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Full transcript of an interview with

EMERITUS PROFESSOR FREDA BRIGGS

on 14 December 2004

by Rob Linn

for the

EMINENT AUSTRALIANS ORAL HISTORY
PROJECT

Recording available on CD

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Interview with Emeritus Professor Freda Briggs conducted by Rob Linn on 14th December 2004, for the Eminent Australians Oral History Project of the National Library and the State Library of South Australia.

TAPE 1A SIDE A

Interview with Emeritus Professor Freda Briggs. She'll be speaking with me, Rob Linn, for the Oral History Collection conducted by the National Library of Australia. And, Freda, on behalf of the Director General of the National Library I'd like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this, that's very kind.

Now, do you understand that the Library owns copyright in the interview material, but disclosure will be subject to any disclosure restrictions you impose in completing the form of consent?

Yes.

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

Yes.

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

This interview is taking place today, on the 14th December 2004, at Rostrevor, South Australia.

Freda, can we begin with talking about your family background in Huddersfield, England? You were born in 1930: tell me a little bit about your mother and father.

My father was born in 1904, and he was in a railway family and so of course he went into the railway as well. But he must have, I think, won a scholarship to a private school because, unlike the other members of the family, he became a clerk, which gave him lots of privileges that the others didn't get: the others being an uncle who was in cartage – because in those days most parcels were transported by railway, Christmas presents came by railway and were delivered to your door by horse and cart – and Grandad was the foreman of the railway yard and wore a bowler hat; whereas my father sat in an office, on a high stool with a high desk, not quite a quill

pen but not far off, and he recorded all the trucks that came in and what was in them and the weight of arrival and departure, and he did that for many, many years. At one time he went into passenger services and then, before he retired, he became a sales rep[resentative] for British Railways; but when I was very young he was with the London–Midland–Scottish Railways that disappeared when there was nationalisation. On my mother's side, my family was actually quite middle-class because it was very unusual for people to own their own houses in that part of the world at that particular time, but they'd bought their house then had a new one built. Grandad was a sales rep in the woollen industry, he was an expert on very fine worsted fabrics for suiting, and he carried on working until he was eighty.

Now, this is your mother's father?

That's my mother's side, yes. Neither of my grandmothers worked and whilst I lived at home my mother never worked either, because in those days there weren't jobs for married women: if you were a schoolteacher you were supposed to leave when you married; if you were a telephonist likewise, and even with the Post Office. There were no jobs for you once that wedding ring was on your finger. So they only had a very brief period of a working life.

What were your father and mother's Christian names?

Father had the dreadful name of Horace, (laughs) and Mother had Hilda, and they didn't have middle names because there was a lot of inverted snobbery in my family; they didn't think it was appropriate to give children second names. Neither my husband nor I have second names.

So, Freda – and your maiden name was – – –?

My name was Akeroyd, which I discovered was actually Norman. My ancestors went over to England at the time of William the Conqueror [in 1066] and settled in a little town called Birstall, which is not far from Leeds. 'Akeroyd' came from 'D'Akerode', which was 'a family living in a wood'. (laughs)

So is Akeroyd A-C-R-O-Y-D?

Ours was A-K-E-R and originally it was O-D-E, and it became A-K-E-R-O-Y-D. I was glad to get rid of it because I always had to spell it wherever I went. (laughter)

So you are ‘progeny of the oak’, Freda?

That’s right. On the other side of the family, on my maternal grandparents’ [side], her great-grandfather was the doctor who served on Nelson’s ship and apparently amputated his arm. There was a model of him in Madame Tussaud’s Waxworks and you could identify him by his nose: we have a very distinctive nose on my mother’s side of the family.

And siblings, Freda?

Siblings: one brother, nine years younger than me, who emigrated to New Zealand in 1973 and he was the only Akeroyd in New Zealand until he had a son.

Tell me, what was it like growing up in the Great Depression years? Was it a struggle?

Actually, we were better off between 1930 and the Second World War than most families, because the white-collar workers were relatively well cared-for, and so compared with other people in the area we were living a comparatively good life in terms of what we could eat. And of course I always had good clothes because we were getting the fabrics from my grandfather and his sister was also a tailor, so I was the best-dressed kid in town. But, funnily enough, I didn’t particularly like that because it made me different from other people.

Did your mother make your clothes?

My mother could do everything. She was an excellent household manager. She could make clothes, but not tailoring. She made dresses and she knitted. They grew their own vegetables – as far as you could in England: with the dreadful weather they have there it was brussels sprouts and cabbage all winter if the caterpillars didn’t eat it first. We had our own chickens and Mum made preserves and put the eggs in isinglass¹ to keep them through the winter and put beans in salt to preserve them. She was an excellent manager and made do with a minimum amount of money.

And, Freda, you mentioned to me as well that really everything in those days was based on delivery to the home in the district, that’s provisions, so there was tea and milk or the baker would call.

¹ Gelatine.

Yes. The tea man came once a fortnight. The milkman came twice a day – it was the farmer who delivered and initially he had a can and put the milk in a jug for you, but restrictions came in and I'm not sure when pasteurisation was introduced because of course in those days people were dying of tuberculosis, which was coming from the cows. Kids were vulnerable: we had kids who died of diphtheria and meningitis and TB, and parents were always very concerned about children's health. My mother was really delighted that I had broad shoulders and was sturdily built, because she thought that that would protect me from all these infectious diseases.

Did it?

Well, actually it must have done because I'm still here! (laughter)

Freda, can you tell me a little bit about the social life in Huddersfield in those years? You were staunchly chapel as a family, I gather.

Only me. My parents were Anglicans initially but they stopped going to church, as lots of people do, as they got older. I never knew them to go to church at all, but we were sent to Sunday School because they thought it was a good thing to do. And in fact there *was* no social life outside the chapel. I don't remember my parents ever going anywhere other than holidays: because Dad worked on the railway we had two free railway tickets each year and we used to go to Colwyn Bay every year, where my father had had holidays as a child, and my parents continued that habit. But apart from that they didn't go anywhere. They didn't go to the cinema, they never went to the theatre, there was never money to spare for socialising, and they didn't entertain in the home at all. Occasionally we would go to grandparents and have tea; at Christmas we always went for lunch. But the socialisation for children was through the chapel or the church and the Sunday School, and they looked after us pretty well.

I went to Sunday School twice on Sundays. Unfortunately, after Sunday School, they would take us into the chapel where you had lay preachers who thumped the pulpit and threatened us with hell and damnation, but there were fascinating missionaries who would come with their slide shows – sepia slide shows, not even colour of course in those days. We also had concerts to raise money for charities. Doing good for others was really drummed into us and we were always involved in fundraising for one thing or another, and then of course you had the chapel anniversary where I was a singer at the age of six and doing solo performances. Then

you had the Harvest Festival, which was much the same. Whitsuntide was a glorious time because usually the weather was warming up a bit and we used to march all around the boundary of the parish, and sometimes we'd meet the Anglicans partway. And we had brass bands, and then we had picnics in the fields and entertainment for the kids – you know, all of these things surrounding chapel life involved races, potato sack races and all those sorts of things. And even during the War we managed to carry on doing that and having very sparse jam sandwiches for our picnic.

Now, what about at home, Freda? Was it a happy household in the sense of mother and father as one, or was there a bit of tension there? What was it like?

There was always tension for me because Father was a strict disciplinarian. It was very much children being kept in their place, not expressing any opinion. And this was widespread, my husband's family environment was the same. Even when I was an adolescent, you weren't allowed to disagree with your parents and you could be hit if you did disagree because that was classed as 'cheeky'. Now, there was nothing worse in that culture than having a cheeky or smart, answering-back child, so they really were keen on stopping that. The other thing was they did not want conceited children. You had to be obedient because being obedient would make you a good employee and the ultimate aim was for you to get a job and be able to keep that job.

So they were looking at stability of employment, basically.

Yes. And I also think that that came from the instability of the Depression. My father always had the ambition for me to work in a bank because banks maintained their staff during the Depression, it seems, and the fact that I wasn't a scrap interested in banks or money or maths didn't concern them at all; that was their aim.

Was thriftiness an important part of their worldview?

Ooh! Oh, absolutely! As long as I can remember I had a moneybox and I could not go into that moneybox, we had to take it to the bank to have it opened. And if anybody gave me money as a present it always went in the moneybox, I was never allowed to spend it. But bear in mind that at the age of twenty-one, despite all that saving, I still only had seven pounds. And when we married we only had seventy pounds.

And what year did you marry?

Nineteen fifty-two.

So saving wasn't easy, despite the thrift.

Oh! Well, you didn't have any extra money to spare, and when I was working it even became worse because, after the War, wages were fixed unless you were in a powerful trade union, and my father's wages were obviously very low and they were quite impoverished and I felt they were quite mean. (laughs)

Freda, one thing that was brought home to me talking to you last week was that your mother, particularly, really valued education and taught you to love books in a way that I would have thought was unusual for the time.

I don't know whether it was unusual, but certainly books were to be treasured. And one of the incentives for going to Sunday School, and even more so joining the Christian Endeavour ---. Christian Endeavour involved going to meetings one night a week – I can remember it very well – it was a Tuesday night and you had to learn for homework large chunks of the Bible and be able to recite them for exams; you had to know the travels that Jesus and everybody else made and be able to mark them on maps; and at the end of all this hard work you received a book, and I still have some of them. Sunday School prizes were really treasured – bearing in mind that the only time you received books would be for birthdays and Christmas presents, and there was a shortage of books during the War.

You intimated last week that, in a sense, your mother had married 'below herself', in English terms, with your grandfather working in the woollen trade really as a very reputable salesperson by the sounds, and was your great-grandfather an engineer I think, too – is that right?

Oh yes, Great-Grandad was an engineer. Great-Grandad had been working in Austria setting up new woollen mills there, yes. And they'd lived there for quite some years, but I think they had to return to England with the First World War because they were in danger.

Was your mother a reader?

Oh yes. My parents both went to public libraries but they also joined private libraries, and books were so treasured that I always had to wash my hands first before I was allowed to read them. And the books that I treasured were often magazines that had been hand-bound. I've got books of magazines that had flowers in them – I can't

remember what the names were – but every page has a picture of a flower with information about it. And they were 1920s. I've still got *Tiger Tim's annual* from 1920! (laughs)

Sounds to me like you had it really imbued in you, Freda, that books were something pretty special.

Absolutely. And I used to read in bed every night and when it came to bedtime it was always, 'I just want to finish the next chapter,' and then I would cheat and read another chapter.

Well, Freda, given your parents' love of books, where did you go for your education?

Ah! The local state school. I used to write books as well, by the way, when I was about six, because at that age I wanted to be an author, and I used to sew pieces of paper together to make my home-made book and write stories. The adults used to come round and laugh at them and I could never understand why. And one stood out in particular, where I'd written this story about a widow whose husband had died ten years ago, since when she'd had nine children. Because we were very naïve, you know! (laughs) And there was I writing, *and* illustrating, my own books.

So who was the model for you, as an author, at that age, do you remember?

I didn't have one. It was just reading books and fairy stories.

So you attended the local state school, that was Deighton Council –

Deighton Council School.

– and what was that like?

Well, I was one of the fortunates. So it was okay for me. But some of the kids were extremely impoverished. And one or two were stitched into their jumpers for the winter – I could never understand the logic of that, and I would imagine it smelled by the end of the winter! There were some strange things happen. But no, I was middle-class by comparison. This was it: even though we lived in what you would call a Housing Trust or Housing Commission, government housing, area – as most people did who were artisans or in the clerical sector because, as I said, very few people could buy houses, there weren't many houses being built for sale, either – but there

was certainly a strong class system there and okay, we were poor, but we were a heck of a lot better off than lots of others, and knew it.

My mother also created a situation where I was only allowed to play with certain children of parents similar to ourselves, and I wasn't allowed to play with children who spoke in Yorkshire dialect because I might end up not speaking reasonable English. (laughs) Which would have been true, by the way.

I was going to say that, given my friendship with a few of them, it's probably quite correct!

Yes. So she carefully selected playmates. And she would encourage the 'better' ones to come and play in my garden and deter the others by various means.

So the emphasis, even in schooling, was on a certain level of 'class relationship' – I'm not quite sure how to put it – well, at least your perceived place in society.

Yes. At that time there was the eleven-plus selection system, which wasn't as bad as it sounds because you could always have another shot at it at thirteen, but there was always the expectation that I would pass and go to a grammar school, an academic school, and that was my mother's ambition. I think they wanted me to become a teacher by that time, but I was very bored with school once I got to grammar school. Primary school was fine. I had very little competition, to be honest: I did well. But of course going to the grammar school I was up against strong competition from people who were higher up the social class who had professional parents. That was where my parenting let me down because, once I got into grammar school, my parents could not help me at all, with homework or whatever.

What, it was just beyond them?

Oh yes, yes. And they nagged, and that's the worst thing you can do because once you have nagging parents who are expressing their disappointment in you, you tend to pack up and say, you know, 'Blow it, I'll go and work in the woollen mill,' or whatever other horrors are there for you. My father used to say, 'Unless you do better at Maths, my girl, I will take you away from that school,' because, even though I had a scholarship, they were still having to pay nine pounds a term, which was a lot of money for them, and buying books of course and school uniform, which you wouldn't have had if you'd been still in the state system.

Now, the school, Freda, was Royds Hall Grammar –

Royds Hall Grammar School, yes.

– which was still a local school to you, was it?

I had to go into town and out again, it was about five miles – two bus journeys.

So it was a significant journey to get there.

Yes.

And the nature of the education, was it maths–science-based, or arts-based, or – – –?

(sighs) First year was fine, because I did very well at English and languages, but gradually it became more Science: Physics, Chemistry, all of which required maths, and they lost me.

Were young women encouraged to have an education in those years?

No, because there wasn't much ahead unless you could go to university, and that was beyond one's imagination. There were only twelve students in Years 12–13 – we had thirteen years at school in England – in the sixth form, we had sixth form I, sixth form II, and we had twelve in total who stayed on to that level. Most of the women went in for teaching. Those who wanted to go into nursing left earlier, but really you only had teaching or nursing as careers.

Why did university seem beyond you?

Well, I was the first person probably – no, I was the second; and I went as a mature age student, of course – nobody in our families had gone to university previously. I think only one person in our *street* had ever gone to university. It just was not expected. And you needed scholarships. There wasn't free university education in those days, that came in much later.

So even at the grammar school, was there that same feeling your mother and father had, that conceited children were not wanted and that integrity was the core value of life? Was that still in that – – –?

Integrity and sincerity, which were sometimes misused because North of England people will express an opinion whether it's being sought or not. There was conflict, really, because as a child you were not expected to express an opinion or be in

conflict, but as an adult it suddenly became okay for you to do so. And, you know, I've always enjoyed an argument and will disagree, but I've found actually in Australia, even in universities, that is not a popular thing to do.

Well, was argument encouraged at grammar school, though, for you?

We had a debating society even then, but at the same time you were suppressed because [children should be seen and not heard]. Oh, I got into trouble in Year 1 and I don't know how I dared do it actually, and that was in relation to the authority of prefects. We were introduced to prefects at grammar school, never heard of them before, and they had far too much power for their level of maturity. One was in charge of our class because the teacher was away and she told us not to talk and I said something to the person sitting next to me and for that she gave me the punishment of learning the whole of *The Lady of Shalott*² off by heart – and I can still recite most of it, by the way. And I thought that this punishment did not fit the crime so I refused to learn it, least of all over the weekend, which was the timeframe. So she sent me to the school principal and he said that I was too big for my boots. I thought this was a matter of (laughs) social justice – aged what, twelve, eleven? – and he said I was too big for my boots and on top of *The Lady of Shalott* I then had to learn *The ancient mariner*³, which I succeeded in doing but I can't quite quote as much of that as I can of *The Lady of Shalott*. But that was to stop me from expressing an opinion that differed from the norm and being – – –.

Even though, in your society, to have your opinion was considered to be one of the things that life was on about.

Yes. Yes, there were conflicts there, yes. Age twenty-one I think you're allowed to express an opinion.

Is that what it was? You mentioned earlier that Maths wasn't your –

Forte.

– forte, and that in fact the destination of the bank your father had hoped for never came to be. Now, when would you have left school, 1946, would that be about right?

² *The Lady of Shalott* (poem), Alfred Lord Tennyson.

³ *The rime of the ancient mariner* (poem), Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Yes.

Where did you head to at that point?

Well, certainly not the bank. Everybody said when I left school, ‘Ooh, we’re surprised that you’re going, we’re surprised that you’re not going in for teaching,’ but I was bored with school subjects which were the traditional French, History. Geography was terrible: we had to learn all about where the mines were in Australia and just put them on a map, and you never saw pictures of Australia. There was nothing, it was just rote learning. So I decided that was no longer for me and I wanted to do something different, so I had three options.

Did your mother want you to go to teachers’ college?

Yes, she did. But they said I would have to stay single till I was twenty-five to pay them back financially, and at the age of fifteen you can’t imagine *ever* living to the age of twenty-five. And by that time I had a boyfriend as well. So I had three options: the railways, which would have meant going to Manchester every day, which now seems like no distance at all but in those days it was a slower train and twenty-six miles; or working in Marks and Spencer’s, I never pursued that – but you had to go to a grammar school, believe it or not, in those days to work in Marks and Spencer’s.

In Marks and Sparks?

Marks and Spencer’s were very elitist in relation to their employees.

Is that right?

That is right, yes.

Despite their retail profile?

Yes. Bearing in mind there weren’t a lot of opportunities for women. Nursing I considered but I was too poor. I think the pay was something like ten shillings a week. Ken’s sister was a nurse and you really needed support from home or you couldn’t afford to do anything. She wasn’t even well-fed. So I looked at ICI⁴ and they offered me thirty-five shillings a week. Okay, I would not get free rail transport,

⁴ ICI – Imperial Chemical Industries.

which I would have had if I'd gone to work on the railways, but I went to ICI, thirty-five shillings a week for a forty-eight-hour week which included Saturdays. I wasn't quite the tea girl but you usually started out as the tea girl and then you became the mailroom girl and then you became a filing clerk – there was a definite career structure here – and from the filing clerk you had then a choice: you could train to become a secretary, at their expense; or a comptometer operator, which was the best-paid job of all. The advantage at ICI being that if you were young you had free meals there, bearing in mind that we're talking about immediate post-war when food was rationed, so to have great piles of chips and whatever for your meals was a real plus, it meant that at least you were fed once a day. If you went to night school you were fed twice a day because you had dinner as well, so we were all going to night school, weren't we? Not so much to learn, but so that we had a free meal (laughs) at ICI. It was a definite incentive to learn. So they would pay for you to get further education.

Was food expensive at the time?

It wasn't available. We were still rationed when we were married.

Yes, that would be right.

In fact, sometimes we think we were actually worse off after the War than we were during the War. Everything, everything, was rationed.

So there was definitely a career structure, as you've been describing. How did you fit in from the word go?

Bored. (laughs) But tolerated it because it was better than being at school. And I fitted in to night school, at TAFE⁵, very easily because you weren't treated like children there. I studied French, German and Spanish – I'd done French and German at school and I continued and by that time had a realistic expectation of one day travelling. And during the War, you can imagine, learning *German*. We had a German teacher and we gave her hell, because she was the enemy, and we had her in tears quite frequently. But post-war there was an incentive to learn foreign languages. And I also did a course in journalism and at one time I did an art course as well – as I said, there were lots of incentives to go to night school every night.

⁵ TAFE – Technical and Further Education (the Australian equivalent of then British night school).

And ICI encouraged this?

They paid for it. They paid your fees and fed you before you left work.

Pretty remarkable!

Yes. Also we had maternity leave in those days – 1950s – and had I stayed at ICI to the age of forty-five I could have retired on half pay. They didn't sack people once they were married.

Was there any cause for conflict there or was there just boredom?

Oh, boredom – until I was about the age of nineteen, and my job then was checking orders. Absolutely laborious. A card came in from the plant – it's a *huge* factory, it was five miles long, spewing out fumes and colour, you know. If it snowed it might have snowed red or pink, depending which dye was coming out that day – and on one occasion I accidentally let an order go through – it was the only time I ever *did* let a mistake pass me without spotting it – and two extra zeroes went on an order for nuts and bolts from Guest, Keen and Nettlefolds. They delivered them without questioning it, and we had a hundred-year supply of nuts and bolts arrive by train. There was this great furore, as you can imagine, and I just laughed and thought, (laughs) 'It's time I moved on.'

They didn't see the joke?

They didn't see the joke. And unfortunately for them I think they went metric shortly afterwards, so I don't know what happened to the nuts and bolts.

You mentioned to me previously, Freda, that at one point very early on in your employment you reported a chief engineer.

Oh, yes. You know, looking back it was a remarkable thing to do – again, this social justice creeps in, doesn't it? I was about fifteen, sixteen, and the chief engineer – I was working in the drawing office, there were about three females with a hundred and fifty men, and the only one who ever gave us any problem was the chief engineer who would come in with sex talk all of the time. And he would make snide comments, he would say, 'Oh, I saw you out with your boyfriend and I know what you've been doing,' and I got fed up with this and I went and reported him to the personnel officer. And, to their credit, they checked him out, found out he'd been doing it with the other women and moved the pair of us. Actually, he wasn't allowed

back in the drawing office where the women were. But that would have been counted as sexual harassment today.

Do you think it counted against you at ICI?

No, it didn't. Not at all. No, I think they tackled that in a very responsible way.

Now, Freda, when you make the – I don't know if the word 'slight' is correct, but you made the error with the nuts and bolts, what happens to you career after that? This is at age nineteen.

Yes. I discovered that at twenty you could join the police force in London. I saw this through an advertisement, and you couldn't join until you were twenty-one if you were in the North of England, and by this time I wanted to leave home anyway because my father was still being strict. For example, I had to be home at nine o'clock at night – even after I was married, if I was out after half-past nine visiting my in-laws he'd be on the doorstep saying, 'Where have you been until this time of night?' He was very controlling.

After you were married were you still living with your parents?

No, no, that was when I visited them. Even when I visited them, he was still controlling. So I said, 'That's it, it's time I left home,' and my husband, who was my boyfriend, was also thinking of leaving home but for different reasons. He was interested in getting a scholarship to go to the London College of Printing. And so I applied for the police force and I was accepted because I was sufficiently tall and they had higher expectations of women in terms of education – of course, by this time I had lots of TAFE certificates for the different languages, you see, (laughs) and so I was able to show that I continued my education. And so when I was twenty off I went to London.

And your father gave permission at the time?

He had to give written permission⁶. But you see, during the War, he had not been in the armed forces because he was grade four, but you had to do additional work voluntarily and he was a special constable. They had additional police who didn't have the same powers as real police, but he would be on night shift, so he would

⁶ Because I was under the age of twenty-one. – FB

leave home, catch the seven o'clock train to his work, he would get home about six o'clock, would have a meal and then put on his uniform and he would be out all night, and presumably manage to get forty winks standing in a police box, you know, like the ones that they have in the TV series of *Doctor Who*. So he quite approved of me joining the police, but my mother told me not long before she died that he was actually envious because my salary, joining the police force at the age of twenty, was in excess of his and he would have been well into his forties by that time.

I would have thought you needed the salary in London, anyway.

Well, no, because the advantage of going there was that they provided us with free accommodation and free meals. And free uniform, of course.

Of course. How difficult was it to get into the London police at that time, as a woman?

For women it was very difficult. There were about thirty of us applied and four of us were accepted.

So that's difficult.

Yes. And we trained at Peel House in Westminster for three months, and then had a two-year probationary period during which time you still had to attend lectures. At the end of that we had exams and, to my amazement, I came top or second in the whole of the metropolitan police area. We were competing with the men as well. And I suddenly realised that I wasn't as dumb as I'd thought I was.

Yes. Because the education you'd been used to was of one type, this was another.

That's right, that's right. And there was motivation.

Was it unusual for there to even *be* women police in Great Britain?

Very unusual, yes. But not so much in London, they'd had them in London since the 1940s and I've seen photographs: they actually wore the same helmets, or similar helmets, to the men, and boots, laced boots, and long skirts. And my sergeant was in fact one of the originals.

Very impressive.

But we tended to specialise in children and women's problems. We were not allowed to drive police cars, we were not allowed to be dog handlers or ride on horses, we

weren't allowed to be in charge of police stations; but we did have an extremely good career structure. We had a woman assistant commissioner in the 1950s, which, compared with here, was really quite remarkable. And promotion was relatively easy: you sat an exam to become a sergeant, which you could do when you'd been in the force for three years, and another exam for inspector when you also had interviews and career assessment processes, but it would have been relatively easy for me to have had a career and have done well in the police.

Freda, you mentioned that you tended, as women police, to handle women and children in that sense –

Child protection, yes.

– child protection: was your first station in the Western Division, did I get that right?

No. When I was training I was stationed at Hackney Mare Street for some time but I wasn't actually operating there; I was still a student. My first police station was Tooting. At Tooting Broadway [Amen Corner] there was a section house which was the hostel, two floors for women, two floors for men and never the two shall mix – one detective sergeant actually pressed the wrong button in the lift when he'd had too much to drink on New Year's Eve and ended up in what *would* have been his room had he been on the right floor. But of course none of our rooms were lockable and he walked into this room and a female screamed, and the punishment was really harsh: he was fined, he was sent back to uniform and was no longer a sergeant. So the punishment for misbehaviour was a real incentive for people to behave, and they did.

Now, when you say – what did you call that? It was an institution, in effect, was it?

The section house.

Yes, the section house.

The section house was the hostel, which had a canteen and there was a warden, and attached to that was the police station, and I was attached to the police station so all I had to do to go on duty was roll out of bed.

So with the section house, was that only for policemen and women, or – – –?

Yes. We couldn't even have visitors. When my parents came they could not look at my room. Because, with working shiftwork, they argued that there could always be people wandering in their night clothes to go for a shower. We were very protected.

Now, did you see cases of child abuse and neglect at that time –

Oh, yes.

– that formed your thinking –

Yes.

– for the rest of your life?

Yes. Very, very quickly: I did additional training in child protection, and compared with now we were really 'with it' because we already had multi-professional teams which consisted of a social worker; what they called a probation officer, who investigated cases with the NSPCC⁷, who took a lot of responsibility for providing services when children were physically abused and physically neglected – they weren't involved in sex abuse cases; and myself. If I found a case I would write a report and the next day it would be delivered to the other people in the team. If I had what I thought was a child protection case, that child would immediately go to the local children's home. The parents would be notified afterwards, believe it or not. No lawyers involved. You'd go straight to the Children's Court where the facts would be put to the magistrates, who were not lawyers.

Oh, the old-style magistrate, in other words?

The old-style magistrates were experts in child development and children, which was a big advantage, but they had a legal adviser there to advise them on the law. And I tend to think, looking back, that that system was better than where you have a magistrate or a judge who is just an expert in law and doesn't need to know anything about children, which of course we have in the Family Court here. So I, for five years, was partially responsible for running the Youth Court for the whole of the South London area, which is an enormous area, and that was held in Brixton Town Hall, believe it or not, every alternate Friday morning, and sometimes there were so

⁷ NSPCC – National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

few cases that we weren't even holding it. There was virtually no juvenile crime, certainly no juvenile sex offences. And now you'd probably find there are several courts every day of the week.

So what was society like in South London? Was it a poor area?

There was poverty, yes. It was relatively law-abiding. You know, you were safe in London any time of day or night, even as a woman and even as a woman on your own. We didn't do night duty until the mid-'50s, but there was nothing scary about being out at all. And people didn't break into houses when they were occupied. There were no rapes. There was sexual abuse in terms of flashers or somebody touching you as you walked past, but nothing on the lines of what we have now. And police think – in the UK⁸, anyway – think that there was a date where the changes started. In 1970 there was a film, I think it was called *Rape*, with Elizabeth Montgomery. The point of the film was how badly you're treated in court. In that film she was taken home from night school by somebody, and she closed the door on him. He knocked on the door again so she opened it, and he went in and raped her. He got away with it in court because of the way that rape victims were treated. She went to a night school class some time afterwards and he was waiting on the car park, attacked her in the car and raped her again. We had two rapes in Sheffield on car parks the very next day. And there's a sense that this is when things started getting worse. They always say that what happens in the States⁹ happens elsewhere five years later, and that seemed to be the case.

So it was a cultural shift, in effect.

Yes, copycat rapes happened, yes.

So with child protection issues, though, what did they centre around in South London in those years in the '50s? Was it physical abuse, or was it ---?

Yes, children running away from home. Very often I would find them, and then they would tell you that they were being abused. Neglect was usually obvious: for example, on one occasion I was called to a van, a small van, probably a Mini, and

⁸ UK – United Kingdom.

⁹ *i.e.* the United States of America.

there were about seventeen people living in it. They'd been down in Kent picking fruit, and the state of the children was horrendous – you know, they'd scabs and filth. You had those extreme cases that came to public notice. Had a few sexual abuse cases: they tended to be where the mother had found out that the child was pregnant to her partner and mother did the reporting. Child sex abuse happened; we had sex offenders in schools in those days, both in my husband's village and my village. Your parents would tell you – they wouldn't tell you why – 'Watch out for him, stay away from him.' 'Stranger danger' appeared whilst we were in school, the local policeman came along on his cycle and said, 'Don't talk to strangers or accept lollies from strangers,' but we had no idea what was involved and rather dismissed it, because at the age of seven we couldn't see why anybody would want to take us away. We knew that children were adopted but they were babies, so why would anybody want to adopt us at the age of seven?

So this is where you first see child neglect and abuse though, really, isn't it?

Yes, it was.

Now, you were married in 1952 to Ken Briggs, and you've told me, Freda, that you became foster carers, in effect, after your marriage, too.

Yes, we did. Because what happened when I was in the police force was recognition that some of these children just did not stand a chance, you know, that they were products of their families. And even with the case where all these children were severely neglected, the children were taken away and put into foster care and – lo and behold! – the next time I saw the women they were out with babies in prams again, the husbands had been in jail, came out, pregnant again. And one sort of despairs and says, 'Well, what can I do?' And so we became foster carers.

Now, by the time you'd married you'd moved to Norwich, I think – or after your marriage.

Yes. After we were married we continued to live in London but found that we could never save sufficient money to be able to buy a house, and rents were enormous taking up a very large proportion of your salary; nothing's changed. Because immediately after the War, you see, there was a shortage of housing – bearing in mind that when I went to London the bomb sites were still there. When I was stationed at Cavendish Road Police Station in Balham there was a house that had

been chopped in half and there was the toilet there, and apparently a man had been sitting on the toilet when the bomb fell: he survived but the whole of the house had gone. And so there was a great shortage of accommodation. And at that time there were literally thousands of West Indians and Pakistanis and Bangladeshis coming into the country every month. I was working in the Brixton area and the West Indians were coming in by the thousand.

Why was that, to provide labour?

No, they were coming because they thought it was an economically advantageous thing to do, and because they were Commonwealth citizens, of course, they were able to do it. But then you had ghettos springing up. And in the housing areas such as Brixton, which were destined for demolition, they couldn't demolish slums because of all these people who came in.

So that caused labour problems in Brixton, late '60s and '70s, with the riots – – –.

Absolutely, yes. And the people who were – you know, the members of parliament who were saying, 'These are our brothers and sisters, we should be letting them come here,' had no idea what was going on on the south side of the Thames because they lived in nice places like Hampstead, where West Indians couldn't afford to live.

Exactly. So it was the cost of living, primarily, that caused you to look to Norwich?

Yes. And my husband was offered a job. By this time he'd been to college, he won a scholarship to the London College of Printing, which was a management course, and he then moved into management. Prior to that he was in book production and, in particular, doing craft book binding in the British Museum which was a lovely job but terribly badly paid. We used to meet in the Museum very often when I was off-duty and we'd go and have (laughs) sandwiches in the local area and meet in the Mummy Gallery. Interesting, but not enabling you to save and get a mortgage for a house.

So at Norwich he moved into a position with Jarrolds, is that right?

He was manager of the bookbinding at Jarrolds factory, which was quite a big one, and we were able to buy a house for one thousand, five hundred pounds, a detached

house, I think we paid another hundred and fifty for a brick garage, and so we were able then to start a family.

Now, at about this time, Freda, is it that the whole concept of further learning clicks for you?

Yes. What really did it, I think, was the fact that my brother had gone to university. As I said, he was nine years younger than me and I felt that he'd played his way through university but still managed to graduate, and he was an Olympic shooter and he spent a lot of time doing this, and I thought, 'Well, my goodness, if he can get a degree that way, what's wrong with me?' And, as I said, I hadn't done what they called 'A' levels, needed for university entrance; I'd left earlier because none of the subjects that they offered would have grabbed me. By 1963, it would have been, '62, '63, I then had two children who used to have lunchtime naps, and so I enrolled in a correspondence program and did my studying whilst the children were having their lunchtime sleep. And I enrolled for Economics, British Constitution and Financial Something-or-other, all of which were very relevant because we had mortgages and I found that I was interested. Ken decided to study with me and he gained one mark more than I did, which of course enabled him to maintain his superiority. (laughs) He was very happy with that.

And he's probably never let you forget it, either! (laughter)

No, not really. So from then I then started thinking about going into teaching. Now, I wasn't really sure about it, but had we not had a real bitch of a domestic science teacher at grammar school, who would say to me, 'You will only ever be suitable for marrying a navvy' – you know what a navvy is?

Yes.

A navvy is –

A labourer of the lowest sort.

– a labourer on the road, yes – 'because your sandwiches are much too big.' (laughter) And derogatory comments like that really put me off. But, interestingly, what *really* put me off her was she derided the poorest child in our class. She derided her for having a second-hand uniform – now, we're talking about during the War when there were coupons – so that put me off domestic science. But I really liked it,

so I started looking around for entry into what was called the 'pud' school, in other words the Home Economics College.

What type of school did you call it?

Pud. P-U-D for 'pudding'. (laughs) And so that was really how I started thinking about going into teaching.

Was your mother still alive at this point?

Oh yes, my mother's only died fairly recently.

So what did she think of all this?

Oh! My mother didn't say very much. My father was saying, 'I don't know why you want to do this when your husband's got a good job. You should be,' you know, 'thinking about staying at home and looking after him.' And, interestingly, there is a letter in today's *Australian* which is saying that old people should not be going to university because we're depriving youngsters of places, so we haven't really progressed that far, have we? (laughs) So yes, I then began making enquiries. We'd moved on then to a little town called Glossop, in Derbyshire, I think I had my mother-in-law living with me about that time, and I was accepted into a college in Manchester as a mature age student. This was very new and they had special terms for mature age students. There was a shortage of teachers and as a mature age student you were allowed to complete your course at a much faster rate. You were enrolling, actually, for double the number of courses as the younger students, so that you were fast-tracked.

Well, this was at the time when the printing industry was going through a bad time and my husband was only in that position for about eighteen months and his company was hit by this. Paper mills were going to Finland and printing was going overseas. So we moved on yet again and went to live in Coventry. Exactly the same thing happened there, his company was taken over, but at least I managed to go to the University of Warwick, which was still Coventry College of Education when I first arrived there, and did a mature age students' teacher training course. They didn't have Home Economics so I then went into Early Childhood. And again my husband moved on. He became manager of Robinson's in Chesterfield and I went to Sheffield University, and I went there for many years and got a degree for junior primary

teaching and then, of course, graduate degree in Education and postgraduate qualifications in Psychology and Sociology and then did a master's in research.

So at this time your children are going to school?

Oh yes, and we used to sit all around the same table and do our homework together, it was quite useful.

And two children?

Two children, yes.

So it's an interesting, busy time for you all, I would have thought.

Yes. And Ken was teaching bookbinding at TAFE at that time as well, so ---.

What, at night school?

Yes. And singing in the cathedral choir. (laughs)

Of course, of course. So the North Country love of music held on.

Yes. Again, very little in the way of a social life, but your social life was around doing useful things.

Was there still that pursuit of sincerity and integrity that you'd known in the North Country, was that still in Chesterfield or not so much?

Perhaps not so prominent, but I suppose I was moving in a different social group now, because of course we were living in middle-class areas with home ownership and we socialised with professionals and worked with professionals. I think that sort of value related to low socio-economic environments. As I said, there was more snobbery in a government housing estate than you will ever get anywhere else.

Freda, look, I might just change tapes and then we'll move on.

END OF DISK 1: DISK 2

This is tape two of an interview with Freda Briggs on the 14th December 2004, interviewer Rob Linn. Freda, from graduating in Education, where did you begin teaching? This is around 1966, I think.

Nineteen sixty-six I was in Derbyshire. I was allocated to a school called Hipper Street, which was in the centre of town. Very low socio-economic, lots of social problems. We had the abattoir at the bottom of the schoolyard and periodically pigs

would fly out and somebody's father would be pursuing them with a big knife. It was a very interesting place to work, (laughs) but I was sent there because I was very unusual, as you can imagine, with that very strange background. And on the very first day it was almost like – you know at a wedding where people line up on either side? – and there were all these parents there, lined up, and as I walked through one fellow said, 'We don't like coppers.' I said, 'No, neither do I, that's why I left.' (laughter) And so I got away with it. But gradually – – –.

How did they know you'd been a policewoman?

Oh, the school principal had let the cat out of the bag. And not very long afterwards I found that I was also acting as counsellor and social worker because I wasn't shocked by any of their problems. They would come and tell me that the man next door had sexually abused their little boy. I mean, some of the lifestyles were horrendous. We had one mother murdered by her boyfriend because she kept moving from father to boyfriend and back again. He got drunk one night and killed her. We had a father who was murdered by the father of another one because he was having an affair with the wife. A lot of them were miners and had quite violent backgrounds and were heavy drinkers as well. But we loved the kids and I felt that I really achieved something there. But the one thing that I realised was that, with my strange background, I was able to spot abused children half a mile away. And there was quite obviously sexual abuse going on in some of the homes, but the school principal didn't want to report it and it was covered up.

You mentioned that you felt you had a nose for identifying abuse –

Yes.

– were there some specific cases that have never left your mind?

Well, the one that stands out – well, several, actually. In fact, one of my former colleagues came to stay with me in January and we spent days just talking about these cases because they stood out so much. One father was a garbo¹⁰, mother worked in a bar but was prostituting as well, and the kids used to come to school black from top to toe because it was a smoky area, it was an industrial area, and they obviously were

¹⁰ Refuse collector.

never clean. And one day we found that the boy in my class had burns under his feet and he couldn't walk – that was how we found out – and – – –.

What age, Freda?

Six.

Oh! God.

And we found it was his older sister who'd done this, because the nine year-old sister was made responsible for getting all the other children to school – there was another one in the kindergarten – and because they wouldn't move fast enough they had a coke stove and she put the poker in the stove and burnt their feet to make them move faster, as she thought. And this nine year-old was just obviously running the home. We had a little girl who was fat, not at all attractive, with a terrible squint and pebble spectacles, who was dragged in by the scruff of the neck by a man one morning who said that she'd propositioned him for sex underneath the railway bridge, and she was about seven or either. And everybody laughed. And I was thinking, 'Hold on,' you know, 'how would she know to sell sex?' She was asking for sixpence. And they just thought it was funny because she wasn't sexually attractive. They didn't wonder how this child learned to sell sex. And this is what I discovered: that lots and lots of teachers were seeing signs that children were being abused and were ignoring them. I also had a few threats from time to time, from a woman who was madam of a brothel – brothels being illegal in those days – because I'd had the audacity to tell her grandson to shut up! (laughs) It was a very lively place.

Then the school itself was closed down and a new one was built and the atmosphere was never quite the same again, but they were still the same children, and that was at Hady Hill [Chesterfield], not far away.

H-A-D-E-Y?

H-A-D-Y. Again, predominantly mining families. And at that time the mines tended to be closing down so that the better-educated and more intelligent miners were tending to move away to another county, Nottinghamshire in particular, where the mines were much more modern.

So how long did you stay in teaching in the schools themselves?

About six years and then moved into what would probably be called a TAFE college now. Then it was an Early Childhood college which catered for teacher education but for in-service, not pre-service, and also for residential social workers, and that was specialising in courses for birth to seven. It was *very* old-fashioned. It was unbelievable that in the 1970s the college principal made you wear a hat and gloves to do teaching practice supervision, had staff sniffing around people coming out of the toilets to make sure they hadn't been smoking in there and, if any of the students became pregnant, she kicked them out of the college because obviously the baby wasn't planned [therefore you were unfit to care for other people's children]. And it was found when she retired that none of the students had ever been in the student union. They'd all filled up the forms; but they found thousands (laughs) of completed forms in cupboards apparently, when she retired, and she'd actually prevented them from joining the student union. But a lot of people still had a lot of respect for her. (laughter)

I think you could write a book about her, by the sound.

Yes. She used to lecture to the new students that if they had boyfriends or husbands they mustn't let them wear tight underpants and they mustn't let them wear nylon underpants because it would affect their virility – it would make them sterile. And of course, more recently, it's been found that she was probably right! (laughter) And she was very much ahead of her time in teaching contraception.

One hopes she wasn't teaching from experience, of course.

But it was a bizarre place to work so I only stayed there for a year. We were glad to see the back of each other, I would think. Because, apart from anything else, I was running the first course for mature age students and she really could not handle mature age students, either. All the colleges had been accustomed to young students. I ended up in Sheffield at the college that had always been residential, so I was the only non-resident there and they didn't really know what to do with me because they couldn't impose the same restrictions on me that they did with eighteen year-olds. And I managed to cope with *that* very well, but with this principal, no way.

Now, how many students would you have had at the time?

Not that many. There'd be about twenty-four per class, that was all.

And those mature age students, were some of them older than yourself, or ---?

Oh, yes. I still hear from them as well, there's one living in Perth at the moment, and yes.

So in a sense, though, it must have been – I'm not sure if 'exciting' is the word, but an invigorating time for teaching.

It was challenging, yes. Oh, very challenging. Even in the school situation it was very challenging because lots of new ideas were coming out. And bear in mind that there were not the restrictions that there are now: teachers devised their own curriculum in agreement with the school principal, and when I was at college all these new ideas were coming out about – what was the expression? – 'socio-metric grouping', where they found that children did well if they were able to choose which group they joined. The open-plan schools were being built, the open curriculum, the open day, all of these things were coming, which for somebody like me were exciting but for established teachers were very daunting indeed, they couldn't cope with it. Also I taught reading using the Pitman system.

Oh, yes.

Now, unfortunately that was scrapped because teachers who hadn't used it didn't want to learn about it, they didn't want any more change. But we had – what was it? – forty-six or forty-seven symbols, and once children learnt to recognise those they could read anything. And by the time they left me at the age of six they could read almost anything. But I didn't realise that anybody had heard of it in Australia when I came here, it was ---.

Oh, yes.

Was it ---?

Yes, it was around.

Yes, but it never really took off, did it?

No. No, not at all. But I know there are plenty of books in second-hand shops you still see with the Pitman system. Talking about books, Freda, teaching early childhood and child development, what type of material did you have to use? We talked about this a week ago and I was fascinated with this, I just think it's something I'd like to explore a bit more.

Yes, there weren't many books. There was one book on child development and I think there was an author called Musson. It was a red book and I saw it only the other day on the shelves of one of my university colleagues. There was also a book called *The normal child and his abnormalities*, I think, and that was the only book that I ever found at that time that related to child abuse and neglect. We used books by Susan Isaacs on emotional development. I'm not sure when Kelmer Pringle was writing about emotional development, but it was just being researched and published at that time, so there were materials there if you looked for them, predominantly British materials.

Now, another you mentioned was John Bowlby[?], was that right?

John Bowlby wrote *Child care and the growth of love* in 1953, and that is still being published – obviously been changed a few times – but that was very influential, bearing in mind that, as I said, I was working in residential social work, where you still had children's homes and residential nurseries. That would be a building where you might have thirty or even forty pre-school children, and of course staff change shifts and the boss might have lived on the premises and usually did, but children were being handled by multiple carers. And Bowlby really brought to attention the need for one primary caregiver – he referred to the mother; it was subsequently amended to be one primary caregiver – and he was one of the first people to recognise that children who did not have a stable pre-school life were the ones who grew up without a conscience, who became socially disadvantaged and even criminal. And I took that pretty seriously. He was followed up by the Robertsons – Joyce and James Robertson.

I think it was Robertson.

Robertson, yes. The Tavistock Institute was very busy researching in relation to early childhood, and they made a series of films. They were horrendous to watch because you could actually see the damage that was being caused to children, right before your very eyes, by the systems. It was institutionalised abuse and people said, 'Well, why did they allow it to happen?' But of course they said, 'Well, sorry, we were just observers and we hope to benefit thousands more, even though this little child might have been sacrificed.'

Initially they looked at a child in a residential nursery. The child had been put in there because Mother had to go into hospital and Father was not allowed to take leave from employment, which was the situation at that time. You saw this child going downhill emotionally and physically every single day until, after a fortnight, he was an absolute mess. And that really led to changes in the residential care of children, and also they then moved on to the hospitals and looked at what happened to children taken into hospitals and filmed that. And they then offered alternatives, that was children going into foster care, but with preparation – and of course nowadays the preparation is alarmingly missing – and they then did a comparison between the child who'd been put into residential care and the one in foster care, and the foster care obviously came out that much better.

So that was a pivotal series of films from the Robertsons, then.

Yes.

I can imagine that – you can read about something, but when you actually see it it must be quite shocking for the first time.

Very powerful. And I used their films. They were available in England before I left but I also bought them here and used them here for quite some time.

Now, you moved on to Derbyshire, didn't you, after this to set up some new courses. How did that come about, Freda?

Because I had postgraduate university qualifications, which were very unusual in my field. And so they also wanted somebody who would be able to initiate courses with mature age students, and having been a mature age student, and a pretty rare one at that, it seemed like the right thing to do and an interesting thing to do, certainly a challenging thing. The challenge was not with the students, however; it was the management who just simply could not cope with (laughs) older people who didn't necessarily want to be told that they had to wear a hat to go into a school.

This boss used to sit there with her elephant bell and you had to knock on her door in a ladylike fashion and she would then invite you in. Well, of course I went in and just knocked and was told that I knocked 'like a policewoman', which really grated. She also used to go into the dining room when the students were there and teach them how to use knives and forks. They weren't allowed to spoon up peas! And that sort of environment, even in 1970, was just not acceptable.

So when I had the opportunity to set up another new course in Derbyshire – absolute opposite extreme, this was, back in the mining field – I took it and I was then there for about six years, five years. And that was as a result of expansion in the pre-school sector. Margaret Thatcher was producing a white paper because research had shown that all children benefit from pre-school education. Prior to that in the UK, only low socio-economic areas had state-funded pre-school, and pre-schools were there for social reasons. If your parents were in hospital or in prison or they were neglected or mother had so many children she didn't know what to do, the kids would go to state-funded pre-schools. But Margaret Thatcher wanted to change that. Nonetheless, the pre-schools that were being created were in the top low socio-economic areas. So they needed more staff and needed them quickly.

Now, this area you went to was near Nottinghamshire?

It was on the Nottinghamshire border and it was strongly mining and engineering. And the mining was declining so that they wanted courses that would especially cater for girls, and that was really the idea behind it.

Now, you mentioned that there was a fair deal of illiteracy in the region at the time.

Yes. Because, as I said, mines tended to be closing down, which of course resulted in the miners' strike, and we were thoroughly in the middle of that. Because the better-educated miners were moving away, they were stuck with a lot of illiterate young men whose main interest was drinking twenty-one pints of beer on a Friday night. They were pretty obnoxious to have around you. I mean, can you imagine the contrast, coming from a place where you had to wear a hat and gloves to go into a miners' college where a lot of them would have had lung problems and were spitting on the floor and every other word began with 'F'? I mean, it was – in those days you did not use the 'F' word, either. So it was an absolute contrast.

Well, the first thing that happened to me was when I was driving a Mini and I parked the Mini, unwittingly, on a car parking space, unreserved, that normally the head of mining occupied; and when I came out to go home at five o'clock my Mini was up on the top of a big gas container. The miners had lifted it up and put it on the top there, which was a very stupid thing to do because they could have caused serious damage to the car. But that was my welcome.

And I came in at a senior lecturer level because I was co-ordinating and starting out new courses. They actually held a meeting of the men in the lecturers' trade union and argued that I didn't need a higher position because my husband had a good job. Same old argument. So it was not 'Welcome, Freda' at all.

And then of course we had the mining strike, which hit us not only because the parents of the students were heavily involved, but when I was out visiting students on field experience in schools we'd have the car searched with pretty aggressive men with German Shepherd dogs. I don't know what the idea was: it was an abuse of power. And the schools had horrendous, absolutely horrendous, social problems.

What, related to the poverty and the closing of the mines and that sort of thing, stemming from that? Or just from ---?

Culture as well. I felt alien. I mean, I can relate very well to people in low socio-economic circumstances, I get on particularly well with Aboriginal students because I recognise so many things in common. You know, I was brought up at a time when lots of parents did not want their children to go to grammar school, my husband was one of them. He was offered a scholarship. But parents, working-class parents did not want their kids to get a higher education because of the risk that you would move away to another area, you would acquire a language that was not understood by your parents, there's a fear of snobbery relating to different employment; but also we're getting back to control, because fathers knew that if their sons or daughters left the area and were educated they would lose control over their families, and that was a big threat. So that was that, it was that sort of environment.

And I decided that I needed to know more about miners, so I took my students down the mine. And it was Markham Colliery where, not long before, all seven fail-safe devices had failed on the lift and it had crashed, leaving quite a lot dead but, even worse, people who were still in hospital years later. They took us to the coalface and we had to crawl, on hands and knees, in the dark, in a tunnel, with big lights on your head and big packs on your back, and if you lifted your head up you hit the roof of the tunnel. And periodically you would see the whites of somebody's eyes and they would be crouched. I often noticed that miners, when they were waiting for buses, would crouch down, on their –

Haunches.

– haunches, yes, and then realised when I got into the mine why it was they had to crouch. And they would step aside and be crouched in this little hole and say, ‘Good on yer, girl,’ you know, and we pushed on until we got to the coalface, and of course when I got there I’d kill for a beer, and suddenly realised why they were so fond of their beers. It was a good learning experience.

The big thirst.

Yes.

So, in essence though, Freda, it would have been difficult to have been in that area at that time with things getting a bit ugly, particularly with the strikes and pickets.

It was. And then I was asked to teach literacy to the illiterate miners because, in the UK, if you are a registered teacher, they can make you teach anything anywhere. I mean, realistically they don’t, but I was the only one in the entire college who had early childhood experience and had taught reading to littlies, so they thought it was quite reasonable to ask me to teach reading to illiterate miners because they were hoping they might make managers out of some of them. And you can imagine that was quite an ordeal: I actually really dreaded it, went into the room and there was laughter all round the room. I was expecting real discipline problems, and when I said, ‘What’s funny?’ they said, ‘You’re a woman.’ I said, you know, ‘So what? I’ve been a woman for the last so many years,’ and they said, ‘Well, we haven’t been taught by a woman before,’ and one actually said, ‘Are women as clever as men?’ (laughter) Oh, really. And they were laughing because they said they’d have to mind their language if they had a woman as a teacher.

You were probably fortunate, Freda. (laughter) At this period, how do you come to be offered a job in Victoria, Australia?

Interesting, isn’t it? The principal at the State College of Victoria was a man called John Banfield, who’d previously been principal in Sheffield.

Ah! Right.

And he was scouring the world – not just Australia, he was scouring the world – for somebody who had a master’s degree in Early Childhood Education, and it turned out that I was one of the very few. And at that time we’d had two years of miners’ strikes, we’d had two years of winters with no electricity, no heating, no television,

no cooking facilities, and we'd had, I think, twenty-one per cent inflation – you know, you were just chasing your tail the whole of the time, our oldest son was about to go to university and it seemed a good time to move. In fact, Australia seemed like fairyland.

What, when you arrived?

Oh! Absolutely. Yes.

After what you'd been used to.

Yes.

Now, what was the position like at the State College of Victoria, what were the expectations?

Oh, I had a free rein. I had two staff who had expertise in junior primary education. The reason for setting up that course was the only alternative was at the Institute of Early Childhood at Kew, which catered only for kindergarten training – I think that was for ages three to five years – whereas the international definition of 'early childhood education' was birth to eight years, and so they wanted a course that would cover that whole age range, bearing in mind that they had dispensed with the infant teacher training course in Victoria, and that loss was really showing badly.

Had they?

Oh! They did in the 1960s, yes.

Oh, I wasn't aware of that.

Yes. And what you will find was that they had rapidly changing teachers, especially in reception class, because the primary course was focused on the class and traditional school subjects. So these folk were graduating and finding themselves in reception classes with insufficient knowledge to be able to teach literacy and numeracy. When we were looking for teaching practice placements, I would just see horrors because the inspectors were all male and they had degrees in History or Geography or whatever, and they really didn't know how to advise teachers and they would give them the most appalling advice, like, 'Teach them one letter a day, and after twenty-odd days they should be able to read.' It was unbelievable. So there

was a need for a specialist course. But they didn't want specialists in Victoria in the Education Department.

What I found was that they often took on things that had happened in England years earlier and had been abandoned. For example, here and in Victoria we started building open-plan schools, despite the fact that in England they'd been found to be inappropriate in that they had no educational philosophy. You know, open-plan schools were built for economic reasons, I think, in the Leicestershire area. There was no educational philosophy behind it in the first instance; and then they had to try and find educational strategies for using it effectively and of course they all started putting their little barriers up. After this had happened, they began to build them here. I went into a school where a school principal, out near La Trobe University, asked, 'What on earth is happening in England, Freda?' 'What are you talking about?' 'Ah, these books that they're using for reading.' Now, in the early '70s in England there were educational priority projects and they realised that teaching with the traditional books was pretty useless in really low socio-economic areas because they were totally irrelevant. So I think it was Leila Berg who wrote books about going to the fish and chip shop and Dad going round to the pub. Well, the [Victorian] Education Department apparently bought these by their thousands and distributed them to this school – was it Greensborough? Greenwood? – it was the school adjacent to La Trobe University. It was predominantly used by students and staff for their children, very middle-class, and the Department distributed this series. This is what I was finding. Instead of being sensible and doing their own thing, they were copying what others had adopted and found to be pretty useless.

So the course you formed in early childhood studies, was that unique at the time?

Yes. Yes, it was. And the other thing that we were also interested in was providing tertiary education for child care, because what had hit me for years was that you had these highly-trained kindergarten teachers who were working very short days, and the children who were in child care from seven o'clock in the morning till seven o'clock at night were with, often, untrained young girls. And there again [in child care] I saw horrendous things, like a girl would be sitting in the middle of the room with pop music playing full blast and she'd have a dozen children in high chairs round her and one bowl with one spoon and she'd put a spoonful of food in each mouth. I saw

children tied to toilets, you know, they had to stay there until they'd done something. There were rules about how many washbowls you had and you had to have certain toys, but it didn't say the children had to play with them, did it? So they used to have them on the shelf so that they wouldn't be played with so that you wouldn't have to replace them, but they were still obeying the Health Department's rules. So I wanted tertiary education for child care, and we gradually moved into that area.

So in the five years you were in Victoria, did you feel that you achieved a good deal under John Banfield?

Yes, absolutely. But we were fighting the authorities, and after three years when our first graduates were due to leave, somebody came along from the Education Department and told them they weren't employable. Unlike the IECD¹¹ institute students ours were not bonded, and that was really the end of bonding, when that course started in 1976. But of course the bonded students didn't have to work hard in college because they were guaranteed a job at the end of it anyway, and some of them really used to mess around, whereas ours knew they had to work hard and do better than the other students to get jobs.

I think you referred to the IECD people last week as 'white glove set'.

They were the white glove set, yes, their students used to have to wear white for graduation. You would see the staff knitting in the staff room. It was a very different environment to the one I was in. Of course, our building was next to Pentridge Gaol!
(laughs)

A great start, I'm sure.

Well, we were there to cater for the western and the northern suburbs in particular, and for working in migrant areas with migrant children. So, coming to Adelaide, it was the first middle-class area that I'd ever worked in really, when you look back.

Adelaide was? Or Victoria?

Adelaide. Oh, Victoria wasn't, no. All the middle-class people were at the Institute of Early Childhood. You know, their history was to provide an education for middle-class gels who would make good mothers.

¹¹ IECD – Institute of Early Childhood Development.

So, talking about Adelaide, Freda, were you approached to come here or did you apply to come here?

I applied but yes, somebody suggested it – I might add, with great warnings and cautions and ‘You really need to think twice about it,’ because it was a time of flux. The kindergarten teacher training college, which was then Kingston CAE¹², was being amalgamated with Murray Park Teachers’ Training College into what had been amalgamated into Hartley CAE, and there was a strong suspicion in the early childhood field that this college at Magill was only interested in student numbers and actually wanted to get rid of the Early Childhood course.

But you were promised to be foundation dean of this new de Lissa Institute.

Yes, I was. Yes. I was actually in Kingston CAE Dean’s office for two weeks and I had a phone call on the Friday – this would have been in February. I hadn’t then actually been called to meet the principal, Geoffrey Mildred. I’d been there a fortnight and hadn’t been called by him. But of course there weren’t many staff around at that time because it was the only time that people could take their vacation. And the phone call came and said, ‘You have to be out of that building by nine o’clock on Monday morning because I’m sending the furniture removalists in. You are all coming up to Magill Campus.’ Now, this was contravening the agreement. We’d been told that, although we were one college by that time, they were going to build a new building for us at Magill and this would take a year. There was no new building. In fact, there was no new building for four whole years. And of course there weren’t many staff around to go on strike or do anything dramatic, so we had to move.

It was pretty traumatic because there were no offices for some of the staff, insufficient numbers of classrooms. Fortunately it was summer so we were able to go out and teach under trees. Some of us were put into a house in Lorne Avenue, which was subsequently demolished: there were scorpions, literally, in the filing cabinets, we had to be deloused and the walls were crumbling. And we’d been promised the new building but what we realised was that they didn’t want to spend the money on a new building for us. The money was invested and I was told that the investment did

¹² CAE – College of Advanced Education.

rather well. Eventually we had the building built, but that was because I was told that Flinders University and Adelaide University were after the money because we were all under the same tertiary organisation. So I was on the Building Committee and we had the de Lissa Building completed in 1984. On the very day that Susan Ryan came to open it and congratulated this wonderful college for honouring early childhood, there was a document – at that very session, this document was sent around showing that they had no intention at all of using that building for early childhood at all; that it was destined for the husband of [Jill Maling], I think she was the Deputy Principal or maybe the Principal at the time, of the South Australian CAE, whose husband [Bruce Keepe] was into Business Management and he'd actually fitted the rooms up for computers.

So Early Childhood has been a battlefield.

A lot of politics, by the sounds, Freda.

Continuously. And even recently. We've always had to fight, just to maintain programs and courses, and I think the reason for it is that we are operating in an area which is not compulsory. Children don't have to go to pre-school, where we are a long way away from the employment sector so that the benefits of pre-school are lost, and even though there is *plenty* of research showing the value of pre-school education in the longer term, you know: who reads research?

That's the thinking, anyway.

Yes.

So just backtracking a tick: you arrived in Adelaide in 1980?

Yes.

That's right, for a short time you were at the old Kingston Campus –

Yes, two weeks.

– in Childers Street?

Yes.

North Adelaide. Then moved to Magill to this scorpion-infested house –

Yes.

– and then, four years later, into actually what was a very nice building, I know it myself.

Yes.

And all that time, Freda, there's a political jostling going on about the place of early childhood education.

It was awful, yes.

To the point, I think, that you and your professor were actually alienated from the Council as such, would that be true?

Ah, yes. Marjorie Ebbeck, who is currently Professor in Early Childhood, and I were certainly alienated. We were told that we were not fit to be [senior staff].

Sorry, Marjorie's surname, I missed that.

Ebbeck, E-B-B-E-C-K. See, what happened was that, although I'd had all these promises and to some extent they were in writing because of the job description that was advertised, within twelve months the Council had changed and the new Council was convinced that we don't really need Early Childhood. And when we became the South Australian CAE there was a battle royal because they wanted to get rid of Early Childhood. They had the notion of us as being this white glove, twin set and pearls brigade, that we had no academic credibility, which was really a gross mistake because we have more PhDs in our sector than they had in Education as a whole. I think we've always been faced with this, that we were discredited, so we made that bit of extra effort to research and publish. So there was this false image – – –.

Also the philosophers tended to be running the College at the time, they managed to get on all the committees. Now, when I first became Dean I was put on twenty different committees and it was just overwhelming. In addition, I had a lecturing load – I was doing sixteen hours a week lecturing. It was physically impossible. The other thing was that they would fail to give me the agendas for meetings and they had it all worked out – you know, this typical political stuff – and oh, it was just impossible because you had meetings to make decisions but the decisions had already been made. And the idea was, when the South Australian CAE was created, that they would get rid of these Early Childhood courses and just put an Early Childhood subject here and there on all the campuses as an option. And that was what Marjorie Ebbeck and I fought, which made us very unpopular with the management, and they

really had me in their hands because my tenure was due to be reviewed after three years and that was at that time. And of course they used standover tactics, literally. I was told to go down to Underdale where Greg Ramsay was then the boss and Jill Maling and John Chalklin, and they sat me on a sofa and literally stood over me. I recorded what happened because it was so outrageous and bizarre. And I was accused of not supporting the College because ---. We obviously had support from the early childhood field around Australia: you know, Adelaide had the best early childhood provision anywhere in the world, and I could see that it was going to be destroyed. So I was told that I was going to be demoted, despite the fact that there had been written assurances that nobody would be demoted as a result of the amalgamation. The union wanted me to fight it but I did not see that one could ever fight a big institution and win, so I opted for one step demotion on the condition that I never had to have anything to do with management again, and that proved to be the best decision I ever made because I was able to avoid college and university politics, which have not changed. Continuously it's been a battle to maintain Early Childhood and maintain standards.

Freda, in the 1990s – this is over a decade after you came here to Adelaide – you were appointed an associate professor –

Yes.

– at the age of sixty-one years, I think, and then to a full professorship at the age of sixty-three. But that, too, wasn't without its joy, was it?

Oh no, trauma all the way. Yes, I was appointed as associate professor, the reason being that once I was free of these committees I was able to spend time researching and publishing, and by the time the professorship came along I was just amazed that I was told to apply for it. But, as they pointed out, I had completed more research and publication than anybody else in the entire faculty. But I was actually appointed professor on January 1, and on January 31 I had a letter saying, 'We note that you will be sixty-five in December. We will require your resignation.' Now, this really shook me because it never occurred to me that I would be compulsorily retired, given that there was no compulsory retirement in South Australia. But of course we were ruled by Canberra, and the federal government still had compulsory retirement. Well, the Dean, who had thoroughly supported me, was shocked and wanted me to fight it,

but I took advice that if I could get a part-time contract it would be better to do that because the law was going to be changed – I was probably the last person to be compulsorily retired because the law was changed within the year, and of course now they have the other problem, that you can be old and decrepit and useless and they can't get rid of you. There should be surely a balance somewhere along the line. But I didn't feel old, anyway. You know, I was absolutely working at my maximum. I had four books published in, I think it was 1995, and it just seemed so ludicrous. So yes, I took advice and talked to lots of people and then opted for a part-time contract – well, initially it was full-time, then it became 0.8, and then it gradually became 0.5 and that continued until I was age seventy-one and had to sign a contract saying I wouldn't pursue another contract after the age of seventy-one, which I signed thinking that seventy-one is terribly old, and I received yet another contract for working – I'm back at the university again in February, and I didn't even ask for that one. But I'm only 'hourly-paid', as they say: in other words, you work long hours and do your preparation and are paid peanuts. (laughs)

Exactly. That's right. And for all your pains, Freda, you have become the first emeritus female professor in your field, so –

That's right.

– that at least is something.

And then there are arguments whether it should be 'emerita' or 'emeritus'.

You mean there are more than one, are there?

Well, some argue that emerita is female.

Oh, I see.

I didn't do Latin, I only did live languages. But the university insists that it's generic: I'm emeritus. (laughter)

Good. Now, behind your many, many achievements in academia, Freda, [you] have had this lifelong interest in child protection that you told me really began right back in those years in London. And then you began teaching it in 1970, now thirty-four years ago, which seems incredible, given that it takes so long to filter through. And this all came about through the nose you had, if you like, or the sight, the ability to –

To sniff it out.

– to sniff out.

Yes. Because I realised that if you educated teachers they would do a better job of sniffing out cases instead of treating child victims badly and rejecting what they were saying and telling them that they were liars. I mean, very often they would go to the person accused and tell them. The rationale for that was, ‘If I tell him what this child has said’ – or her – ‘if it is happening it will stop.’ But of course my research later with sex offenders showed that, when this happened, the mind of the sex offender was, ‘The school knows and doesn’t believe it and isn’t going to do anything. I’m safe.’ So they then put more pressure on the child – ‘See, nobody believes you, nobody’s going to help you’ – and the abuse continued much worse than previously. And I felt that teachers had more responsibility than they were then taking, and needed education. So yes, I started teaching this stuff in 1970.

I became interested in child protection programs for schools actually in the 1950s, when I was in the police force in Norwich, and in Norwich, around the whole of that area were American Air Force bases, and of course a lot of the girls married and went to America. And I was called by a grandmother of a seven year-old child, who was an American child with a Norwich mother and American serviceman father, and she was spending a holiday with Grandma. Grandma said that the neighbour, Mr Clark, whom I remember very well, had invited the child to join other children, including his own, to go on a picnic and they had a minibus. And she thought, ‘How nice of him to include her,’ and did the usual thing and said to the child, ‘Be a good girl and do what Mr Clark says,’ and off they went. When she came back she reported that Mr Clark had been sexually abusing them, that she’d said no and had obviously told. And there were lots of children in this car, and of course I realised that everybody trusted him because his own kids were there and it never occurred to anybody that he would abuse his own kids, but he did. The child gave me all the information I needed, I went to interview the other kids and yes, they agreed with it and they told me they’d been out with him before, and I ended up with thirty-eight different cases. He’d sexually abused just about every child within hailing distance of his house. What interested me was that the girl had only been exposed to this behaviour once and told. The others had been exposed to it numerous times and hadn’t told. Why? And it turned out that her teacher at school had told them that these parts of their bodies

were private, that nobody's allowed to mess around, touch around, tickle you in those areas, and if they do you say no and tell. That's what she'd done. And I thought, 'Well, isn't it bizarre that such a simple message could have stopped him in his tracks?' Had she not done that he would have probably carried on forever and not been caught.

I didn't pursue it then, but in 1980 I started investigating what programs were available in Canada and America and wrote to education authorities and asked them to send me details. That proved a bit embarrassing because one, the Care Kit from Canada, came with a three hundred dollar bill (laughs) and I was expected to pay it. But the others were just booklets. And so I had quite a collection in 1980. That was when I started teaching student teachers that you can actually incorporate [child protection] in health curriculum.

And then, early in 1985, I went to an Institute of Family Studies conference where I met a policewoman sergeant from Victoria who was an educated policewoman, who was obviously allowed to use her initiative much more than policewomen were here [in SA]. We got into conversation and she said that they [VicPol] were being pushed into providing something other than Stranger Danger because they'd just published their first statistics for reports of child sexual abuse and found that only six per cent involved strangers and of course all they taught was Stranger Danger. So police were being pushed into providing an alternative and more appropriate program. I then told her about all the materials I'd collected. So she went back to police headquarters and I was asked if I would act as a consultant for Vic Police. They formed a multi-professional committee which examined my documents, and they chose the Protective Behaviours Program. I was hoping that they would follow New Zealand's example and write their own, but they said no, they didn't want to reinvent the wheel, they wanted a quick fix as a matter of emergency, and so adopted Protective Behaviours, which was very American, created by a woman called Peg Flandreau-West who was a social worker; she wasn't an educator. When you look at the history of it, these programs were actually created by the rape crisis centres in America, by feminists, with females in mind, and they assumed that child sexual abuse would be as scary as being raped – and assumed wrongly, of course – but they built it up from there, always with the male as the perpetrator and the female as the victim. And I was very concerned at the time because this was not a program that was developed to

meet children's developmental needs; it was a generic program and a concept which was both complex and at the same time very simplistic. They claimed that this had been proven effective for children from birth to old people, and I thought, 'Well, this is strange because how can concepts that are appropriate for three year-olds be also appropriate for ninety-three year-olds?' They chose it for the wrong reasons: it wasn't chosen for educational reasons; it was chosen because it was cheap. Six pages of typed script. They claimed that within six sessions we could wipe out child sexual abuse altogether.

They thought it would be cheap because there were no videos, there were no games, all you had to do was train people, but in actual fact it turned out to be very expensive because teachers went to lots of training programs and at the end of the day didn't feel confident to teach it, simply because there were no materials and it was so sensitive. So I started looking at what else was needed. I'd already written the first book on child sexual abuse, that was actually published in 1986. Protective Behaviours was adopted in Victoria in May 1985 and yes, it was better than Stranger Danger; yes, it was better than nothing; but the problem was that teachers weren't really teaching it as it had been written, anyway. We also found, later, that it was not suitable for boys because seventy-one per cent of boys who were sexually abused did not find sexual touching scary. It could be exciting, it could be fun, it was presented as a game, it was presented as affection, and it was only long after it had been introduced that they were scared and wanted to opt out then found they couldn't because they had not said no in the first place.

So what was the official response to your first books, Freda?

Oh! I was named in parliament as causing problems for families. There was a parliamentarian called Dr John Ritson who said that my book had caused somebody to be arrested wrongly – I was the cause of the problems. The Leader of the Opposition, John Olsen, actually had to write to me to apologise because my book was published one year after this case had happened. But there was fear amongst the male population in particular, and the politicians used that fear: you know, 'We will get rid of all this stuff at the next election.' It was triggered by Dr Geoffrey Partington in South Australia, who was a lecturer at Flinders University. He also had a supportive colleague there, along with the Australian Family Association of which

he was a member. Partington actually published his own book – had it printed and published himself – talking about the ‘child protection industry’ and labelling child protection people as the ‘lesbian feminist mafia who were anti-family and anti-men’ and ‘teaching children to say no would break up families,’ it would ‘cause children to report people falsely.’ ‘Be terrified: if you pat your child on the bottom you will be arrested.’ There was a great amount of fear, and of course the media helped. And Adelaide became known as the child abuse false reporting centre of the world – I saw a program about it when I was in New Zealand. It was crazy.

Yes, I remember the time well.

Yes.

And it was very political. So in a sense they’d missed the whole point.

Oh, absolutely. And then of course we had the misfortune to have the Clevedon case in Britain, which involved a doctor who had been trained in Adelaide, and believe it or not the British media were phoning me to see if I’d been involved in her training, and she’d been trained in Leeds for the particular process that was being used. If you remember, they’d said that hundreds of cases had been found in that Clevedon area. But if you looked at the population of that area, it wasn’t an extraordinary number. And my information was that, although this became a huge political and media thing in the UK, in actual fact most of those cases were confirmed again later on, but of course the media didn’t want to know about that.

I might just change tapes again, Freda. Is that all right with you?

END OF DISK 2: DISK 3

I think one of the problems at that time was – – –.

This is tape three of an interview with Freda Briggs on 14th December 2004, interviewer Rob Linn. Sorry, Freda.

That’s all right. I’ve always thought that one of the problems for child protection was the fact that it was the Women’s Movement that brought it to the forefront. There were rape crisis centre phone-ins, and even my husband would sit there and say, ‘Well, they’re probably telling lies.’ And the fact that men did not stand up and say, ‘Hey, this is not just happening to girls, it’s happening to boys,’ men became defensive because they were afraid of being accused falsely, as a consequence of

which it's taken twenty years for the sexual abuse of boys to be revealed. And I would think it's only within the last couple of years that men have said to me, 'Well, good on you. Keep up the good work. I was a victim, too.' And I mean men who are in the media, who are in positions of power. And look at Peter Lewis, the Speaker in Parliament: he's come out and said, 'Well, I was a victim.' Well, two years ago that wouldn't have happened. And I think that's a real pity that it became tagged with 'It's a female's problem,' because even now boys in schools don't think that child protection is relevant to them, they think, 'Oh, only girls get raped,' and have said so, and we're talking about 2003, 2004.

So through the '90s, Freda, your work in child protection took you well beyond Australia's shores, and particularly in New Zealand the work you've done has framed the way both the police and the educational system sees it there.

Yes. Well, what happened was that with the Protective Behaviours program here there was great resistance to anybody doing any research. It was interesting that it was the only curriculum in the Education Department that wasn't evaluated with children – it had never been evaluated *anywhere* with children, which is astonishing. And there was resistance to research because, by that time, the Education Department had built up quite a little empire of jobs for people, even in senior positions, as child protection co-ordinators – they were responsible for training staff and supporting staff – and they said, 'We don't want to know if there's a problem with this program.' Eventually I was given permission, and it was only a minor sort of research project with no funding, but I was given permission on condition that somebody from the Education Department accompanied me. And of course we found that, within three months, unless the program was reinforced, children had forgotten just about everything. And even with Stranger Danger, none of them could identify who a stranger was.

Now, New Zealand had gone their own way. I'd been asked to talk to them from about 1990 onwards – no, before then: 1985 onwards, I would think – and by 1990 New Zealand had its program in schools. They had gone to a lot of trouble and a lot of expense and it took them much longer, but they had created a program that involved teaching materials, games for kids, programs for parents, videos for parents, and so I asked if I could, without any funding, evaluate it and compare it with ours. And I did and of course found, by using pre- and post-testing, that theirs was far

superior to ours; and not only did children know more but their learning continued, which tended to [suggest that protective strategies were reinforced by parents and teachers]. I then looked at why it was better, and it was better because, first of all, the teachers were supported, they had police education officers who introduced it to the schools, who introduced it to parents, they were involving parents and the whole school adopted it. Quite different to here, where it was just voluntary and haphazard. So New Zealand police were very pleased with the results and they amended their program according to the findings that came actually from the children.

And that was when I discovered, of course, that Stranger Danger has been an absolute waste of time and is actually the contrary to beneficial, because children under the age of eight could not understand the concept of ‘stranger’, it’s much too complicated for them, and they would say that I wasn’t a stranger because I’m a woman, because I carried a briefcase which meant I work, and strangers don’t work, and ‘Strangers wouldn’t know my name. You know my name,’ or ‘I’ve been talking to you for two seconds therefore you’re no longer a stranger,’ and ‘Strangers don’t look kind or seem kind, which you do.’ And then eventually, of course, I said, ‘Well, what is a stranger like?’ And they told me it was a man, always a man, who wears a beanie or a mask and wears black and drives an all-black car, steals children from their beds and they’ve never seen a stranger in their lives. And of course I realised that this is dangerous because they think that anybody who doesn’t meet the description is trustworthy.

So it was a really interesting time in what we learned about children’s thinking in relation to safety issues. New Zealand police then involved me in lots more research. I evaluated their intermediate school program, not just with kids but with parents, because by this time senior police were wanting evidence that the program was being used – not just that they were getting safety knowledge, which we knew they were, but what evidence *is* there that the program is being used. We found plenty of evidence that it was. And then, in – that was 1996 – 2000 I think it was, they asked me to evaluate the secondary program.

In the meantime, police were involved in another program, called DARE¹³, which was a drug education program for parents, which was offered simultaneously to a primary school program at the child level in relation to drugs. I evaluated programs with both parents and the children, and also the people who were delivering it; it was community-based, with police assistance.

Then there was another program called DARE To Make A Change. Now, that one I agreed to do but I was extremely cynical because it involved reading a storybook, twenty chapters, a chapter a week, and it was a modern day fable where this boy – who had no name so that you could make it a girl – encountered all the things that kids might encounter, such as drugs and stealing and bullying and graffiti and all the rest of it, becoming absolutely useless and hopeless. And what I found, to my astonishment, was that children who had a history of crime, drugs, you name it, really bad backgrounds, kicked out of schools, had responded to this book, started making changes at chapter three. So I was able to come up with some recommendations for that.

I mean, the joy of working with New Zealand police was that they accepted criticism, they accepted recommendations, they made change. None of the evaluations I've done for other government authorities have been willing to accept that – they ask you to evaluate, but when you come up with ideas that are different, or criticisms, they don't want to know.

Whereas in New Zealand it was the reverse.

Yes.

They accepted them and went on.

They *wanted* to know, and then made the changes, yes. Every single time.

And those programs have ended up being very, very effective.

Very successful, yes.

Whereas, in Australia, we're still afflicted with the Stranger Danger.

¹³ DARE – Drug Abuse Resistance Education.

That's still alive and well, yes. The program in New Zealand is quite explicit. For older kids they have work cards which say things like, 'Suppose that a man unzipped his pants and showed you his penis, what would be the safest thing to do?' 'Suppose that somebody asked you to touch ---?' You know, quite explicit. Initially the teachers were red-faced, but they found that the kids weren't. They said that children would go, 'Ugh, yuk!' if you had a question about 'Suppose your auntie gives you wet, sloppy kisses.' So the teachers found that being open and honest – and parents found that being open and honest – was extremely valuable, that children were able to talk to them about – and *vice versa* – a whole range of things that would otherwise have been off-limits. For example, anything that comes up on television now they find they can discuss sensibly with children. But what we found at the intermediate level was if they'd been at a school where there'd been no junior program, it was too late. The kids felt deprived, because they didn't have the knowledge and the confidence that the others had, but, worse than that, they could not talk to their parents about the program and their parents found they couldn't talk to them because they were too embarrassed. And we're talking about ages eleven to twelve.

So, Freda, apart from New Zealand through the 1990s, where did your research take you, research and publishing take you? I mean, it didn't just end with that side of child protection.

Oh, I was researching here as well, yes. I did research with parents because there was very little knowledge about what happens to families. You know, usually, very often with child sex abuse it's in families. And one day in the late 1980s I had a knock on my door and there was a group of ladies from Elizabeth saying, 'Help, help. We want to set up a group – we *are* setting up a group – of mutual support for parents who've been in our situation,' and they wanted me to advise on programs. And as a result of that I wrote a book called, *Why my child?* There were three Adelaide groups available for parents at that time: they were run on a peanut budget, I think all three got thirty thousand a year or something, two half-time employees for each group, and gradually their contracts were getting shorter and shorter. Labor – the local Labor Government – cut them back and then the Liberals cut out their funding altogether, and they closed down with the message that people had to go to Victims of Crime, which of course was in the city. And they were not experts in child sexual abuse, either. It was a disaster, really.

In the meantime, I'd taken students to the prison. We found there that most of the women were there for drug offences and some of them were only the same age as my students and they had children who were in foster care or with grandmas unpaid and couldn't cope. And so I became interested in prisoners and, in 1993, managed to get funding from the Criminology Research Council – bearing in mind that up to this point there'd been no funding for child protection. I mean, New Zealand was great because they provided my airfare and paid minimal expenses and gave me research assistance and gave me transport, gave me everything I needed, but applying for ARC¹⁴ grants, it was impossible because there wasn't a category for it. It wasn't counted as education. And of course science was the in thing anyway. But when I started getting funding from the Criminology Research Council that made a big difference. And I was able to interview eighty-four prisoners who were convicted child sex offenders, and I interviewed them in Perth, in all the South Australian prisons and also at Cooma [NSW]. And the ones in Perth and at Cooma had been in a treatment program, the ones in South Australia hadn't, and the difference was very marked in their attitudes, in their disclosures. It was another big learning curve for me.

Cooma was especially interesting because they were mostly sex offenders in there, and SBS¹⁵ had a program about their treatment program – they weren't allowed to call it a treatment program; it was a re-education program – but it seemed to be very effective. And they had prisoners who were saying how effective it was, and they were so concerned about the ease with which they'd been able to sexually abuse boys that they were willing to appear on TV unmasked – I mean they weren't shadowed in any way – and I thought, 'Well, golly, they've got guts, because they're going to be recognised.' And I heard their stories of how, in childhood, they'd been sexually abused. And then they were able to explain how they'd become offenders. And one of them said that two more TV programs wanted to go and interview them, did I think it was a good idea. And I said no, it wasn't, because even with SBS right at the very end they'd interviewed a well-known feminist who'd said, 'They shouldn't spend any money on these bastards, they should spend it on victims,' and of course these people

¹⁴ ARC – Australian Research Council.

¹⁵ SBS – Special Broadcasting Service.

were victims as well as offenders. I thought that step reduced the usefulness of that program. So I said, 'No, don't let television come in again. If you want to get your word out without it being doctored' – because I know what television does, you know, they'll take an odd sentence here and there and make you look an idiot – 'put pen to paper and write it down.' Now, this was with tongue in cheek because these were not educated men at all; they'd probably written very little other than dole [forms]. But within a month I had the first chapter. And because it was so impressive I showed it to my publisher, and she said, 'If you can get any more chapters like this we will stick our necks out and publish it, because it is groundbreaking stuff.' And so they published the book *From victim to offender*.

I was then puzzled as to what the difference was between men who'd become offenders and men who'd been sexually abused and didn't become offenders, so we then went on and interviewed another two hundred altogether, men who volunteered information and assured us that they hadn't offended. We only had their word for it, of course. But the difference [between offenders and non-offenders] was the sheer volume of sexual abuse and violence in their lives.

So have you been driven to a large degree, Freda, by community need or community outcry, do you think? You know, you said the women from Elizabeth came to you.

Yes. I suppose also I've found gaps in knowledge. When I wrote the first book on child sexual abuse, *Confronting the problem*, I thought that was the end of it. You know, 'I've done it, that's it.' But of course what I realised was how little we knew and I've got a lot of curiosity and saw the gaps in research and knowledge, and of course the field was wide open in Australia, I don't think anybody had done any research other than the medical research that Professor Kim Oates was involved with.

So in a sense you saw a need, even if it wasn't – well, it was from the community to a degree, but there was a need there just for people to know. And, given where you'd come from, you were probably the only person who could have done.

Yes. Because there's always a lot of curiosity as to why somebody from Early Childhood (laughs) would be doing research with convicted sex offenders. It's normally the criminologist's role. But when I was planning this I read that criminologists very rarely actually interview criminals. (laughter) And even the recent research, I suppose it's community-based, I've done with foster parents. And

that came about because I was looking at the – oh, violence and intimidation in the lives of people involved in child protection: that came about because *I* was being threatened, and I thought, ‘My goodness, if this happens to somebody in a university, supposedly an ivory tower, what’s happening out there?’ I was threatened for a whole year by two people. You see, now, with so many people on drugs, violence is coming from totally unexpected sources. These were women who sought my help and I couldn’t help because they wanted me to change the decision of a Family Court judge which, however powerful I might be, (laughs) I could not possibly do. So from there on they did bizarre things: sent me obnoxious stuff in the post; left me voicemail messages every day; contacted all the talkback programs in Australian media – which shows they were intelligent enough – and told them that I had information about the corruption in the Family Court, corrupt judges. And of course they were just doing it to annoy me, I suppose; but they went one stage too far and they wrote to the Federal Police. Oh, they wrote to President Clinton, actually sent him a tape, both sides – it was mother and daughter – and they sent me a copy of it and also to United Nations, and then contacted Federal Police; and that was the first time we were able to see the address. They were sending me copies of everything they’d written and finally we saw where their address was, and that was the end of that. Apparently, within two minutes of meeting the police officer who said, ‘Professor Briggs has handed over everything that she’s got,’ they accused him of corruption. They’d reported eight solicitors for not having any integrity, for being corrupt, and they then transferred their attention to him and I haven’t heard from them since, thank goodness.

Has this work put you in a bit of a notorious spotlight, in a way, Freda, do you think?

Less than I actually expected.

Oh, okay.

I actually get sex offenders ringing me, you know, asking for advice and – – –. Not much hostility in recent years, no. Only from drug addicts. (laughs) That’s on record, anyway.

Freda, just looking at growing up in Huddersfield, now living in Adelaide seventy years on, there’s been a huge sweep of life that you’ve had in that time – and I

don't mean just in the years, but in coming to understand things and see things: where can you see this whole question of child protection going now? From all your experience, do you think governments *are* going to listen, are communities going to listen?

I'm not optimistic because there's always been a lot of talk and not a lot of action. I would like to see child protection programs in all schools, possibly with teachers who specialise in that area because then you would get consistency. If it's just left, as Protective Behaviours was left, to individuals, it won't happen. And my research shows that unless children have a good, comprehensive, explicit child protection program in schools, they are extremely vulnerable because parents even now, in 2004, are not giving children sufficient information. It's too embarrassing, they don't know how to do it, they don't want to scare kids but at the same time they're still sticking to Stranger Danger. In the report I wrote for New Zealand police earlier this year, we had forty-four per cent of boys with learning difficulties who'd been sexually abused, and despite that, none of their parents had given them anything other than 'Don't talk to strangers.' And the girls were given vague hints that could have been given by my mother seventy years ago, like 'Don't talk to boys,' or 'Keep away from boys,' or 'You might get pregnant.' There's not sufficient information being given to children even now – especially boys – to be able to recognise abuse.

So schools: yes, the Education Department here is currently creating a new program; but will they carry through with training in the universities, to train the teachers? I doubt it, because there's been resistance throughout my twenty-five years at Magill. I have not been able to get education on child abuse and neglect into junior primary and primary teacher education, least of all secondary. It's only been in Early Childhood, and that was because I was there. And I think people will try to avoid it. Because the [administrators and] people who are in control are not experts in this area, therefore it's threatening, they probably have misconceptions and myths, the same as everybody else. I mean, I used to be told that if we teach our students they might be reporting people falsely. They're much more likely to report somebody falsely if they're inadequately educated. So that's why I'm cynical.

The justice system is not a justice system, it's a legal system, and great changes need to be made there. We need a court that is specifically for children with people who are educated in child development and child abuse, not just law. In fact, one of

the magistrates – I think his name was Clark – the other day, at a workshop where I was on the panel, said, ‘We don’t actually even need judges,’ which was interesting because we were talking earlier about the magistrates in the UK who were not lawyers but you have the legal advice there, and he was thinking that this might even be considered. You need a child-friendly environment. There is a pilot project in New South Wales at the moment which Bob Debus, the Attorney General, says is mobile, it can go to where the children are. I don’t think we’ll ever get courts in McDonald’s, but you get the picture. And it has to be done fairly quickly after an offence has been reported, because we are – especially in this state – being cruel to kids. If the parents decide to proceed with the prosecution of child sexual abuse it can take up to two years. During that time the child cannot get on with life or put the abuse behind them; they’ve got to remember it; and the longer the delay the worse the outcome, the greater the advantages to the perpetrator. And it’s just a game for lawyers: they can be as rude, as insulting, as cruel to children as they like and judges do not seem to interfere.

Looking at child protection from community services: quite clearly there has to be early intervention, which was the intention of the current tier¹⁶ system. But of course not only did they cut back on social workers but they also cut back on the services that would have provided that early intervention. So there has to be a focus there, but also on the education of social workers because my recent research with foster carers tells me that social workers don’t know very much about children and are unable to advise them; that children are being kept in dangerous homes for far too long, and by that time they’re often unfosterable with sexualised behaviours. They sexually abuse the foster carers’ own kids, they smash up the foster carer’s home, they set fire to foster carers’ homes, and they’re getting no support from the social workers who are responsible for the children.

So there is an enormous amount of work to be done and it isn’t just about money; it’s attitudinal.

¹⁶ Tiers are used by Family and Youth Services to categorise assessed risk upon notification; from them flows the type of investigation and child protection mechanism to be applied – Tier 1 = children in immediate danger; Tier 2 = children at significant risk; Tier 3 = children in need. Source: SA Government (2003), *Child protection review: final report*.

Well, Freda, thank you very, very much for talking with me today. It's been a wonderful experience, thank you.

My pleasure.

END OF INTERVIEW.