURE OF RURAL WOMEN
IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA
Tape recording available: 1 hour 48 minutes

OH 326/27
MELVA WATERMAN

NOTES TO THE TRANSCRIPT

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This is Neil Baron interviewing Melva Waterman of Port Augusta on the 8th of July 1994 regarding her perceptions of rural life and leisure in the period 1940 to 1960.

Good morning and welcome.

MW Good morning.

NB Melva I notice that you were born in Exeter in 1923, to start with can you tell us a little bit about your family and your early life?

MW Well, I was ahem a member of an extended family, aunties ah grandmothers, lived with us. Ah I only lived there for a very short time then I went to live in Welland near Croydon in South Australia and there I stayed in that house until I was seventeen, when I left home. Now it was a fairly lonely life for me, I had one sister who is seven years younger than me. I was very very shy, didn't like meeting new people, so I read a lot, hid around the place with a book when I was called and wouldn't come. I liked being by myself. Got used to it.
There were adults all around me, busy adults so I didn't get much of an opportunity to interact, you know; "go away and play child". So ahem I grew up fairly lonely and fairly shy. I didn't start school until I was six, because my mother thought I wasn't ready. Ah but I enjoyed school when I was younger, it the early years I did, later on I hated it. Some of the things I couldn't do very well. I was good at english and all the language subjects and I loved drawing and I liked history. I like sitting listening to stories and I love reading, but I hated anything on the maths side of things. So my education was very unbalanced [laugh] ah so I think that about my early life there's very little to tell, very little that's interesting, all my interesting things come much later. And then they came in an avalanche. I discovered things. [laugh] It's about it at that stage.

NB So you enjoyed, I guess in some ways the ability to be to be on your own, to be resourceful on you own from an early age. Being able to get a book and just sit down and do things?

MW Oh yes, and I sewed, I learnt to sew and learnt to help myself ah because no one else would, you know. We were very poor, and most of the people didn't have much money, I mean that was in the '30's through the depression years. So there wasn't much money around, and so you know I cut up my mothers things, cast offs and and made things out of them for myself. I was making my own clothes at twelve. So, you know I figured out how to use a sewing machine, and then I was constantly playing and looking back I think that probably stood me in good stead for my later years. Because I had to find out how. So you got as book, or you asked someone else or you eventually sorted it out. [laugh]

NB Can you just paint us a little bit of a picture of what Adelaide was like during the '30's, through your eyes?

MW Well I can remember what children were at school without any shoes, and they walked along. You know I always had lunch, so I never ever had to worry about the soups kitchens and things like that. Like you know parents came to the school with big bowl, pots of soup and children were coming along and they were walking along in the lunch shed with their hand out, you know; "have you got anything you don't want, don't throw it away" sort of thing. But apart

from that, as I say I I personally, we didn't have a motor car and hardly anybody else did either. You were using bikes all the time. Ah tram cars were running, there weren't many busses. Ah I never ever went anywhere, during those I'm talking about you know primary school. Up to primary school days, I very rarely went anywhere. Ah perhaps to the pictures on a Saturday afternoon, was a real treat. You know you'd get a shilling to get in and buy something with that. Ah, but there wasn't much happening to me personally. Everything I did I did by myself, or with a you know a mate from school maybe. We just played with dolls and things. Made things, and read.

NB Now I notice in 1937 you went to Croydon Technical School,

MW Yes that's right

NB Did that start to change aspects of your life?

MW Well it was different to primary school of course. Being a technical school the emphasis was on ah home science, and ah practical things like cooking. No I don't thing it did, I was just waiting to leave, to get out. and then when I did get out of the school, there was just no work, no job. I was nearly twelve months at home doing nothing before I go a job. It a sort of, history repeating itself, it was the same in those days.

NB Now at that time, that was just before the start of the second world war,

MW Yes, yes the war started when I was fifteen. And that was the year, that was the year, part of that year I was at home and I got a job towards the end of the year. And my birthday being at the end of the year, I turned fifteen at that time.

NB Did you start to notice a change with the start of the war?

MW Oh yes, yes everything geared up. Very quickly. Ya.

NB Was your job directly a result of the war, or was it.?

MW No not my, my very first job which I only had for three months was, we I worked in a a place in Twin Street in the city. It was called A mantle factory, they made clothing, women's clothing and I was taken on as a finisher. You did hems and sew buttons on and all the trimmings. And I earnt nine shillings a week. Now out of that nine shillings, it took four of those shillings to get there in the bus. So I
gave my mother the other five shillings, and [laugh] she of course and the family kept me. And I used to go all the way to the city, and there'd be a note on the door, no finishers needed today. So I might work three days out of the five. So I only lasted there for three months.
My mother thought that wasn't very good. So then I got a job in a department store, called Kernichs, on the Port Road at Hindmarsh. We that was ya-hoo. I jumped [laugh] up to fifteen shillings a week and ah then I was there when my birthday was at the end of the year and I got a rise. I went up to a pound. Because I had a birthday. So ah then, at that stage then, I used to walk two and a half miles to work, to save the money. So I then felt I could afford a bike. And at that stage I
hadn't learnt to ride a bike. Nobody had a bike around me [laugh] So I learnt to ride a bike after I bought it. Took me eighteen months to pay, at one and six a

week [laugh] something like that. Anyhow I had a bike then so I was much more mobile, well I went here, there and everywhere. And then I was there for eighteen months to two years and then ahem they were. Everybody was registered, you know for the defense purposes you had to, you had to say what you were doing and what you weren't doing. And I then answered the call, so to speak. And I went to work at Popes, making shells for the army. So I learnt all about factory life, and shift work. Which I never ever thought of in my life, working at night. It was only two shifts. You came home at half past, two long shifts, you came home at half past one in the morning. So I rode my bike up the Port Road, cause it was, the Popes were, it still is in Beverly. I think it is.
Anyway we ah, so there I was there for ahem, couple of years I think, I'm just trying to remember. Couple anyway, be roughly that.
And the work was dreadfully hard. I was as skinny as a rake, and very tired. You know we were doing men's work, swinging big lathes around and ah it was hard work.
So I, by this time I'd met my husband, a the boy friend at the time and ah he worked at ahem Islington in the railways. So he didn't get he, he tried to get into the navy and they wouldn't, they wouldn't let him go. He was key something or other down there. So ahem and he's at this particular time, his mother was sick. So that's the time, I left home and went out to look, they had a large family, I went out there to see what I could do. With the children were younger than they looked, younger than me. So I went out there when they were still at school.
So I went out there to help with that family. And it seemed an awful long way to go, I used to, I used to ride my bike into the city, and then catch the train to Woodville to go, Woodville, Kilkenny, Woodville. Ya. How did I get there? Well I caught the train, anyway I got there and that. So I did that only for two or three months, and it this was killing me, cause I was helping at home, you know long hours. So I ahem went to the department and said that I wasn't strong enough to be able to cope with what I was doing. What else could they find me.
So they sent me to Holden's. Holden's then where making aircraft and trucks, and I don't know about trucks, something, some other vehicles. I was put in the aircraft section, so I was there until I got married.

NB Melva could you tell us a little bit more about the munitions, I guess the way life was then for a women?

MW Well a the women were expected to do the men's work. Which meant lifting, ah dirty. When I I'd be working on the lathe, and there'd be an elderly lad sitting behind me, with her hands in kerosene all the time while she ah checked what every piece that I gave, I did it. Turned it, put a thread on it or something. I passed it to her and she had to check it in a test thing. We had to rinse all the burrs off, the shavings off with the kerosene and then try it. As a result many of them were covered in dermatitus, and and then people where working very long and they were having many accidents. You know girls got their fingers chopped off and their hair caught in drills and there were many accidents. But we we did all this work and and we were paid piece work for it too.
So the harder you worked, of course the more you earned. Ah which meant to get a reasonable wage you had to work hard. you were standing on board, we we had a board. We stood on a board above the concrete floor. But that would be dripping in oil and kerosene and that, so you were constantly wet. But you wore boots, but everything was wet around you, and everything was cold. The hours were long, we had twenty minutes break for lunch, so you'd have to wash your hands, gobble your lunch, go to the toilet and you'd be back again. You had very little, your talking about leisure time Neil; "there wasn't very much I can tell you" [laugh] only of course when you left and went home.

NB Now this was the start of a new com{sic} sort of situation with women working in these positions?

MW It was, it was very new.

NB Was most of the composition of the employees, female?

MW Yes, yes, very much so. There were key personnel like the bosses and the tool makers, they were the ones who checked your machine. Ah the minute something was out, you had to scream for the tool maker. He would come and adjust your machine, because we didn't have the qualifications. We were just labourers, in a sense, with a bit of technical knowledge that you learnt on the job.

NB Was their a feeling with the women that you were doing something patriotic, that it was advancing the cause of the war. Or was it just seen as a job?

MW I think, if they were honest they were seeing it as a job. Ah, you see what annoyed us for many years as women was the fact that there might be a man with a disability, you know that couldn't go to war. He'd be working on the machine next to you. But he got nearly twice as much money as what you did. And while I was at Holden's, we went on strike for six weeks, which was a dreadful thing to do in the war. But ah we were fighting for survival. They were, the company brought in some 3h I don't know what you'd call the people who did it, but they were timing us.
They stood behind us with boards and stopwatches and things, and they timed us at our and put down our number. And then they went on to the next table, bench and did the same thing to the next girl that was standing there. Ah and they collated it and ah we wanted to know what it was all about. And they wouldn't tell us, do you know it was just for productivity, to increase productivity. But ahem we ended up, ahem going on strike. Six weeks over that. And, and, and they stopped it and they finally capitulated and told us all about it. Ah it just ended up, that what they were really doing was ah trying to cut down the amount of people working. Trying to make things a bit faster. You know they were asking questions like, and they were putting us. If we moved you over here, and we moved that there, that would save two seconds. Because a lot of this was repetitive, you know chain gang sort of stuff you did. [laugh] Over and over, the next person did the next thing. But it was welding and cutting out metals, you know soft aluminium alloy stuff.

NB When you were at Popes you were saying you were working piece work,

MW yes

NB Was this the same situation at Holden's?

MW No, no it wasn't no no.

NB You also mentioned when you were at Popes that the majority of the employees were female

MW Yes

NB Was this also the situation at Holden's?

MW Ah I should say predominately women but there were a lot of men there too. I think because what they were doing was a bit more specialized, and they needed the expertise of these men. And I mean ahem they were, see materials were in fairly short supply too. So you had to watch out you didn't make a mistake, they kept, someone kept coming around to check on you all the time.
To make sure you knew what you were doing. Because they would of been many, many women who never ever done anything like that before. Never used their hands before. I mean girls were going out to work on farms and doing all sorts of things.
So it was while I was at Holden's that ninety percent of the men's wage was granted to the women. Couldn't give us the whole lot, they had to give us 90%. It wasn't long after that, that this was, by this time it's getting near the end of the war, see I was married in 1944, and I wRs still there then. I was there, that was ahem we were married in April, and the following December was when I came up here. My husband was here for a long time. Eighteen months or so before me.
And then we married and we couldn't get a house that's why I stayed there. But then ah just before I, towards the end of the year, just before I was married they put off many of them. They'd built up enough aircraft and what ever they were doing, seeing that the by this time the war in Europe was over, it was only the Pacific. So ahem we weren't needed as much.

NB Did it matter whether a woman was married or not, working at either Popes or Holden's?

MW No not at all. No not in those days, no. And that was unusual too. Because it is so terribly long in time since ah girls were allow, married girls in banks and
teachers and all those sort of things. That's within my time living here, that's happened. No it was a case of all hands on deck.

NB So they needed you so they would ah cut corners

MW Yes cut corners. Oh they certainly did cut corners, yes.

NB Looking back now, do you see those years as being I guess enriching at all, did you learn a lot, out of that was it a good experience?

MW Yes, yes I would say yes it was. It was a good experience. Because it teaches
you discipline. Ah much more than school ever did. You just had to get yourself
there, you know getting up. The shift at Popes started at half past six in the
morning. And went until three o'clock I think. And then you started at three and
went till about half past one the next morning. You know with two two twenty minute breaks in that time. So it was long hours. Well you had to get yourself up, and you had to get yourself there, and they you had to get yourself home. So which took a while.

NB Was there a. spirit amongst the women when they were working together, was it ah I guess not necessarily singing or anything like that, but was there a sense of, oh spirit of some sort?

MW I would say there would of been amongst some of them would of been friends. But while you were working you had no time to chat. And you had very little lunch time, break time. So social side of it wouldn't of, it would of been coming to work, and going home. If you lived near by. You went home on the train together. I noticed it more when I went to work at Holden's, I felt much more relaxed then, than I did at Popes. Certainly I was just that little bit older, that might of made a difference, and I'd met a boyfriend and [laugh] my life was changing by the time I went down to Holden's.
But it always amused me, that ah we used to go in a train to, there was a station

at Holden's. The you know it was almost Holden's train. And they had the carriages with each individual door, and there were two two long seats. You know like, and we called them dog boxes. Long seats, and you'd find the same person sitting it the same seat everyday. And and so that would be when you ah you ah chatted to people, but it it mightened, you mightened make a friend of them. It might be a married man or an old lady, or you know you didn't have much to.
I don't feel during those years, through work that I had time for many close friends. It came in my my other activities. Which weren't many either now that I stop and think about it [laugh] You know you seemed to be too busy.

NB During that time were you able to go to football matches or down to the beach, or do things like that, in your off hours?

MW Oh yes, I went to the beach yes yes. I went to the beach. But I I didn't like swimming, still don't. Ahem but I liked walking along the beach, and I liked wading and I liked lying in the sun. Ahem, but I never I did, I wasn't interested in football. You must remember that I was I was the eldest girl, we did girl's things.
I played netball for several years every Saturday. Ahem through work, not through Holden's. This is through when I worked at the shop. I I did play netball then. But then of course when I started shift work that put paid to that because I was working on a Saturday.

NB When you were working both at Popes and Holden's ahem did you attend a lot of dances?

MW Oh yes, yes yes yes. Two a week, that's were I met my husband. Now he's out there grinding will I till him to stop. Right. [tape stopped]

NB Melva just before that quick interruption you were talking about meeting your husband at a dance. Can you tell us about dances, and meeting your husband and what the situation was life in the city?

MW Oh it it was wonderful. There were several places to which you could go, by the hundreds they weren't small areas. I started off by going to the ballroom at the Grovernor. Hotel. And they had ah learning to dance classes there. And that's were we met. It was at these classes. And then they had, there was a, a big dance hall called the Palladium and another one called the Palais. Now the Palais was a bit a upmarket, bit more expensive to go to, than what, the Palladium was a shilling a night. But the Palais that was only Saturday nights. And it was a magnificent hall, it was where Ayre's House is now, it was there. They pulled down the actual building and kept some of the other buildings. And that was, oh that was beautiful. There was a big chandelier in the middle and they used to ah play lights on to it so that you know all these little twinkling lights and [laugh] talk about the beginnings of disco [laugh] only it was much more sedate. But ever, they had a big band, you know you had a twelve piece band. No alcohol. Ah they sold cool drinks. And every girl was there in her full length ball gown.
And it was all old style, the most modern bit was a fox trot. And we used to do ahem, and always making new dresses as cheaply as we could so we'd have different ones. And that was a very exciting time, I loved it. And I went, well and practically until my husband came to work up here.

NB At that time going to the Palais or the Palladium, the age grouping could you have a?

MW Oh ah from twelve, thirteen year olds to eighty. Wide range of ages, and they

went regularly. And the Palais had tables around the side of the hall in little alcoves. And the table then chairs or seats, seating all around I've forgotten whether chairs or seats. Seating I think. Ya and they used to meet on a regular basis. But nobody ah worried about alcohol and everybody ah danced. Being old style dances, like the Maxine, and the Pride of Eryn, and all these old dances. The Orlando and that. And tangoette, and those, you know they were lovely. And everybody moved in unison. You know you got behind somebody else. By this time we'd, you didn't sort of go there unless you had a bit of knowledge about them because if you were standing when everybody bobbed down [laugh] you looked a bit of a fool. So ah it was ah very graceful, exciting, it went until about eleven o'clock from about eight until eleven and then home you went.

NB Can you tell us were the Palladium ?

MW I'm just trying to think. Ahem Pirie Street, I think. It was ya, yes it was around the corner from one of the squares but gee my sense of direction, and place is always hopeless. If you really want to know that later, [laugh] Jack will know. [laugh] I think it was, I think it was Pirie Street, it was that end of the town.
It was just like a wopping big shed. Huge place. Hundreds of people in there.

NB Would a lot of the servicemen show up there during the war years?

MW Very few, very few. You see the, most of the servicemen were in either the north or in the Eastern States. Didn't have that many stationed around us. Oh at Port Augusta became a very important place but that's of course is much much later. In that period but later than I'm talking about. I'm talking about my teenage years. You know in the '39, '40, '42, round about then. Before the war really got rolling, things got really serious.

NB So really those early years, the war was quite a bit more remote was it?

MW Yes it was, yes. I mean men were going, but it wasn't until the Japanese started, the European war seemed a long way away. But once the Japanese came into it, in '42, well that was that was different.

NB Were just about to run out of tape on this side so I'll just stop it

MW Right, right

NB and we'll take it on the other side.
Tape 1 Side 2

NB Melva. just before we turned the tape over you were mentioning, the war and about how it started hotting up once Japan got involved in it, can you give us a little bit of an idea of your perception of that time?

MW Well the newspapers became much more dramatic with the shelling in Sydney and the bombing of Darwin. Everybody started to talk about it and you knew people who were you know in New Guinea and places like that. It seemed much closed to home and there were the battles at sea in the north, and you wonder, started to ask well what happen if the Japanese do overrun us, what will we do. There was a lot of fear, a lot of, lot more talk about it I think. And I

didn't, I can't say I noticed it in any other way except through the news, and and and talking between ourselves.

NB Okay, did the newspapers play a big part in your life during that time?

MW Well you looked everyday to see who was dead. [laugh] Not that, I didn't have anybody close to me that was in in the forces. Neither of my husband's, nor our family had anyone that was really close. But I did have friends and their fathers were killed. So you were surrounded by it you know. Your work mates would talk about uncle so and so died, you know so on and so forth. So it it was there, whether you, you weren't, didn't worry so much about being affected personally. Everybody was affected. And of course during those years we haven't mentioned the fun and games we had with food. Food was rationed, as you know it was two ounces of butter a week, four ounces of sugar and I've forgotten how much meat. But they were the three things that were rationed. So you learnt to become very innovative about what you ate.

NB Did the rationing of food in the city cause great problems?

MW Yes it did. But then everybody else was doing it too, unless you knew someone. Some people seemed to manage to get more than others. You know some people kept fowls, so you ate a lot of eggs [laugh] to get your protein.

NB You were saying that people were becoming innovative, were new recipes and new type of food ideas being introduced because of it?

MW Oh yes yes, there were. And things were very bland. See you couldn't buy the spices. The first things that seemed to cut out were the coffee, so you you ate ahem a ground, oh gosh I forgot, I can't on the spur of the moment can't thing of it. We ate, drank a coffee substitute, it was ground something or other ah. Teas seemed to be always dusty when you could get it. Ah you just learnt to do without. Cause everybody else was doing it too. I think the comfort in all of these things, and I would say it's to do with peer group pressure that's on people now. If you are doing the same as everybody else, you don't seem to mind. But when everything comes good, and other people get it and you don't, then you start to be concerned about it.

NB Yes I agree with you whole heartedly. During this time, when you still in Adelaide before you were married, ahem did the radio play a big part in your life?

MW Not in my life personally. We never had a radio. Ah the first radio I knew anything about was when I was about seventeen when I went to stay with my future in-laws to help and they had a con, a big console radio and they used to listen to every evening, everybody sat around and listened to it. Especially the plays on a Sunday night, you know. Religiously you'd make sure that you finished the dishes so you'd be in, it was about half past seven that it started. Yes.

NB Do you remember what your favorite programs were?

MW No. No. No. I can't remember. Oh well I personally didn't spend that much time with it. I always listened to Harry Durths Playhouse, you know the the on Sunday night that went for a couple of hours. That was just like going to the pictures. I did go to the pictures occasionally. But as I say we were working long hours, you know. Just didn't have the time.

NB After you got engaged, did your life start to change a lot?

MW No I was engaged at the age of eighteen, ahem and we just did what. Well we didn't have enough money to get married. Had to save up. But we got engaged anyway. So I was engaged for two years before I was married. So no, it didn't change, we still went to dances, still ah I still sewed. Ahem and read and went to work. Did the normal things like cleaning your room and all the things that your expected to help with at home. Like the ironing, and sometimes I look back on it, it was an awfully boring life [laugh] it was routine and ah nothing happened out of the ordinary. Oh there's one one thing that I perhaps could mention that I did. This was a bit earlier, when I worked, seemed to have done many more things when I worked at these(sic) shop, at this shop than I did much later.
I think because there were moments when you didn't have customers, you might of been able to talk. It was a department store see, and there were other girls and boys there. Ah we formed a social club, and we all used to pay a shilling each, and once a fortnight we hired ah, we called it a sharabang [?] it was a big truck that they put seats across the top. Long seats went from one side to the other, and there was a little bit of a roof over the top of it and we used to pile into these seats and go off to Victor Harbor, places like that. Take our lunch, and go down there for the day. That was a very, I really enjoyed that, that has stayed in my mind because it was about the only social thing apart from going to the pictures maybe on a Saturday afternoon.
We went then because it was much cheaper. You knocked off, we worked very long hours in the shop, twelve o'clock until Saturday. Just had time to grab lunch and go off to the pictures. Because it wasn't so, only the children went to the pictures. I'm talking about fifteen, sixteen year olds went off on a Saturday afternoon to the local pictures. I mean you wouldn't be seen dead at that age [laugh] going in an afternoon now unless your in the city. But to a local you wouldn't be seen dead doing that. [laugh] So you get much more sophisticated, we have become much more sophisticated, expect more, demand more. You can see the changes in your tv programs. What you were happy with, you eyes were glued to it for a start, and then you become blase about it.

NB With the truck that used to take us down to Victor Harbor

MW Ya

NB How many could you get on it?

MW Oh, twenty odd. Big truck and they they ah it was used just, you see we didn't have many busses. See during the war and those times, they were making trucks and army gear so ah there weren't the number of busses being continually coming off the assembly lines. There were all sorts of things that changed and you just made do.

NB Actually it sounds wonderful, the ah

MW It was it was spontaneous and happy and you never asked for much, you never got much, but you didn't ask for much. And you just grabbed, took your sandwich cause you couldn't buy, afford to buy anything when you got there so you took your own sandwich and your apple.

NB It became a whole day outing?

MW Yes, yes yes. Yes you went on a Sunday.

NB What about sport during that time. Was there a lot of sport being played in Adelaide?

MW Yes, as I said I played netball, yes I think so. They had football and that. But I think from memory they restricted the number of teams? Oh gee all the men were away. But I think they played football right through. I don't know about, a lot of people played tennis and what not. Don't know I was never very interested, I am not at all a sporty person. I only played the netball because everybody else was. I was never any good at it. Not fast enough.

NB The time you were at Popes and then at Holden's you were very close to Cheltenham Race Course, did you ever go to the races?

MW No, no no. Don't like horse racing. In fact I don't, I'm interested as a spectator and ah and as time went on I had a very sporting family. Every, all my children and my husband always played sport. But not me.

NB After you were married, did your life change much?

MW Oh it certainly did. Ahem I came here, and [laugh] I came to Port Augusta after I was married, but before we had. We stayed in a hotel, so we could be together for a weekend. Because my husband worked fairly long hours here to in the railways. And he didn't have the money to get backwards and forwards to Adelaide to see me. So we wrote on a regular basis, and ah I came here one weekend but that was my only introduction to Port Augusta was just to see what it was like this weekend. And all we did, we had no car, we just walked around the place. And then when I came to live in December of that same year, ah I arrived by train all dolled up like I going into the city. I can remember it vividly because it was such a shock to me, [laugh] I had a lovely green linen dress on and a white straw hat, with yellow daisies around the brim. I had white shoes, I had stockings and white gloves, and my luggage. And I got off of the train, with my husband there to meet me and I said; have we got a taxi" and he said; "you'll see" [laugh] So when I got out to, off the platform I got the shock of my life. We had, he had scrounged a friend of his had got a friend of his which was a carrier.
Now it was a horse and trolley with a big high seat up the front of the, flat top.
With a big high seat up the top and there, there was room for three on this seat.
Well here's me and my, what a contrast I thought to myself. And I found out later there was only one taxi in the town. And it was so busy that you just, he would tie, in case the train was late he wouldn't tie it up for so long. So Jack thought this is no good.
So that was my introduction to come to live in Port Augusta. And I was only here for three weeks when the railways shut down at Christmas time and we were going to Adelaide, going home on leave. It was about three weeks afterwards. And we lived in a tiny little house that Jack had rented furnished, there wasn't much in there that belonged to me. I only brought clothes and a couple of photos and things. And I was already home sick. So we though, we understood that the train was to leave at twelve o'clock on a Saturday. And we lived not far from old Stirling Road. Were the Pastoral Hotel is, ah down the road a bit just behind there. So to get to the railway station we were going to cut through the parklands.
Now at that time, the only thing on the parklands was the oval. All around was just scrub, and there were walk pathways through it. Now there are houses and goodness knows what. The whole whole park area is taken up. But we walked, through, cut through the backway. Walked through across this ahem park which was scrub and ahem saltbush and what not. And got halfway through it in time to see the train, go out.
This is Saturday. No more trains until the next Monday.

We had no food in the house, no busses, nothing like that. I sat down on my case, in the middle of this park and balled. Under my arm I had a leg of ham. Jack knew, it was that was a real treat. I was taking that for Christmas. That was a real treat, because you couldn't get meat you see in that time and Jack knew a pig farmer so we had this leg of ham. Which was a real treasure. Ah sat there and as I sat there balling, my husband trying to comfort me, crows were circling going gaw, gaw, overhead [laugh] So back home we had to go. So with bread and butter and ham, we got through the weekend. [laugh]
There were only, when I came here to live, there were only three thousand people here. And one school over at the west side, and one on the east side. No high school, no college, just the one school. It was a higher primary, when you got to ahem year eleven, you had to do your leaving honors, you had to go to Adelaide. Of course as a result, not many children got that far. So that that, all the technical things, like the apprentices, everybody went to the one school, down the street. They did have night classes on all sorts of things. And ah had apprentices there, so but it was all done at the primary school.
Or higher primary. Had a few, had three high school classes. So now, well that's that's, not this is not strictly true I was going to say there are nine primary schools. But there are not, one closed two years ago. That one the main one down the street there. They're pulling it down now and they're going to build a new police station there. So that's a big change, a lot of heart ache around the place because the old schools, apart from one section of it is all gone. All bulldozed flat. So.

NB So your first introduction to Port Augusta was much different than what Port Augusta looks today?

MW OH, it was just red sand, it was just empty. Big spaces, you'd you'd have dust storms and the sand would pile up against you windows and yes I say there was there was one school here, and one school over the west side. Yes very much so, not many people. No work, no women working. The men worked very hard.

NB The main industry at the time was the railway?

MW Railways that was all there was. Oh there might of been an engineering place but no no, yes railways and it was very very important area because of it's geographical position. So was Quorn, at that time. Quorn was a a very important place. And I don't know whether you realize but they had three different gauges. You came, you had to change trains at Port Pirie, that was wide gauge to Port Pirie. And then from Port Pirie to Port Augusta was standard gauge, and from Port Augusta to Quorn was narrow gauge. And the narrow gauge went right up, up to Alice Springs. Which went through Quorn.

NB You were talking about going to Adelaide for Christmas on the train

MW Yes

NB and that was really you only way of getting to Adelaide

MW Yes

NB Was that a direct train to Adelaide from here, or did you have to go to Port

Pirie and then?

MW Oh you still do, still have to go through Pirie to get by train, yes.

NB So that was quite a bit of a?

MW It used to take, we used to call it the train from this end, we used to call it snake gully, because it rattled along and [laugh] it was ahem train. The journey used to take about six hours. Because there was a change over, change all the luggage over to the other. To the train at Port Pirie. So you had a big wait there. [laugh] Oh things have changed dramatically.

NB Can you tell us a little bit about how you adjusted to coming from Adelaide, coming to, from a city?

MW Yes, born in the metropolitan area, ahem thinking about shopping was much easier. That's what I noticed first. There weren't enough shops here. You know what is Commercial Road, it still way Commercial Road then but you couldn't buy things. And of course you must remember it was war time, things were very scarce.

MW You couldn't buy needles, thimbles anything made of steel. Everything like that was in short supply. Wool, all the wool had gone to make army uniforms and things.
You couldn't buy wool. Clothes were rationed, you know I bought when I had my first child, I bought three babies ah, cotton blankets to make myself a dressing gown, I bought three pink ones to make myself a dressing gown, you couldn't buy because I wanted my coupons for other things I didn't want to spend half of them on one dressing gown. Because they were relative things. I bought ah grey army blanket and made myself an over coat. Just embroidered it, you know. Livened it up a bit. [laugh] You you got very innovative.

NB You were mentioning there was no work around for women,

MW No only laundries, ahem a bit of office work. But once you know there were girls in the banks, until you were married and then you were out.

NB What sort of things did you do to ah occupy your time?

MW I sewed, I knitted, crocheted. Ah that's before, you mean before, when I first came here. Went walking, rode my bike. I spent hours and that before I came to Port Augusta, my husband and I used to, when our shifts, he worked shifts also. When they ah, when we were off, you see I worked two and he worked three so occasionally we had the day together. We used to go riding in the Adelaide Hills, then we spent a lot of time on our bikes. Covered many many miles. And I did the same thing here. Because he was a professional bike rider, so there were races. And then I think until oh I suppose, until my children were married, much of my leisure time was taken up with them. Because they're all sporty people so, Denise used to run, and we used to go to the meets. Because the bike riding and the running, my two sons were bike riders also and they and and yachtsman. So there were ahem times when all these meets were on. You were here there and everywhere.

NB You were mentioning you husband was a bike ride, a professional bike rider, and involved in races, were women riding at that time?

MW Yes yes I got very close to doing that. I've had a racing bike, and I was

training but I had a bad fall in the Adelaide Hills and when I came out of hospital after a month later, I had no bike he sold it. [laugh]

NB Can you tells us a little about what bike riding was like then, I mean as far as the professional?

MW Well they used to ride at Kilkenny, ahem long training. You trained whenever you could, at odd hours. You didn't always train with someone else, you had to do it alone. Ahem and there were the meetings. You know you'd get together after the meet and have a meal, a barbecue or something. It was friendly and it was nice, and enjoyed it.

NB You mentioned Kilkenny that was up near where Tubemakers was, is that correct?

MW Yes out there, near Woodville, ya that's were the bike track was. That's the track racing, but of course half of their time is spent in the other season is on the road.

NB Now the bikes we know about know a days are made out of Kevlar, synthetic items and,

MW Oh yes yes

NB twenty five gears. Can you tell us about the bikes you used then?

MW Well bikes were, they they didn't have much much on them. You see the track the track bikes are very light, they've got no gears or anything. They're just wheels and frame and handle bars. But the road bikes had gears and brakes. Ahem because they had to conform to road standards, and you need to get up hills. But they were more sparse. Bit strong, the types that they used were singles.
The tyres, the tyre and the tube is one, and you just roll it up and stuff it in your pocket. You know it's not a, it's not a heavy thing. Costly, you know at the time there were about five pound each or something, and my son my eldest son used to go through oodles of those. Of course he was very good, he represented the state, Jack and Tom never ever got to that stage. It was just more a fun thing, he did it very seriously.

NB The bike racing and the enjoyment of riding the bikes was something you brought up from Adelaide, and you were able to do up here?

MW Yes, oh yes will there was a good bike club here. They used to ride around the oval, there was a trotting and bike riding was around the oval. Yes all that was, ya but you know that was every so often. They went all over the place.

NB Were there a lot of other activities that you were able to get involved with here?

MW Ah, I knew sort of second hand to me, I went to earn some money, I went to the college and did a dress making course. Because although I had sewn, all my life I had never made my own patterns. And I thought if I'm going to sew for the people, people are lopsided, and odd shapes. I wanted to be able to make my own, so I went to the college and did a three year course. So that I could do that.
Because I had three children in four years, and I wanted to stay around with them so it was something to do at home, and earn a bit of money. I took in ironing, cause I've always tried to make a bit of extra cash. Whatever talent you've got,

[laugh] I think you ought to use it. Always needed money to keep up with the children's activities, partly.

NB You mentioned a college, that was the college here in Port Augusta, was it?

MW I started was built in that particular era, when I was doing it. Now that would of been ahem, oh around about 1950, somewhere around the early '50's I did that. Oh ah see, I had I'm jumping around a bit I know, were not doing it in chronological order but I had, after I had three children, and they went to school. Then I spent much of my time at school, so a lot of my activities were based around school. I mean it was my leisure time during the day. But I spent a lot of it at school like hearing children read, ahem and in those days they had no teacher librarians. The parents did all the libraries.
So I studied to become a librarian. And I used to do all the ordering with the teachers sanction, what do you want you know had discussed it with them. I did all the cataloguing and rostered a group of mothers. So I was there at least two days a week doing that. And because of my knowledge of sewing and embroidery and that I was employed by the staff to teach the year seven girls. Boys did woodwork, girls did sewing, in grade seven, year seven kids. So I was on the staff and in those days the inspector used to come along to ahem see what all the teachers were doing once a year. Unless they had a new one and they got looked at after about a month.
Well this inspector came this particular day, and he had to, because I was on the staff, he had to see what I was doing with the girls sewing. So we chatted about that, and he looked at their work and said yes that's fine.
And then a couple of days later he was doing another c(sic) and he went into the library and there I was again see. And he said; "you spend a lot of time here and I said yes and I take home books to mend and all sorts of things yes I spend a lot of time at school but I do enjoy it. And ah he said; "have you ever thought of becoming a teacher" and no I haven't. I don't think my education is good enough, cause I only did two years of high school, don't think it's good enough. So he talked about. it and he said; "have a talk to your principal about it because in those days they were desperately short of teachers. So I said alright, so this was about ten days before the August September school holidays. So I had a talk about it and after the school holidays came I had a job. I was a teacher and it caused me so much panic, because I mean it's one thing understanding books and teaching sewing and another thing, having to teach maths and science and all these other funny things [laugh] but I thought never venture, never win. I mean I'm on trial for three months, so ah I went.
I started in the September, after the September school holidays, and I was put with some poor teacher who just came to the school too. She didn't know where anything was. I knew more than she did, so anyway between us after a couple of week I was put with somebody else and I was allowed to teach up to year three. Only only the little kids. Which I realize since, was is the wrong thing to do because I think the beginning of a child's education is much more important.

NB Were just about to run out of tape so well just take it on

MW Aw gosh.

Tape 2 Side 1

NB Melva just before we switched tapes you were just saying about you were able to teach years one to three, can you tell us a little bit more about that?

MW Well I think that they, the authorities thought that ahem these little children didn't matter so much, you didn't have to have much knowledge particularly in maths. You know, you could see, I was helped a bit by the fact that by this time I had three children, and I had gone through whatever they gone. Two of them were in the primary section, the other one had just started year three. So I suppose that talking to me they thought, oh well if she's followed through their homework she'd know a little bit shout what they are doing. [laugh] Talk about blind leading the blind. Anyway I, I started after the September school holidays. And I had ahem about six weeks of working with under supervision setting notes, that poor principals.

You see I wasn't the only one, there were two others in the school doing the same thing. Poor principal, ah looking back must of been standing on his head because he not only had to super, he had to supervise us. See all our lesson notes, tick them or say no this isn't a good idea, etcetera. So anyway I limped along and then at the school, at this particular time we had a very large fife band. And these

children needed uniforms, so me being one who knew about sewing, had to supervise this making of these uniforms. Now there were fifty children there, and they all had pleated skirts. So I spent a lot of my time when I was supposed to be learning how to teach, helping these children, helping these mothers make these uniforms for these children. And it was so funny, I had just bought a really modern sewing machine. I bought the first automatic Singer that came out. And I could make button holes. So these skirts had five or six button holes. So I sat there for days putting on the button holes in these skirts.

Well anyway then time went on and a lot of the teachers at this particular time were sick, so instead of ahem learning I was teaching. I'd go in to relieve all these teachers who were sick, because they didn't have relief teachers. And the classes at this time were very very large you know. A forty-eight, fifty, in a class. So anyway, I limped along until the end of the year. And it's it's twelve month course, your supposed to do. Well I thought, oh plenty of time to learn a bit more, I'm not going to worry about this. So holiday time came and the school opened on the Tuesday in February the next year.

So the Saturday before that, the principal came to see me and he arrived at lunch time, we're all sitting down to the table, husband and three children and then myself. Sitting in there having lunch and he knocked at the door. And he came in and he said; how are you and the formalities over he then said; "how do you feel about taking a class in February" and I stood there absolutely stunned. And he said; "well perhaps you can offer me a cup of tea or something" [laugh] I sat there, I said; "I'm not ready for that" and he said; "well they won't give us another teacher" and I've got so man children. And I said; "but I'm going to need help and he said; well there's a teacher whose coming down from Leigh Creek to take the other grade three, I'll give you one and her the other, and she will help you". Oh dear oh dear, I thought.

So ah alright I arrived on that particular morning and I, she he brought, this lady had turned up from Leigh Creek, they'd shifted down here. So he brought her around on the Monday and we had a chat about it. And she said; "well when ever I'm giving tests and things I'll but carbon underneath it and I'll give it to you first thing in the morning" [laugh] Well when I got there on that morning, here's your

children. At assembly, these are yours, these are yours and quite a few new people, new teachers there. I had fifty-six grade three, seven and eight year olds,

fifty-six of them. And the rooms were so crowded that ah the children had to get out of their seat, that two two row, they were all desks, two rows, they're tables now but they're all desks. And ah sitting down I had five rows of them, and the two side rows were against the wall.

So if this kid wanted to get out and go to the toilet, three kids had to move

before he could get out. And they were right in front, right up to your, your table was out the front. Now luckily in those days everything that we taught them, ah was set for you. Week one, you taught this, and there were books that were set. You had a word book for spelling, you had two readers a year. Ah you had ahem a maths book. and it was all set out in units. Woe be tied you if if you didn't finish unit one on week one.

MW So in that way it was all set. Made it a little bit easier. But it nearly killed me, because I had to, I had to study along with it. I had to be one, what science for this week, art and craft, I was fine. Language I could cope with that, reading, comprehension was all right. Ah history I could read up the history before hand and just talk to about, education in those days was so formal.
You'd never be able to do it now, you couldn't handle that many children. But anyway, so this this teacher whizzed me the note. And then each day the principal set a test every Friday. Ah and you knew before you gave that test that about a third of the children would get no spelling right, no mental right, no maths. That you had ten mental, ten words, a piece of dictation and ten sums.
And they would to take their book up and they'd be a line out the front of the principals office, about ten miles long you know [laugh] all these children would get growled at because they didn't learn their words that week. And I started to thing about this, I'm a free thinker, this isn't education to me. So I was constantly having rows with the principal. This is wrong, these children just can't do it. And I've got fifty-six kids.
So this lasted for six weeks, and he soon realized that I, and the other teacher was the same. So but there was a very elderly teacher, she'd be about sixty-five at the time who had retired. And so they roped her into coming back to teach. If I tell teachers this now, they just can't believe me. We were told to pick out fifteen each of the worse kids that we've got. And we handed thirty of the our pests, either behaviour or academically to this particular poor teacher.
And she ruled them with a rod of iron. And she really, she did make an impression. This is the way, and you're going to learn this word until you can all spell it. You know she was next door to us, [laugh] now that was the 1950's, ya. So anyway as time went on she ahem, we got through the year all right. And then I start, I felt it was all wrong so I had talked to other members of the staff, the deputy and that and they. See in those days they had nothing like ah the laboratories, and the things you've got now to extend a child beyond it.
So I started writing up my own, I'd write a story and then I'd ask questions on it.
And it would be at an easy level, and then I'd have another batch that was a bit harder. So as the children progressed, well the harder ones, cards moved down. So then I'd have groups around the room. So, oh I I just felt it was all wrong, I thought you poor kids no wonder you can't, your not learning. They were wrong every week no matter what they did. They never had the background or the foundation for it. So as well, things changed as time when on and we got more reading material and, fancy two books a year. Apart from library.
Two readers, I had year three, I had for twelve years straight. I knew, and those readers went on all that time. I knew the stories off by heart, after all that time.
And then the open units came in and I said to the principal; "look if I am going to do this, I am going to change myself, I want another year level, I can't stand this anymore" so I got a year five, I think. And then I had year sevens and things changed by this time I thing I'd proved myself. Ha. And I taught for twenty-eight years before I retired, ten years ago.

NB Actually I find it very ironical that your talking about the 1930's when you

really dislike school,

MW I hated it ye.

NB And you then

MW yes

NB ended up as an adult spending so much in school.

MW Yes, yes, ya.

NB Do you think part of your empathy towards these children was the fact that you didn't like school, when you were going to school. Could see some of the problems, even then?

MW Oh I could, because I've always been a person who who wa sn't part of the stream of things. If you did that, I wanted to do this. Always been a bit like that, ahem. I don't know whether it's cause I'm reasonably creative, ah. I I no, I I don't
really know. I think I spent so much time on my own, and having to do things, as I
told you before I thing my early development of having to sew, of having to find out how. I always wanted to know how. I liked science, strangely enough.
I like finding out how things grew, and ah what made them, mix this with that what happened and that sort of simple thing. But I think it was the fact the teachers were cruel in my day. You know they'd line the boys up in the front of the cla ss in the morning and they'd give them one, "put your hand out they give them all one whack on the hand and say; now that's just to remind you how to be have today".
Hadn't done a blooming thing, and that I hated. I hated, I think I hated the
teachers. Not so much that I hated what I was doing. I just hated the, hated the
system. And even when I started teaching, I wanted to change the system. Didn't like it. Made no sense to me.

NB Yes I think it's quite interesting the way you you came into teaching. Ah

MW Yes oh there were a lot of them, they called them pressure cooker teachers. Oh there were a lot of them. And they, most of them made excellent teachers.

NB You'd obviously during the ah '40's you experienced a lot of different, you
worked in the mentions factories,

MW Yes

NB you'd seen a lot of different aspects of life,

MW Oh yes yes.
]
NB that you wouldn't have had coming right from say school

MW No you see the the say the, I think one of the problems with teaching generally is that the the teachers go through their school life, they're secondary, their tertiary, and then their college and then their interschool. Whereas you know I had to go without, like a lot of the other people of my era, you went without. You made things do, see I mean if the teach, a lot of the

teachers are now saying, things are tightening up a lot, they haven't got the amount of money to spend on craft materials.
What on earth am I going to do. I've never, if you give me a piece of newspaper and a bit of glue and I've got, I can have an art lesson. Did, piece, bits of sand, we
can draw in it. You know it's never had any problem, never even occurred to me that there was a problem.

NB Yes I think your early life stood you in good stead as far as being innovative

MW It did, It did.

NB and being able to think.

MW Yes Yes

NB Did you enjoy your time of teaching?

MW Yes I did. Yes I did. It was really hard work, ah but I did. I let, I was at the
one school for nineteen years, ah plus the two that I was teaching sewing. And then I was asked by the then inspector at the time would I like to transfer down to the Port Augusta primary school, which was the one down by the main street there. Because there were, there wasn't anyone on the staff who knew anything about art and craft. They get about six weeks in the college, and unless they're interested in any outside or unless they follow on and major in it, they ah come out with very little knowledge and very little confidence to teach art and craft. So I went down there, and I was there for seven years.
The first two years that I was there, I taught only art and craft to the whole
school. From reception right through to year seven. One of the hours I was ah
teaching them on my own, the other, then at that time ah, or by that time the
teachers had been granted non contact time to prepare lessons and things. So they had one hour a week, so I gave the teacher that hour by taking their class, and the other hour they had to do it with me. So I discuss before hand, ah what the child, what their needs were. And because I was teaching them every week I had an idea, I had lots of notes and things. And so I made the lesson notes, showed them to the teacher and got them to actually do it, and then presented them with the lesson notes. So they had something on which to build. And that was a fantastic time, I would of loved to have done that all my teaching days it was wonderful. Because I did it for two years, I could see where the kids were going.
You know, I could see that, if somebody with a bit of specialist knowledge can get
into these children, how much wider their knowledge becomes. We had a kiln down there, so I taught them pottery, and painting and I experimented with them and did all sorts of jazzy things. It was wonderful time. But then they had a group of very difficult children, at this school there were many Aboriginal children, not that they're any more difficult to teach as behaviour problems, but they spent a lot of time away from school.
So therefore it's not their ability, it's just they didn't attend school. And they
couldn't see the relevance in a lot of the things that were being done, so there
were many many difficult ones. And there was a couple teachers coming from college and they wouldn't of been able to handle them. So I had to stop what I was doing and take this class. So.

NB I'd like to talk a little bit more about the Aboriginals and the town a little
bit later on, but what I'd like to talk about now, is looking at 1950 [loud noise
from outside] looking at Port Augusta. Now your a young mother, you're doing courses

MW Yes

NB You're looking at doing other things. Can you give us an idea of the changes that were happening first of all within the town, and then secondly some of the changes you were starting to experience as well?

MW Well the biggest change would of been, ah not that was out, about thirty-two years ago so when would that of been, six, fifty, sixty oh yes round about, ya well it might of been, up to sixty it probably wasn't built. The power station was built, I can't remember what year it was but it was close, whether it was after '60' or close to '60'.
A but when that was built the whole of Willsdon was built, all those houses were built. And they were built in a hurry, to accommodate all the people. The school at Willisdon was built. So that was built, now I know when, I can tell you when that was built, when ahem my son, my eldest, my eldest son was eight. And he he was eight, that was ya now, he Jim was eight, so he was born in '46,

NB so it would be 1954

MW Yes, yes so we're in the fifties when the power station was built, lower ago, yes I'm just trying to correlate that, ya. Well Willisdon school was built. Now ah [laugh] this is another funny thing, when you look back and think what technology, what they use now, what you've got in front of you for example. When Willsdon was built, the school was built it was built on a big sand hill, just an empty flattened sand hill. The whole of this area was just red sand. It was built on the sand hill, there were no fences, there were four classrooms and one administration block which had the book room, the office, and the teachers room, staff room. And four classrooms. there was a year one and a year two and a year three and four and a year five, six and seven in these four classrooms.
And my children, my eldest two had been going to the Port Augusta Primary. They went down by bus everyday. I didn't live here then of course, I lived a bit closer on Hospital Road. And the children went went there for the first couple of years. And then when Jim was, went into year three, and Denise went into year two and Tom the youngest, hadn't started school. And I went up to this school, just to take them and enroll them and there were about oh a hundred odd children started. Because this area had just been built, and the families were just beginning to move in. So and the children, parents didn't want to take them away from the central school. The, ock {sic} so that's why we didn't have many older ones the big big bottom group, not many at the top.
So I went up there and the men were still there, that had been building the school. They used the building to sleep in so their mattresses were all over the place. Ah they'd they'd, we had little combustion stoves in the corner, so thinking that was cool they had their butter and their food and, stored in these stoves. So we had to get rid of all of that, and then all the furniture was outside. I mean this is February in Port Augusta. Which is a bit warm.

MW All of the furniture was outside in the sun, and that was covered in newspaper. And the sun had melted the varnish, so all the newspaper was stuck to all the furniture. Then they had, the principal, who was only an acting one for three months and three teachers. The head master had to teach too. And there were three other teachers, two of them were were young girls straight from college, and one man. So there were lots of parents around the place.
So what on earth were are we going to do? But there weren't many men, all the men were at work of course. All these women there, so we scratched off this newspaper and got rid of the mattresses and then we had all of these desks and that to move in. They'd just been dumped

outside. So the head master rang the high school, and they sent a lot of the big lads up for the day and we finally got, eleven o'clock in the morning we got in there.
Well then I went along to the first council. Show how ignorant you are, I went along to this night meeting they had, and they had to have it. They had no power at the school, no lights. So you worked by day and then you had to go. No power.

At{sic} so we had the meeting, I think we had power hooked up but no lights, because we had to have the meeting down at the central school. So we all went down there and I said yes, I put my name down as a committee person on this. Thinking that it was the welfare club. Which meets of an afternoon. But I found out I was on the committee, you know that that, I didn't even know, nobody explained to me that there were two bodies.
In fact there were three bodies, there was a mother's club for the junior primary, then a welfare club for the primary, and the council. So I didn't know about this.
So I didn't know about this so anyway I, oh well so what. So I ended up being, ended up after a year, I was on this council for, until I started work. Working up there then I had to resign.
And one of the things that will really amuse you is that school functioned for two years without a telephone. The principal used, there was a public one across the road and down the street. He had to go down [laugh] had to go down to the public phone. Or he'd have to send someone down in a car, down to one of the other schools, or had to do it. You know which which was a job. We had no library books. All the parents rasseled{sic} around for all the books they had at home. That the children had grown out of, that formed the nucleus of the library.
My husband and lots of the other men, made all the swings and the bell tower. In the railways, and then they charged the education department for them. Although the railways let them do them there, they charged them to get some money to buy library books and things like that. So that was the start of that school. Well I suppose ahem, Tom was in year seven, and I must of started work five years after the school was opened I was there working. So that was a funny time.
And then we had, I can remember one council meeting we had an argument about one of the staff members, one of the council members, I'm sorry. Was adamant that we needed library books and other equipment and things. And the rest of us said, but we must have a telephone. It's ridiculous, supposing there's an emergency. I mean it was isolated, and we we it was a fair way out of the town, it's on the other side of the town. So that was a bit of a giggle. [laugh]

NB You're talking about the power plant and now we sort of determined

MW Yes

NB that that opened about 1954. Did you start to notice a big change soon as you started living in Port Lincoln, urgh Port Augusta

MW Port Augusta

NB was it starting to grow. Was things starting to change?

MW Oh yes rapidly, yes rapidly yes.

NB So that

MW more schools were built, the west side expanded and second, although the school over at the west side, and the Stirling North school, are oh I supposed are ten years ago. They weren't built in that era. But the other schools, so it Willisdon,

Carleton, and the catholic school went over to the west side. They grew, ya and then another high school was built. We now have three high schools. And eight primary schools.

NB During this time, were looking at sort of when your children were being born and their early years in school. So I'm talking about late '40's, early '50's did you get involved in any other organizations other that your school organizations?

MW The art group, the local art group was formed. And I was, I'm one of the foundation members of that. That was, oh no no that was '65. No it's a bit later. No I wasn't. You see I was involved with all my children's activities. And I was doing dressmaking, you know I didn't have to, well there wasn't that much here that, that's very very sporting town, Port Augusta. Poor cultural things are about five percent, the others are 95%. Every sport imaginable is placed here.

NB So not being a sporting person yourself, you you were then really involved in your children's and your husband's sport.

MW Yes, yes well there was, it's not only going off to the meetings, there's their clothes to see to, their equipment. Fund raising activities, and I'd be involved on those.

NB What about church groups were you involved in church groups at that time?

MW Yes I was, yes I was yes. I was secretary of the Presbyterian ah afternoon, ladies group, yes for a while.

NB Did ahem did the church play a big part in the town? The different churches play a big part in the town?

MW Oh I think they did for some people. More so than , much more so than now.

NB Were there a lot of fetes and sort of church organized--?

MW Oh yes and there were more so, ya as time went on. There some of the ah pentecostal type churches. You know the crossroads and all those. The assemblies of god and all of those gradually came in.

NB With your young children you were a very avid dancer before you were married,

MW Hum

NB or just after you were married, with the children coming along did you and Jack still get involved with in dancing?

MW No never here. Oh only cabarets, through sporting. You know each sporting organization has it's prize giving night or whatever like that. Weddings and things. But that's all.

NB So there was really quite a dramatic change in you, once you left Adelaide?

MW Oh heavens yes, yes yes there was. In the sort of things I did. We use to go to see films here on a regular basis. Ahem but then when you you have three small

children, ah and no motor car, you'd rather and I took the children everywhere that we went, you know they'd be in a basket under the seat when you went off to cabarets somewhere like that. [laugh] Just just took them. We used to have lots of picnics, you know go out into the Flinders, and lots of picnics.

NB I'd like to talk about that in a minute but

MW hum

NB were just about out of tape on this side, so I'll just turn the tape over.

Tape 2 Side 2

MW Just before we turned the tape over Melva we were talking, you were talking about going on picnics to the Flinders, can you tell us a bit about that?

NB Well by this time, ah we owned a motor car. And we used to go for picnics with the family, other families as well. And walked miles and miles in the Flinders. Now by this time I was starting to paint. So I was always looking for subject matter.
Thinking about that, so that's that's one of the reasons for going and the picnic was just a [laugh] secondary consideration. My family were taking me to ah get some subject matter.

NB Now you're a very crafty person,

MW Yes

NB ah, and I'm saying that in a very complimentary way.

MW Hum

NB but is then when it really started was in the early '50's when you started doing your painting. But is this when it really started was in the early '50's when you started doing your painting, is that when your craft--?

MW Well I went to the college to learn to paint, because I felt it would improve my teaching. So I needed in those days, teachers had to draw many things on the blackboard. And I found that I was lacking in that area. So I went to the college, to learn to paint. And many things followed from there but, if your dealing with up to the '60's it came later than that.

NB Now the college you mentioned this is the college in Port Augusta, isn't it?

MW Yes yes.

NB Was the college here used by the locals much?

MW Oh yes it was then in those days. You ah you could do almost any leisure craft, if you could find ten students. And they either they or you could find a teacher.
Quite happy about that.

NB Were there a lot of women, this is I'm talking about the early '50's now

MW Yes yes yes,

NB were there a lot of women starting to get involved in going to the college and doing different crafts?

MW Oh yes yes there were, things like sewing, cake decorating, ahem calligraphy, ahem oh there was woodwork. Ahem restoration of furniture, jewelry making. All sorts, what ever you wanted to do if you could find and convince them that you knew of ten people or you could go and start off something and they'd advertise and ah pottery was was doing well.

NB So the college really was a big advantage to--?

MW Oh it certainly was, ya. Different story now I'm afraid. They've cut out all those leisure classes.

MW No, it's apprenticeships and skills development for unemployed and that sort of thing now. They say that they, the others don't pay. Costs too much to produce them to do it.

NB The courses that you were doing, were they mostly women that were doing them, or were there men as well?

MW Yes they always, always wom{sic} more women than men at these sort of things.

NB And were they held in the daytime or were they held in the evening?

MW Both. Mainly evening. Most of the women were working of course. Or had young children, had to wait till husband came home to mind the children so they could go.
They became social events, it was your night out, to go to cake decorating or something. And I think many of the students would of done it from a social point of view. They probably never did it again afterwards.

NB So it was just a good excuse?

MW Yes, and they yes. And I think a lot of women that I know and I think this still happens, they say I have done cake decorating, I have done pottery, when they have only really scratched the surface.

NB So really, it was acceptable for a woman to go to a class in the evening,

MW yes

NB but it wouldn't of been acceptable for her to perhaps go down to the pub?

MW Oh heavens no. Oh No, I never went into a pub until I went to stay in one when I was married. You just didn't do that. Oh no that has, that's one area that has dramatically changed. I mean I walk in and out of them now without turning a hair.
No women don't, didn't.

NB In the early '50's in Port Augusta, obviously there would of been quite a few pubs around,

MW Oh yes yes. Port Augusta has a lot of pubs.

NB Would women go into them?

MW No, very rarely.

NB And if they did go into them, what are would they go into?

MW The dining room, or the saloon, you certainly wouldn't go into the bar. You weren't permitted. [laugh] Didn't like you there. [laugh]

NB So although it was readily acceptable for men to go bar, and spend time in the pub,

MW yes

NB it was frowned on. What alternatives did women have. If you went downtown and the men were in the pub, what alternatives did the women have?

MW Well it depending, depends on what, you say if you went to town, well then it would depend on your husband or your boyfriend. I, you might go shopping. I would imagine you would end up in the city somewhere. You go shopping and he'd go there. Or go to meet his mates. Or you'd stay home or you'd stay with your relatives. Even now when I go to Adelaide I stay with Jack's mum and Jack always goes to the corner pub to meet his mates.

NB During the '40's, '50's ah there was a lot of involvement in towns, in smaller country towns with the CWA and the WAB

MW yes

NB things like that for women, was there that sort of involvement in Port Augusta?

MW Oh yes yes I was a member of the CWA, in those early years yes. Yes that filled a big part, because they had a craft, handicraft section. And they introduced different things and I learnt a few other things besides painting and sewing. You know more crafty things through them.

NB So they were a good sources of being able to learn?

MW Yes yes they were. Like basket making and other things like that.

NB Were there any other woman's groups like that around that you could get involved with?

MW No not in those days, not that I know of. See there were no clubs in Port Augusta. You might find the football clubs might of had a little shed, where they met at the end of the match. They didn't have, the clubs weren't around like they are now. See see there's the Railway, Quinda is the Railway club. Well that was built round about that time. But then there's there's ETSA, a big club, and all the football clubs. And the hotels more, have more of a club atmosphere.

NB Those clubs started developing when?

MW Oh, I thing round about the '60's I would say. 1950 ya, yes ya I think round about then. It was something I never ever took a great deal of notice of. I'm just trying to think of. I'm just trying to think when my children were playing sport. But they've, see the yacht club, the yacht club has been here since 1980 something, 1880 something. And that's always been there, but it has expanded from a little shed into a bigger shed and into a, now they have a hall.
So over those, those between fifty and sixty were the years when things started to move. Ah there seemed to be more money around then. You know wages started to escalate. Now my husband when he first came to Port Augusta in four oh, '43, '44, he was only getting three pounds a week. And it wasn't long before it tripled and then doubled again. When I was training as a teacher, in the '50's it was a, I only got five pounds a week, as a trainee. But they I I jumped up to oh about seventy or eighty a week.

NB So there was a big economic change?

MW big jump big economic yes. Social, economic, electronically, see well for instances ahem in that period at the school, at Willsdon school we had one tape recorder in the whole school. And you had to, you put your name down if you wanted to use it. And the children were not allowed anywhere near it. And we had, what else did we have, one of. One radio, one portable radio. So if you wanted to listen to the ah music program from the ABC which a lot of the teachers did, because I mean [it was a} teacjomg aid. It was put
So that's how everybody wanted, pushed your little button on the wall and you could, you could hear it. But this this was a [laugh] real real tape recorder and frightened the wits out of me when I first got hold of it. Gosh when so, yes dramatic changes in that field. But they're going on everywhere, so there's nothing new about that.

NB You mentioned a minute ago that ah that you didn't know a lot about music but yet awhile ago--?

MW I knew nothing about music.

NB a while ago you mentioned the fife band that you were

MW yes yes

NB did you have any involvement with that ah?

MW Well my daughter played the fife in it, and that's Denise did . And that stood her in good stead, because she ended up playing bagpipes. So she, and she also learnt to play the piano.

NB So you didn't have any musical instruments that you were involved with?

MW No no. And haven't the least inclination to. No I know nothing about, I appreciate music and I certainly have lots of records and things and I do listen often but I don't want to do it.

NB Your life looking now, changed very appreciably in moving to Port Augusta?

MW Oh it certainly did yes.

NB do you see that change from Adelaide to Port Augusta as a good move for you, was it a good move for you?

MW Yes, yes in the long term. Because for a start the first few years, wouldn't have ahem, I probably wouldn't have altered very much you know getting married having children taking them to school, going to the shops, doing some sewing, and something like that. I think having to face up to the fact that there weren't things here, and having to be more innovative, made me do things then. Because I was basically very shy. You know my friends laugh like mad, I'm going to sneeze in a minute, made, [tape pause] just sort of trying my thoughts in order, had what was I talking about when I suggested.

NB Oh you were just mentioning your friends were mentioning that?

MW Oh the fact that yes, because they don't believe me. But it's it's ams7ing what you can do. I can stand up in front of anyone and speak now, and I do that, do that fairly often. Teaching of course and just brought me into that. I say I nearly died with my leg in the air when he said your going to have to take a class, or would you like a job. I can't do that, oh yes I can because I need the dough. Oh yes you can you can do anything you want to. And I've convinced myself of that, and I've tried to convince my kids. Never been terribly successful with Denise. She lacks confidence. And Ah I looking back I blame myself for that. Because I'm full of confidence. And I think I must of squashed her some where along the way, because we were at loggerheads all the time. I can deal, my grandchildren I can do anything with, but I never could with Denise, I think there was a chemical thing. Maybe because she is the only woman and I'm a woman too. I think it's something to do with that, we clashed.

NB Perhaps it's because the two of you are so much alike?

MW Oh possibly, possibly ya. We did, we don't know of course but we've come to terms with all of that. But she still lacks confidence and I was oozing with it. Because I convinced myself that I can do it, yes I can. I had to say that so many times that I believed my own propaganda eventually. [laugh]

NB The idea of teaching, do you think you would of had that opportunity if you would of stayed in Adelaide?

MW I doubt it. I don't don't think so. Although I think I would of been involved with my children. I would of been at the school doing things because I like working with people. I think I would of, I'd of gone along to help. So it, they were doing the same thing in the metropolitan area as well. So I might have, that I don't know.

NB You talked a minute ago about gaining confidence and having it. Was that, was that part of maturing, what that part of being married, was that part of living at Port Augusta, or was it a part of all of it?

MW Part of all of it I would imagine. I think it's it's being a loner, feeling a bit ah, ahem insecure, or shy or thinking to yourself now it anybody is going to get anywhere at all, if I'm going to get anywhere at all I'm going to have to help myself. Who's coming along to start patting me on the back, saying come along and do this. I've always felt that I'd have to do it myself. Get out of the situation that I was in. Not being able to do things with shyness, and everybody too busy around me to care tuppence about what I did. And being so far away.

I finished year the school{sic}, my sister started. So they was a big age gap, gap there. I hadn't a clue what she did, can't remember. Because by the time she was near fourteen, fifteen, I'd left home. So there was that. I never even wor[sic], wasn't even there with her during her teen years because I was gone at seventeen. So you know that's, makes quite a difference. You are a product of your environment and I think I was. And it was just sheer, I have a fair amount of will power, very determined person. So I just did it, or I found someone who could show me how to do it.

NB Moving to Port Augusta, ahem did you feel a sense of isolation?

MW Oh incredibly so. Yes very much so yes.

NB And did that take a long time to get over?

MW Yes it did. I met a couple of other railway wives, who were ahem with whom I worked. They knitted and we sat together during the day. Went to each others house, and became friends that way. You see I was married two years before I had any children. So there were those two years to fill in, and ah I. But I mainly sewed or you know experimented with cooking and things like that. There was nothing that cost anything. [laugh] You know it was just sewing for myself and and for Jack. Make jumpers and things.

NB During that time especially the first years here was it more isolation or was it more loneliness that had a part in your?

MW I felt isolated from all the things, I liked going to big shops. Like roaming around the city in Rundle Street in those days. I liked that, ah. But lonely, I don't know that I was terribly lonely because I could be quite happy by myself, as long as I've got a book. We did have a central library here but we did have an institute, that had library books. So I could always get books. Couldn't afford to buy many, but we could borrow them. You had to become a member of that, but that was no problem. So always had a book to read.

NB So as long as you had a book to read you were happy?

MW Happy, yes yes.

NB Looking back now what was the, what would you say would be the greatest advantage in having left Adelaide and moving to Port Augusta or a smaller town?

MW I think the greater opportunity for an individual to get somewhere. It's like being ah, it's better to be a big cog in a small wheel, than vis-versa. I think that would of been, I feel as if I've had opportunities here that I may not of had. And I think over a period of time your known, you get know here. Now I'm an identity here, I have my place here.
I am through my art, I'm quite well known. I mean having taught so many children, you know all their families, and they still speak to you, and you meet someone this big, that you saw that big, and you taught me grade two or grade three or something. And then then through are and craft, I'm quite well known.

NB I guess looking at the other side of the coin now, what would you see as the biggest disadvantage in leaving Adelaide and living up here?

MW Opportunities for your children, education, it's alright but it's not the best. Ahem. My children have done quite well, I have one still living here. Ah, they've done quite well. Well Denise met Michael here, ah but my other son he was married and he he became, and they he had two children and then he was divorced. So the wife he has now he met down there. But there, the boys are pretty ah innovative people too. Much more so than Denise. Denise would be if she's had someone beside her to encourage her, is what she needs. But I don't know I've had, I there are no disadvantages, shopping may be, you can't always get what you want. And if I want to but anything in bulk or anything special I have to go to Adelaide. But then if, but then were up and down to Adelaide anyway. Go every couple of months, sometimes more than that. So flitting off to Adelaide is not a big deal to us. You know the distance doesn't bother us. Off just off we go like were going around the street or something, we just go.
It, but many many people in Port Augusta just don't go to the city. I know when ever I'm going I want to get ahem going down to buy ah material for my crafts, I just say anything you want. And I usually go away with a list. So many many people just don't go to the city. Once a year perhaps. And I mean I mean Port Augusta isn't far away, it's only three hours.

NB It's a lot different now that the six hour train trip?

MW Oh yes yes. That was quite an event. Ya. quite different. Yes it's just cars are faster, and they taken off all the corners, you know you just you whiz straight through now, you don't deviate around this town and that town, have to slow down because of it. Well you did then, if you went by road. But we were years before we could afford a car.

NB So you wouldn't feel ah like you'd have to miss another christmas ah?

MW No no that was my first christmas away. [laugh] A bit hilarious actually.

NB Actually I think we've covered most of the areas that I wanted to

MW yes yes

NB look at Melva. I'd like to than you very much for your time, and sharing with us your experiences it's been lovely and I think you've had a wonderful like in Port Augusta, so I'd like to say thank you.

MW [laugh] Right that's all right Neil.