

STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA
J. D. SOMERVILLE ORAL HISTORY
COLLECTION

OH 201/8

Full transcript of an interview with

GWEN SMOKER

On 25 June 1993

By Rosemary Willis

Recording available on CD

Access for research: Unrestricted

Right to photocopy: Copies may be made for research and study

Right to quote or publish: Publication only with written permission from the
State Library

NOTES TO THE TRANSCRIPT

This transcript was created by the J. D. Somerville Oral History Collection of the State Library. It conforms to the Somerville Collection's policies for transcription which are explained below.

Readers of this oral history transcript should bear in mind that it is a record of the spoken word and reflects the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The State Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the interview, nor for the views expressed therein. As with any historical source, these are for the reader to judge.

It is the Somerville Collection's policy to produce a transcript that is, so far as possible, a verbatim transcript that preserves the interviewee's manner of speaking and the conversational style of the interview. Certain conventions of transcription have been applied (ie. the omission of meaningless noises, false starts and a percentage of the interviewee's crutch words). Where the interviewee has had the opportunity to read the transcript, their suggested alterations have been incorporated in the text (see below). On the whole, the document can be regarded as a raw transcript.

Abbreviations: The interviewee's alterations may be identified by their initials in insertions in the transcript.

Punctuation: Square bracket [] indicate material in the transcript that does not occur on the original tape recording. This is usually words, phrases or sentences which the interviewee has inserted to clarify or correct meaning. These are not necessarily differentiated from insertions the interviewer or by Somerville Collection staff which are either minor (a linking word for clarification) or clearly editorial. Relatively insignificant word substitutions or additions by the interviewee as well as minor deletions of words or phrases are often not indicated in the interest of readability. Extensive additional material supplied by the interviewee is usually placed in footnotes at the bottom of the relevant page rather than in square brackets within the text.

A series of dots, indicates an untranscribable word or phrase.

Sentences that were left unfinished in the normal manner of conversation are shown ending in three dashes, - - -.

Spelling: Wherever possible the spelling of proper names and unusual terms has been verified. A parenthesised question mark (?) indicates a word that it has not been possible to verify to date.

Typeface: The interviewer's questions are shown in **bold print**.

Discrepancies between transcript and tape: This proofread transcript represents the authoritative version of this oral history interview. Researchers using the original tape recording of this interview are cautioned to check this transcript for corrections, additions or deletions which have been made by the interviewer or the interviewee but which will not occur on the tape. See the Punctuation section above.) Minor discrepancies of grammar and sentence structure made in the interest of readability can be ignored but significant changes such as deletion of information or correction of fact should be, respectively, duplicated or acknowledged when the tape recorded version of this interview is used for broadcast or any other form of audio publication.

J D SOMERVILLE ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION, MORTLOCK

LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIANA: NO. OH201/8

Interview by Rosemary Willis of Gwen Smoker (nee Buller) on 25 June 1993 for the Goodwood Orphanage Oral History project.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

Could you please tell me your full name?

Gwendolene Jean - - -. Which one, Smoker or Buller?

Buller is your maiden name?

Maiden name, yes.

Whereabouts were you born and when?

21st September 1958 at the Queen Victoria Hospital.

Your occupation?

Paramedic aide.

What were your circumstances for going to the Goodwood Orphanage?

I got told a million stories so I don't know really. One story I got I was neglected - my mother neglected me. [interruption in recording]

If you could tell me why you came to the orphanage?

Yes, my mother neglected me. That's what I got told in later years. She told me that she put me into the orphanage so she could organise her life and take me home again. Oh, strewth, I've lost it. What did Sister tell me?

Who told you that you were neglected?

[queries question]

Who told you that you were neglected?

One of the other girls said I grew up there. One of the girls in the orphanage found out in the later years.

So you came at what age to the Goodwood Orphanage?

As far as I know I was three when I got there.

Can you remember your first experience that you can recall of the orphanage?

No, I really can't remember. No.

Do you remember the early days, before you went to school?

No. No, not before I went to school. I remember Grade 1. Sister Carmel was my teacher.

Was this taught on the premises?

Yes it was. Where the - - -. The room later became the library. I think there was Grade 1, 2 and 3 there, I think, in those days and a study room. I think that was a classroom as well.

Can you describe your daily routine when you were a young child?

(laughs) Yes. Getting up in the morning sort of I can remember. I remember having breakfast.

Who used to get you up in the morning?

Oh Sister Carmel used to come in and switch the lights on and clap, didn't she, until we all got up. (laughs) Of course!

What were you like at getting out of bed?

Terrible. I still am - I'm shocking. Well I sort of remember having breakfast, which was usually porridge, cornflakes, semolina, bread and milk - I liked that. That was the best, bread and milk. And then I remember Sister Margaret and the tray of toast. She'd give a piece to the big kids and then she'd take it in turns for the other tables and give us younger ones a slice. Then I remember walking to school. And this is sort of all over the years - it's not sort of right back at the beginning. Walking to school.

This was St Thomas's primary school?

Yes, St Thomas's primary school. Some of us walked in a group. I remember some - - -. In those days too, once I started walking to school, trying to keep up with Sister Carmel when she was walking fast to school. I found it very hard so I thought, "Well, I think I'd rather walk at a slower pace rather than walk and chase her". Coming home from school and getting changed out of school uniforms, yes.

What did you used to put on then?

I don't know. Clothes that weren't really warm. I always felt cold - not really warm clothes. I can't remember the rest of it. And then I remember tea. Well tea was usually about six o'clock. Then we'd have to go upstairs, organise our pyjamas and everything and then just sit and wait to be called and have a bath. I remember that - Sister Carmel.

What pyjamas did you wear? Were they different in summer and winter?

Yes, they had those button-up ones. I always wanted - in winter - I always wanted the fleecy ones instead of the button-up ones because they were always cold when you put them on - you always felt cold in them.

What, were they cotton?

Not cotton. They were fleecy pyjamas but they just weren't warm. And, oh, summer, I can't remember - I can't remember what I wore in summer. I suppose I just remember being cold in winter.

Did you used to put on extra clothing because of the coldness?

No. No, we didn't, no. I remember the sheets being really cold too - freezing. It took all night to warm up. (laughs) It was terrible. And then it was hard to get up in the morning because you were warm.

So what sort of things would you do after tea, before you wen to bed?

I can't really remember. I can remember just watching TV in the study room for a while, and then we always got kicked out so the big kids could watch *Mod Squad* - I remember that.

Do you remember what you used to watch on TV?

Oh well, *The Brady Bunch*. (laughs) Who didn't see *The Brady Bunch* in those days? Oh, what was the other one? Not *Young Talent Time*. Oh, what was it?

Was it *Show Case*?

Yes, yes, *Show Case*, that's right - yes, Hector Crawford's *Show Case*, that's what it was, yes. I remember seeing that. And then I remember the later years we got - - -. I suppose as other girls moved on and the numbers got smaller one end of the dormitory was set up, had a big rug put on the floor and set up as a lounge-type thing and we got a TV upstairs. I remember the day we got that, because we all kept outside, outside the dormitory. We weren't allowed to come inside and then Sister Carmel came and got us and we all went mad when we saw that, and there was about thirty kids sitting around this little tiny portable TV, black and white TV, and we thought we were it.

How did you get to choose the programs?

Oh, I think they were chosen for us really.

Who by?

Just Sister Carmel again. You know, "This was on, that's on," sort of thing. There was mainly *Show Case* and *Brady Bunch* I remember.

Did you have close friendships with other children?

Yes. In the early years I remember Kathy Easton, Michelle Taylor. Oh, who else was there? [break in recording]

I was asking you a question about friendships.

Oh Eva, I remember her as well - yes, Eva Hutler.

What sort of things did you do together?

Well with her we used to - - -. We'd keep some fruit at night and roll across the floor to each other and have a bite out of it. And it was mainly an apple - usually an apple. I remember doing that with her.

What do you mean you used to roll it across the floor?

Oh well I'd take a bite out of this apple and roll it across the floor to her, then she'd take a bite and then she'd roll it back to me.

What, you'd be in your beds would you?

Yes, until the whole apple was gone and there was nothing left. Oh, what else?

Do you remember what sort of things you used to get up to?

Gee.

Did you hang around with the orphanage children when you were at school?

No, not really, no. I never had that many friends at school I suppose. Kept to myself really.

Did you feel stigmatised?

Yes, definitely, yes - not good enough, yes. Yes, that was how I felt, yes, definitely.

How did the school children treat you?

Oh they were all right I suppose, but I just didn't feel as if I was good enough mainly.

Do you know why?

No. (laughs) No, I don't know.

How did the orphanage children treat you?

I really don't remember sort of - - -. It's hard to explain. [pause] It's just like an ordinary - going to an ordinary school with just the other kids in your class. That's what it seemed like to me, even though some of the kids from the orphanage were in my class.

What about when you were actually on the orphanage premises? How did the children treat you?

Oh, God. (laughs) Oh, strewth.

Were you bullied?

Yes.

Were you happy?

Oh no, not happy, no way. (laughs) I got picked on a lot, yes.

Why was that?

I don't know - I really don't know. Just did, just got picked on.

How did you respond to that?

See I cried a lot and had a lot of headaches. I suppose that's why they picked on me, because I was weak.

Was that the usual sort of thing, that younger or weaker children were picked on by the more assertive ones?

Yes I think so. I didn't sort of notice it with anyone else - didn't notice it. Oh well, getting around in my own little world I suppose. (laughs) Yes, I don't know. I don't remember - I didn't really notice.

Do any children stick out in your mind from that time that you lived at the orphanage?

Oh God. Janet's group, I remember that lot.

What was Janet's group - who's Janet?

[queries question]

Who's Janet?

Oh, she was - - -. She came from overseas and looked after a group of - - -. There was eight of us in the group. I remember those years very well.

Why is that?

I suppose because I was heading towards a teenager. I don't know, life seemed to get pretty - - -. I don't know, whether I got bad or - - -. I don't know.

Were there periods that were worse than other periods there for you?

Yes, they were the worst years. Yes, the teenage years were the worst years I think, yes. When I was younger I sort of - - -. Oh, I just remember when I was younger, yes, I was sort of picked on and cried a lot and that sort of stuff. But I don't know. I suppose as I got older, I don't know, things meant more and hurt more, or something. But I just remember those years.

Do you remember in particular what happened in Janet's group - why you remember it?

Oh, because I got picked on all the time. (laughs) Oh, there were some girls in our group. One in particular had - - -. Oh, she used to have the group ganged up on me and used to drive me bonkers. Yes, I used to get fed up with it all. Because I was

the oldest and I wasn't as mature, like the others. (laughs) Like they all thought they were.

What sort of things would they do to you?

Oh just - - -. Just picked on you mainly, that's all. Yes, they just weren't very nice. Just ganging up I suppose. Wouldn't talk to you. And then sort of on top of that as well the people I stayed with for holidays weren't that crash hot because their daughter was great and I just felt like a piece of dirt all the time. I suppose nobody's fault, but that's just the way I felt - just not good enough - and it sort of, I don't know.

Tell me about your holiday experiences. What would happen?

I had some nice people - there were some nice people but - - -.

You had different people each year?

I had a lot of different people. Yes, tons of different people. I didn't stay with them for very long. The only thing I really didn't like about it, I'd sort of - - -. When you first got to - - -. When you sort of the first night that you went to these people it was - you know it was good. They sort of looked after you and all this sort of stuff - everything was fine. Then you went to bed at night and I'd just wake up in the morning and think, "What am I supposed to do now?" and sort of wait for somebody to get up and, I don't know, tell me what to do or whatever. Just to know. It was very confusing every time I went to someone new. I thought, "What do I do?" You know, "I don't know what to do, what to say, or anything". It was really - - -. It was really weird. Yes, didn't like it at all. And now when I meet someone new I'm very quiet until I get to know them, yes. Then I'm all right again. But, yes, that was really terrible. But they were nice people.

Does anyone in particular stand out in mind?

Oh, going back - - -. Oh, Helen and Dennis Ryan, I stayed with them. They were really nice.

Why was that?

Because, oh, I had my tonsils out and I ended up - - -. It was near the school holidays and I ended up having a bit of time off school and stuff, because I wasn't that crash hot after that, and I stayed with them an extra week. It was the September holidays - and extra week. They were really nice. Then I stayed with J.... and Harry Bowmyer, and since then they've adopted me. And Ann and Des Rogers through my teenage years. That wasn't really that good.

Why was that, do you recall?

Oh, I thought it was all right back then but it wasn't - it wasn't that crash hot.
[interruption in recording]

We were interrupted by a plane.

And I can't forget Betty and Mel F..... They were really nice people. They were an older couple. They had married children. They had a butcher's shop - he was a butcher. And I got on well with their kids as well. They had grown up daughters. Kay and Cheryl they were twins,. and Janice, and G..... their son.

Do you remember what sort of things you'd do on the holidays?

Well mainly, Auntie Billie and Uncle M....., I was there for weekends mainly. They'd work a fair bit in the shop and we sort of - - -. I was a bit older then so I could - - -. You know, we could do what we wanted to do. Sometimes - - -. Oh, somebody came and stayed with me once, someone from the orphanage, and we just had a weekend where we could just watch tellie and do what we wanted to do. She'd just pop in and check and see if we were all right and all that sort of stuff. That was really good. Joan and Harry. Oh, I don't know about them.

Who's Joan and Harry?

Bowmyer. [interruption by plane]

You were saying about your holiday families.

Oh Joan and Harry, yes. Joan and Harry sort of, when they stayed with them for holidays, I sort of had the first contact with grandparents. I'd met other people's parents but Joan's Mum and Dad and Harry's Mum and Dad sort of stood out more as grandparents because - - -. Oh, we weren't sort of - - -. They didn't babysit us much or anything, but we sort of spent a lot of time with them and they were really nice people. And then, oh, who's next?

Did you have an enduring relationship with any of your holiday people?

No, not really.

You said you were adopted by a couple.

Yes. Oh, I don't know - I don't know whether I want to put that in or not. That's a totally different thing, yes.

Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with your mother at the orphanage? How often did you get to see her?

I only saw her once a fortnight. It's terrible though, but she used to embarrass me. (laughs) It was terrible. Because I'd get picked on because of her. Yes, that's something else I got picked on for, was my mother, yes.

Why was that?

I don't know. Whether it was the way she dressed or just who she was, but I did, I just got picked on.

Do you remember any particular incidents?

Oh I remember one day she fell over and I was looking around to see if anyone was looking, I was so embarrassed. (laughs) I thought, "If anyone sees this I'll never live it down". I couldn't even help her get up, and it's terrible. No, I just remember coming home - - -. And I remember coming home from school a lot too, and you could see in one of the shop windows across the road. There was a seat outside the gates of some sort. I think it was a bus stop for some reason. And I'd look in the shop window before I come round the corner just to see if she was sitting there waiting for me. And if she wasn't there I'd think, "Oh, she hasn't come". Oh, it was terrible - isn't it terrible. When I come inside and I'd look at the seats - - -. Come through - - -. I don't know, I suppose those doors and a big arch, I don't know what it was, I think. And then I'd look to see if she was there and if she wasn't I'd have another sigh of relief and if she was I used to think, "Oh how embarrassing. I wish she'd go". All the time I was sitting with her I'd think, "Oh gee, I wish she'd go and leave me alone".

Did she bring you anything?

Yes. Yes, she used to bring me chips and stuff like that. Savoury biscuits. Oh one day she really embarrassed me. She brought me down some chicken and I thought, "I can't eat this". She said, "Give it to them and put it in the fridge and you can have it for tea," and I thought, "I don't want to eat this".

Why did you feel so self-conscious?

(laughs) I don't know - I really don't know. But, oh, it was terrible. Yes, I thought "I'm going to get picked on". Maybe because I thought I'd get picked on. I usually did. I expected it. Still copped it anyway.

Can you tell me a little bit about the recreation time? The kinds of things that you got up to?

Oh, just mainly playing in the yard I think. Not that much really.

Did you get up to things that you weren't suppose to?

Oh we all did that, yes. (laughs) But I can't remember - - -. I can't remember a lot of things that we used to get up to.

You told me in the preliminary interview about an incident with a nun - Sister Claudette?

Oh Sister Claudette, yes. (laughs)

Can you tell me about that/

Oh yes, the nuns were playing tennis one day and I went and put on a school uniform, put the other one on my waist and went and sat in the parlour. I knew that she was getting ready to go out and I sat in the parlour and waited with my back to her, with a nun's veil on as well, and somebody went and told her there was someone to see her and she come running down the stairs and into the parlour and I turned around. I said, "Hello Sister Claudette," and she freaked - she went red. (laughs) She cracked a mental. Never forgotten that one.

Did you get punished?

I don't remember. I just remember her cracking a mental because she was late, because she was going out.

So what do you mean, cracking a mental?

Oh just, I don't know, telling me off I think. She just went nuts. (laughs) That's all I remember.

What sort of relationship did you have with the nuns?

I don't know. They weren't around a lot really. It was mainly the girls really, from what I can remember. That sort of - - -. It was the big ones looking after the little ones mainly.

Did you have a big girl looking after you when you were young?

I must have done but I can't remember. I can't remember who it was.

You told me earlier that a girl made your first communion dress, an older girl.

Yes.

Can you tell me a little bit about that?

That was Winsome. I remember her coming to the orphanage and measuring me up.

Who was Winsome?

Winsome, she was one of the older girls. For some reason she took to me. I don't know whether I might have been her charge when I was little. I don't know. And then I remember her coming back again and she'd sort of got the dress together and then I tried it on. And then after that, when I - well, when I had her for confirmation, asked her to be my confirmation sponsor - she came to the orphanage with these two dresses for confirmation. One was sort of almost psychedelic pink - buttons up the front and a belt - and the other one was white and it had little red

flowers on it and a beading around the waist with a bow on it. Anyway I picked the white one with the little flowers on it and that sort of thing. And Bernadette Daw had seen them both and she said, "I'm going to pick the other one," and I thought, "I don't care - I like the one I've got". I remember that, yes.

Do you remember your first communion?

Yes I do, yes.

What would happen?

Sister Carmel got me and Kathy Easton up for - - -. I don't remember any of the other kids being around. She got us up early. We went out to the sleep-out and had breakfast - she made us some toast and a cup of tea. And then I don't remember much about being in the church or anything. Then we came out of church - that was Holy Cross at Goodwood, the old church. Then we walked over to St Thomas's, had a communion breakfast there, photos taken. Oh, and we had photos taken in the garden too, the front garden at the orphanage.

Did you make your communion with the children from St Thomas's?

Yes we did, yes. Then - - -.

Was this a special day for you?

Yes, yes, it was. Yes, it was always very good.

Did you get to have a party?

I can't remember what happened after that. I don't know. I just remember communion, that's all.

Do you remember other special religious days?

Oh, one Palm Sunday, yes. Father Holland did a good job of that.

Why was that?

I don't know, because it was just nice.

Can you describe what would happen?

We all go down on the lawn - the big lawn down the back of the orphanage.

This is all the children?

Yes, before mass. He'd bless the palms and everything and then we'd all get a palm. And then we'd come back down the side - down the side of the tennis court - up round the merrygoround, across the quadrangle, back into the church and then he'd say mass. Oh, I just remember Palm Sunday, always have.

Why do you remember it?

Because it's not done the same way since. (laughs) Any other church or anywhere I've been it hasn't been the same way. [break in recording]

Was there any special feast days that you celebrated?

July 19th, the Feast of St Vincent de Paul.

What would happen on that day?

We'd have mass. We'd have mass and then we'd have a party and then the big kids would have a social. I remember one year - we all got a present too. I remember one year we got pillows and we all went racing upstairs through the cross door. I tripped over a school case. fell on top of me, twisted my knee and I had a greenstick fracture. I've never forgotten that, and my knee aches in winter because of that.

What happened when you got the fracture? Did you have to go to hospital?

We went to the Children's and had an x-ray and they found it was fractured. Yes, just a greenstick fracture. I just couldn't do sport, for a while until it was all right, at school. I just remember sitting there while everyone else was doing sport and watching. Yes, I think it was only St Vincent de Paul's Feast Day I think.

What about Christmas? What would happen at Christmas time?

Oh we had a Christmas party and that was really good.

Can you describe that to me? Who used to do the decorations?

Oh, I can't remember.

Was there any special food?

I can't remember what we had. But I do remember, as far as decorations go, that Christmas tree. There was a little Christmas tree and it had a music box on it and you wound it up and the tree turned around. [break in recording]

You were describing the Christmas tree.

Yes, the small Christmas tree.

Did the children get to decorate it?

I don't remember doing that, decorating the trees or anything. I remember Sister Lucy and the lady there, she used to make the Christmas puddings and if you went down the cellar you had to watch where you were walking because they were all hanging in the cellar. She used to make them. I suppose it was the usual thing. We had mass and then we had the party.

Was there entertainment?

Yes, there - - -. Was there a social after that or not? I can't remember.

I can recall Carol Latter singing to Father Holland, *Hey Big Spender*^.

(laughs) I don't remember that, no.

Then you got a present?

Yes, we all got presents.

What sort of presents did you get?

I can't remember when I was younger, but sort of in the later years we got to pick what we wanted and I usually picked a record because I was a music lover in those days. I used to switch off with music. And one thing I did remember about Janet's group, we were always told to turn the radio off in the dormitory (laughs) and, I don't know, the radio was left on and I was told to turn it off and I left it on, and she went upstairs and it was still on and then she got us all together and said, "Right, who left the radio on?" and nobody would own - "I'll finally get back of this group - I'm sick of this". "Who left the radio on?" Nobody would own up. And then afterwards they were all saying, "It was you,," and saying, "No it wasn't me, it wasn't me". And she said, "Right, until I find out every week I'm going to dock ten cents out of your pocket money," and I thought, "I'm going to get this group back," and to this day I haven't told that group yet - until now. (laughs) One of them knows. Oh dear. It's off the track, off the track. I just think of that.

No, that's fine. Can you remember your birthdays? Would anything special happen?

Yes, when we were younger we had a party and we got to ask some of our friends. I don't remember mine. I remember being asked to Raeline O'Neill's once.

What happened?

Oh, just had a - - -. We went into, oh, St Mary's side. That small room. You know that small room near the gallery? When you went upstairs and you first walked in, you walked in that door upstairs and it went up to the gallery. Janet's room was there, room.

The sheet room?

Not the sheet room - not the long part of the gallery. Janet's room was there but there's a room in here and there was a table there.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A: SIDE B

You were saying about Raeline's party.

Yes, and I can remember too - - -. Whosever birthday it was anyway, “If you’re not going to be my friend I’m not going to ask you to my party”. I mean there was all these kids. (laughs) I remember that. Yes, I remember going to Raeline’s mainly, and the chocolate cake - chocolate sponge, round sponge cake - that was usually the birthday cake, with bottles of soft drink.

Did you give a present to anyone?

No. No, we didn’t do it. I don’t think. I don’t think so.

So did the orphanage, or did the nuns give a present to the child?

Yes, I think the nuns did, I think. Pretty sure.

What about birthday cards?

I don’t remember any birthday cards.

Can you remember outings that you used to go on?

Yes, we used to go with, oh, youth groups, that many youth groups, to the zoo. And we had - - -. Christmas time was busy. They usually crammed everything in to one week. There was - - -. Oh, I think it was around the time of the pageant. There was the pageant, there was the drive-in.

Tell me about the pageant?

The pageant? Oh, the pageant. (laughs) I’ve never forgotten the pageant because we always - we always sat - - -. Our table was always near the kids from the Spastics Centre.

This is the Lord Mayor’s Christmas party?

Party, yes, after the pageant. I can remember always being sat next to them and it used to put me off, just watching all these kids being fed. But now I understand it all with my work and everything. I cope with it really well now.

How did the orphanage children react to all the other disadvantaged kids?

I don’t know. I don’t know. I don’t even know if anyone else noticed, but it sort of stood out to me. And I can remember Dick Moore standing up there saying, “You can’t leave until everything on the table’s been eaten,” and I thought, “How can I eat sitting here?” I sort of wasn’t prejudiced against these kids and that, but it just - - -. I don’t know, it just really struck me for some reason. All these disabled kids sitting there and - - -. I can remember a few years sitting there with them. And then getting off the bus and walking over to our section.

What do you mean, our section?

The sections that were sectioned off for the kids from the children's homes. Walking over to our section and all the ordinary people on the other side - - -. One side of the street was sort of for all the kids - I think it was King William Street - for all the kids from homes and that, and then the other side it was just the - - -. I don't know, the ordinary people.

The general public?

The general public, yes. Just the ordinary people. And just getting off the bus and walking to our area and that sort of thing, it was a bit weird.

How did you feel?

Like I was being watched (laughs) by all these - "Well, what are these people looking at me for? I'm not in this pageant". (laughs)

Did you feel stigmatised?

Yes, yes, I suppose, yes, again.

What other outings did you go on?

What else was there?

I can recall on bus trips singing songs. Do you recall that?

Oh, we're getting into music now. Oh no. Oh, what was *Found a Peanut*? That was another one too wasn't it?

Could you sing it?

[sings] "Found a peanut, found a peanut, (laughs) found a peanut - - -". I can't go through the whole thing. Yes I did.

Would you be able to sing some of those songs to me?

[sings] "Cracked it open, cracked it open, cracked it open yes I did."

What about the orphanage song? If you could sing the orphanage song for me.

I don't believe I'm doing this. (laughs) It's unreal. [sings] "Down by the subway, right on the busline / There is a home we call our own / A hundred years old now and still standing proudly / Known by the name of the Goodwood Girls' Home. / Carol is the tallest and Kay is the smallest / And Leda is the quietest of us all. / The Cooks are the fightiest / The D.....s are the cheekiest / and poor old Sister Margaret has to put up with us all." All right, that's it.

That's all that you remember?

Yes, that's all. That's my version that I remember, yes.

Did all the children appear in this song?

Well that's what I - that's what I remember. Yes, the version that I got, yes.

Where did this song come from?

..... I just knew it - I just knew it.

Were there special occasions that you sang it?

No, I don't remember, no. It's just something you picked up along the way and it's just remembered.

Were there other songs that you remember?

There was only that rhyme. (laughs)

Would you like to say that rhyme?

"..... here comes the" Oh, revolting. (laughs) "Dibby, dibby, dibby, it's no green" (laughs) I can't stop laughing. I'll start again - calm down. "Dibby, dibby, dibby, it's not green pie." (laughs) "Dead cat's eye. Spread it on bread and make it thick, then wash it down with a cold cup of sick."

Did you sing this around the nuns?

Oh we probably did and got told off for it. (laughs)

Where did you learn this from?

I don't know where that come from either.

One of the other children?

Must have been. Yes, when the nuns weren't around.

Can you tell me what sort of things that you would have got up to when the nuns weren't around?

I got caught for smoking on the oval, thanks to Joe Mc..... and his big mouth.

When was this? There were obviously boys there at some stage?

Yes, in the later years some of our girls had their brothers with them, sort of to keep the families together. And then I remember one day I was standing in that small room with the laundry with Patsy Larkholme. And, oh, I think the laundry woman, Josephine, had coffee and sugar in a cupboard and we went in there with Patsy and she said, "Oh, do you want to make some toffees?" And I said, "Well, how are we going to do that?" She said, "Well come out here". So we went out the back into this little room. Anyway there was a host-maker in there.

This is the communion host?

Yes, the communion host - there was a host-maker. She said, "We can turn this on and make it hot and it'll be a stove, right". Anyway we put some sugar and some

water in these paper cups - I don't know how we didn't kill ourselves. Anyway we were mixing it up. Anyway it was starting to get warm and she was saying, "Yes, see, it's starting to dissolve," and all that sort of stuff. Anyway Maxina Dunne, she appeared on the scene as well - I think it was just the three of us. And then I don't know who was holding the top of the host-maker up, but all of a sudden there was this whopping great bang - the fuse blew. And anyway Maxina freaked out and ran out and with that, whoever was holding the handle dropped it and of course it went splat and the sugar and water - the stuff went everywhere - and it all went on the host-maker and it made it all go black and sticky and horrible. She went racing up to one of the nuns and said, "There's a big bang in the laundry," and then we got into trouble for that. (laughs)

What happened to you?

I don't know. And then Janet and I, her and - - -. This is when she made her first communion, because I think she wore my dress for her first communion. We went round the strawberry patch and were pinching strawberries. Susie Leder caught us and told us.

Told on you?

Yes. Told on us, yes - she dobbed on us. She told Mother and Mother sent me and Janet to bed, I remember that.

How would you normally get punished?

Ah, and picture nights, swearing at Anna S..... and she dobbed on me too. I got sent to bed - I wasn't allowed to go to the pictures.

Did you look forward to going to the pictures?

Yes I did. Yes, I did for some reason. I don't know why, but it was good.

Can you describe one of the picture nights - what would happen?

Oh, we'd all go in the study room. I remember Mr Craddock very well.

Who was he?

He was the man that ran the films. I think I liked the noise, the sound of the projector too. I don't know why, but I did - the crackling sound that it made.

What was the atmosphere like on picture night?

It was pretty good I think, pretty good, yes. I suppose seeing somebody different too, different people.

What do you mean, seeing different people?

Like adults that we didn't normally see. I remember in the later years there was another guy that come and did it and he had a bald head and we used to call him Egg Head. Oh no, they just seemed like nice people.

Do you recall visitors other than your mother coming to see you?

I suppose not coming to see me, but coming to see us. I remember the seminarians.

Who are the seminarians?

Oh, who were they in those days? There was a lot of them. There was Paul Birke, Peter Vinkini, John van der Linden.

These are the trainee priests?

Trainee priests. Chris Aidy - I won't forget Chris Aidy.

Why can't you forget him?

(laughs) I don't know, because he sort of had a lot of contact with us and he sort of mucked around with us when we were teenagers and, I don't know, just carried on like a teenager himself I suppose.

So what did the seminarians do when they came to visit?

Oh, they'd come and have - - -. They used to come one night a week, I think it was Thursday night, and they'd have tea with us and go from table to table. I don't know, I can't remember whether they came for anything else. I remember they did a big - - -. They did a mass, a joint mass with Father Holland. There was quite a few of them came. Whether they were about to be ordained or whatever I don't know, but I remember this mass that they did, this heap of them. Alan Winter was another one I remember.

Did you used to get to play with them?

Yes, they used to muck around and stir us, yes. Yes, they were pretty good, yes.

Do you remember any specific ones?

Oh, not really no. Things that we did. Oh, they all just sort of mucked around and had a good time with them I suppose.

Were they the only males that you had contact with?

Oh Father Holland was there over the years. brother, or whether he was a father figure or what, I'm not sure. H..... Sims. Oh, and Dominic, the gardener.
(laughs)

Can you tell me about him?

Oh, we used to all stir him up. We'd throw stones on the lawn so they'd bounce off and hit him when he went over the lawn with a lawnmower. Stand up on the balcony and call out to him and he'd abuse us - I mean, he's Italian. He used to go - - -. I remember one day he had a pigeon and he broke its neck in front of us.

What was your reaction?

I didn't like him when he did that. I thought, "You cruel man". I remember Sandy and Joe in the earlier years, the big shed down the back - - -.

Who's Sandy and Joe?

Oh they were workers. I remember them mainly messing around with chooks - chopping their heads off and seeing all these chooks running around without their heads. I don't know, how many other males were there?

Do you remember when the swimming pool was given to us?

I remember the hole being dug in the ground. That was when I had my tonsils out, around that time. And, oh, the swimming instructor, I remember him. I can see his face but I can't remember his name. He'd come and teach us to swim and then some of - - -. I think some of the girls started going - - -. He was from the Unley pool and I think some of the girls started going there too - I don't know why I can't remember it being opened or anything, the opening. I remember waiting at the gate and the first one, you know, running in to see who was going to be the first one in the pool. And Kathy Easton slipped in between the lawn - - -. She slipped. In between the edge of the lawn there's a bit of a groove and then there's cement. She tripped over that running to get in the pool and she cracked her teeth. I remember her doing that. That was - - -. Oh well, just liked the pool - that was good.

Do you remember your bathing routine?

Just sitting there waiting for Sister Carmel to come and tell you to go and have your bath and we sat in the - those silver trough things - and had a bath.

Did you share a bath with other people?

Yes, there was always someone sitting down the other end. Oh, I'm just thinking about those baths. It's terrible when I think about it. I can look at the photos but actually thinking of what it was like when I had a bath in them. And there was this smell - a funny sort of smell about them too. Whether it was the water I don't know, but it was sort of - - -. Yes, very weird, strange. Strange it was.

Did this change over time?

Oh it changed, yes. They had some more baths put in - these trendy square mod baths.

How did the children respond?

Yes, they thought it was good, yes. Oh those stainless steel baths. Oh hell, what an effect - just thinking about them. Oh yuk! Yes, we thought we were pretty cool there, in those baths.

Did all the children share the same bathroom?

Yes. Yes, they were all just sort of called at different times.

What, the different age groups?

I think so, yes, from memory. I just can remember just sitting waiting to be called to come and have a bath.

Do you remember when the little boys were there?

I can remember - - -. The boys I can remember was Lindsay and Barry, Jamie Quinless.

Do you remember what the little boys got up to?

Oh Barry and Lindsay, they got up to everything. (laughs) Oh, they were little darlings those two.

Can you remember anything?

Mischief, trouble. They were into everything.

I can recall them peeing on the little girls bath.

Oh yes, I can remember that, yes. Yes, that's right, yes. Doing all those mischievous things, and Barry breaking his arm and belting everyone with his plater. (laughs)

How old was Barry?

Oh I think he was about five, I think. And Lindsay was about, I don't know, three, even younger. Gee, who were the other boys? I can't remember the other boys.

Do you remember any significant changes that occurred over time between the nuns and yourselves? The kind of interaction you had with them?

As we got older things really changed. This new age sort of appeared. They sort of - - -. I suppose treated us more like we were human beings I think. Just rather than sort of being in an institution, like the early days. It was more relaxing. Like we could - - -. We had old record players and all that sort of stuff, and we could sort of do our own thing.

So life was very regimented at one stage then less so later?

Yes, less so later, yes, in later years.

How did the children react to that?

Oh I don't really know.

How did you react, do you remember?

Yes, I thought it was good. It wasn't too bad. Yes, it was fairly good. But then sort of different people appeared on the scene. Like they started having, oh, well lay staff I suppose. People coming and sort of - - -. People that weren't nuns, and working at the orphanage and stuff like that, and it sort of, I don't know, it made a difference I suppose. They had a bit more contact with the outside world and it made a difference I suppose - changed attitudes or something. Sort of back in the old days it was sort of the nuns that - - -. The nuns had the nuns' part. You couldn't go in there and all that sort of stuff. You weren't allowed to and it was a big secret, hush, hush, hush. They had their own dining room. Then all of all a sudden they sort of come out and started mixing more with the kids and we got to - - -. In the end we got to see - well I did - got to see those places that we were never allowed to see, like the so-called nuns' part and all that sort of stuff. It was more sort of - - -. They were more homely I think. Because it was, oh, I don't know.

Can you tell me about when you first got to see the nuns' area? Did they take you through or did you sneak through yourself?

The first thing I can remember about the nuns' part was having our hepatitis injection. They took us in the and we walked through the nuns' part, and that was theirs and then going back - I think back to our dormitories and that. So I think they did it that was I think so that the ones that hadn't - didn't have it done - wouldn't upset the ones, and they were the ones that hadn't had the injection. That's the first time I remember going in there. Then I remember shifting out of Janet's group (laughs) and having my own room, but that was after the - - -. Those rooms upstairs used to be the nuns' rooms.

How old were you when you got your own room?

Oh I was about - - -. Oh, I must have been fourteen or something I think, fourteen or fifteen, although I can't remember. I was a teenager anyway.

Were these the nuns' old cells that you were in?

Yes, yes. You know, the ones sort of up the front of - - -. Up near the front of the building. Actually I had the room that was Janet's room. And there was, oh, Susie V....., Karen Vincent, me. Was there Nanette, Nanette O'Brien, up there. Sister Carmel had a room up there.

Did you get to decorate this in any way, or personalise it in some way?

Not really so much my room, but I remember the dormitory on St Mary's side very well. Always had sweet everywhere.

What do you mean sweet?

Sweet posters and pictures

Oh the group you mean?

The group, Sweet, yes, in one corner. Bernadette had Rod Stewart. Veronica. Who did Veronica have plastered all over the wall? Oh, I can't remember. Cynthia had Slade I think.

So the children were able to decorate their own spaces?

Yes, their own spaces. And I remember one night - - -. I don't know who I had. I had a mix of stuff for my wall. I woke up one night in St Mary's side and it must have been the door - the dormitory door slammed in the wind. I woke up and I heard this bang and I looked at the wall and saw all this black and I thought, "Oh, the room's fallen down". But it wasn't the room, it was my posters. And I'm laying there thinking, "What am I going to do? Nobody's awake - nobody's heard this". And then I realised it was just me posters on the wall and the door had slammed. Gee I freaked out that night.

How old were you?

That's when I was a teenager. I thought, "I can't tell anyone about this". (laughs) happened. Haven't forgotten that too. So it sort of got a bit more personalised. In the big dormitory we sort of - - -. When we were younger there wasn't any room really. We couldn't because there was a lot more of us. And I suppose as the numbers broke down the nuns had more time to get to know us I suppose, get to know, I don't know, what teenagers are like, what young kids are like, what they like doing. But in the early days I think it was sort of get up, get the routine. They still had to have a routine I think, I suppose, to get through. They would have, to get through, and they just had to stick to the routine. In the later days we were a bit freer because there wasn't so many.

Was there any training or advice given to you in the way of moral values, or how you should be conducting yourself as young ladies?

Oh, "Get your elbows off the table". We had that one from Janet. Oh, I really don't know. Oh there would have been. I mean I wouldn't have come this far otherwise. I've been told I've got good values - always to keep my values - so I must have

done something good. I must have learnt something I think. And when I stop to think, "Well what are my values?" (laughs) at times. I don't know.

Overall how do you think you coped with the place?

Survived I think. We were survivors. It's made me very strong - I learnt a lot. I can survive anything. I mean a lot of things have happened since and I've thought, "Am I ever going to live through this?" and then all of a sudden the sort of faith or something. I've just got this faith and I know that I'm going to get through and I usually get through. Then when I look back I think, "Gee, I'm stronger again". Yes, young years certainly sort of helped sort of pulling me through now.

You mean because it was so tough then?

Yes.

You feel you can get through anything?

Yes, I can get through anything, yes.

So overall, when you look back, how do you feel about the orphanage?

Oh, I think it was - - -. Yes, I think it was good. If I had to live my life over again I think I'd live it the same way. Only some parts I wouldn't want to happen again, but then again, you know, you get stronger from learning all these things.

What were your worst memories of the orphanage?

[break in recording]

We were discussing your worst memories of the orphanage.

I remember being called a wet bed, along with all the others that wet their bed.

Did that hurt you?

Yes, yes, and being picked on as well. I remember - - -. Yes, it did hurt and upset me. I remember Rosemary wetting her pants one day in school and seeing how embarrassed she was and thinking, "Gee, I know what that's like". But that's sort of after I stopped going - - -. Well, Sister Carmel stopped calling us wet beds I suppose. And I had someone else - we had Janet looking after us then. But it's given me a good sense of value because of the work I do now. I really get on with my clients with dom. care. I understand a lot - a lot of the things that they've got to put up with. And it's a terrible - - -. Some of the basic routine and that is pretty horrific, what they have to do each day, just to get out of bed and - - -. It's like I said, I can relate to it.

Do you remember any really happy memories?

Not really no. [pause] Happy? With some of the people that I stayed with for holidays, yes. Yes, some of the girls, sort of the friendships.

Did you feel camaraderie?

[queries question]

Did you feel camaraderie with the other children?

What does that mean?

A shared - - -?

Yes.

Something that sort of - - -?

Something was there. Yes. Like you could meet - - -. Like not even see some people for years and all of a sudden you see them and it's like you saw them yesterday. Yes, it all sort of - - -. It doesn't come back to you, but you sort of - - -. You just know that they know. Well this interview's good because somebody actually knows what I'm talking about.

What about your emotional life at the orphanage?

Very confused mainly. I'm sort of just starting to work all that out now.

Did you learn social skills?

No. Oh no, I suppose I did. I must have learnt something. I'm still learning about it now. It's hard to describe it all. Yes. I always sort of had - - -. Yes, had to be ladies and all this sort of stuff.

Did the nuns say something to you about that?

I remember one nun saying that - - -. The kids on St Mary's used to come down the stairs and they were all lined up in lines, and they were all respectable and nice young ladies. St Anthony's side they used to herd down the stairs when they were going out. Used to be sort of rough and tumbled and not organised and nice like St Mary's side. But this particular nun said that one thing about the girls on St Anthony's side, you can always trust them and you always knew that they were telling the truth. The girls on St Mary's side were the biggest liars that ever lived. (laughs)

A nun said this to you?

Yes, Mother said that. Yes, Mother told me that. She told me that a few years ago. I thought, "Oh that's nice. I was on St Mary's side - St Anthony's side". (laughs) I was on the good side. Yes, and one of the values I've learnt is honesty. I've been told by a lot of people that I'm very honest. Sometimes I think do people think I've

got a big mouth because I'm so honest, but I don't think so. I think I'm just honest and that's it, and people like that, when you're honest.

Do you think you picked that up from the orphanage experience?

Yes, I think so. I picked it up from somewhere. Yes, I think I've picked it up from the orphanage.

From having to live with a lot of other people at close quarters?

Yes, I think so. Yes, I think.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B: TAPE 2 SIDE A

Is there anything in particular that you'd like to add?

I really don't know.

Did you ever run away?

No, no, but I was told once that if I wasn't happy there I could go somewhere else.

Who told you that?

Sister Carmel. A couple of the other girls ran away. The police brought them back one night. I don't know why they ran away. Whether they weren't happy or whether they did it just for something to do I really don't know. I just remember them doing it and she said to me about it. I think they asked me if I wanted to go with them, I think, and I said, "I don't know," but I said, "No". Of course, you know, being honest, they told her that they asked me and then I think that's why Sister Carmel said, "You can go somewhere else if you're not happy".

How would you characterise your experience at the orphanage? Was it happy, sad, mixed?

Mixed. I'll say mixed, yes.

Were you depressed?

Yes, yes, depressed, had headaches, cried a lot.

Was this a common experience?

Yes, yes, I reckon - I reckon it was, yes, a lot of the time. Looking for something that - - -. Something that wasn't there. And now looking back on it, I think it was mainly my father not being around. I think that was the hardest thing, sort of not knowing where he was or anything, or who he was. I've heard stories since, but I don't know whether they're the truth or not. Nobody seems to know. Just sort of sorting that out. I've been told, you know, that I'm looking for something and I'll never find it, and I think that's what it is. I've sort of been looking. I did a few years ago. I wrote a letter to this - - -. Well this guy who they told me it could be

and that sort of stuff, and he wasn't sort of interested. I just had this real thing about it for a couple of years at Christmas time. Really wanted to know, wanted to find out. But now it's sort of more - - -.

You mean who your father was?

Yes, who my father was. Not it's sort of, oh, "I hate you for doing this to me," but very sort of forgiving as well because maybe he doesn't even know that I exist. So sort of half and half.

Was this something that was talked about at the orphanage? The reasons why the children were at the home, was that discussed amongst the kids?

Not a lot no, not that I ever heard. No, I don't think so. But we all were just there as far as I knew. We were there and that was it. That was life, we were there. There's not really a great deal that I remember.

Do you know why that is?

No, I just don't. I don't know why I don't remember, no I don't. I haven't got a clue why. I don't know.

Does it worry you?

No. Because we were, I don't know - - -. We were just there and we grew up that way and not much we could do about it. We just did it.

So is there anything that you'd like to add before we finish up?

What can I add? I think I'm going to learn a lot from actually reading this and listening to it. I think it's going to be a big help.

You feel this is therapeutic?

Yes, I do, I do. I think it's, yes, a very good thing to do.

Are you looking forward to the reunion of girls who were there in the sixties?

Yes, I am, yes. Really looking forward to that. Yes, it'll be really good.

Why?

Well, just to catch up on everybody and what they're doing. I'm going to have a good time, have a laugh. Yes, muck around, like the old days. I think it's going to be really good, yes.

OK, we'll leave it there.