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Full transcript

of an interview with

DR. DAPHNE ELLIOTT

25 November 2008

-
by

Erica Jolly

for

**AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF UNIVERSITY
WOMEN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

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DAPHNE ELLIOTT

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**AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN
- SOUTH AUSTRALIA INC.**

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**DR. DAPHNE ELLIOTT
M.Sc. (Sydney), PhD (Cambridge)**

**J.D SOMERVILLE ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION, STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH
AUSTRALIA: INTERVIEW NO. OH 891/1**

Disc 1 of 2

We are in [the] Recording Room 3 at the State Library and it is November 25th 2008 and I am interviewing Dr Daphne Elliott, a national past president of the Australian Federation of University Women as part of the Oral History Project of the South Australia Chapter of the Australian Federation of University Women – which is held in the University of Adelaide and copies of which will also be held in the State Library and I thank Daphne for being my first person to be interviewed with this machine. I am Erica Jolly, education/health liaison for AFUW - SA.

Thank you Erica I'm glad to be part of your first experimental effort with this very impressive machine.

Very good for a scientist Daphne, it's wonderful.

I'll ask some questions and you go as far as you like with what you want to say and then we'll take it from there to all aspects of your life experiences, which are very important because they lead up to your connections with AFUW. OK?

Fine.

Starting with where you were born and all your family [experiences?]

I was born in Campbelltown in 1926 which was at that time a very small town not far south of Sydney, about 30 miles I think it was. My mother and father were married in 1922, not long after he came back from the First World War and at that time he was working in Sydney, 71 York Street, which I recently looked up in a trip to Sydney and it was fascinating to see this beautiful building where my father had once worked.

Anyway, a few of my mother's family had experience in the hotel business and they were instrumental in, I suppose, directing my mother and father into that business as a way of setting them up soon after their marriage. And so they took up a hotel in Campbelltown just opposite the railway station. It was in an upstairs room there that I gather I was born in 1926.

And what were the first things that interested you and that you enjoyed in your early life?

They moved soon after that to Picton and I remember there was a garden at the back of the hotel they took up there, where at a very young stage, my mother was pointing out to friends that I had put bags around the tops of the poppies to collect the seeds, so I think I had a scientific bent very early on.

And I went to the primary school at Picton. On and off my parents took leave and I went with them, still quite young, to New Guinea and New Zealand and, in 1938, we were with a family party in America. They were quite widely travelled for that time and I expect it was his experience in the war that had made him so outgoing. But when my

primary schooling ended, there was no secondary school at Picton that was 50 miles south of Sydney. So I either had to get a train up to Sydney everyday, which was really quite impossible, or go to school in Sydney and board somewhere there.

So they looked around and they chose for me the Presbyterian Ladies' College at Croydon, and there I was a boarder for five years. I did fairly well at that school, single-sex school, very much with the Presbyterian ethic. Some excellent teachers, most of them unmarried women who were dedicated to teaching. I remember a few in particular. There was Flora Eldershaw. She wrote with Marjorie

Marjorie Barnard! [interrupting]

Barnard [and] Eldershaw. They published the first one about Australia. She made a big impression on me. She was a very forceful woman. The Botany teacher, the history teacher: both of these women, really made me very keen on their subjects. And we actually had an art teacher, Adelaide Perry, who has since become quite famous but I'm afraid she couldn't do very much with me. I didn't have much talent in that direction.

But you had a connection with the humanities and with the sciences.

Yes

With Botany and with History

Definitely with History and with English with Flora.

And with English

So at the end of my school year when I was Captain of the School and Dux of the School, I got school prizes both in Science and in English.

What was your favorite element of English?

I think it was writing actually. Certainly History was European History and I was absolutely enamoured with the French Revolution and things like that. And what was it about English that I enjoyed so much? Well! I think it was the stories and the writing. I was less than eleven I think when I won first prize at the Picton show for a composition. And that's absolutely appalling to read now I have to say, but it was an early start.

I'm of course fascinated by connections between the humanities and the sciences.

Yes, you are.

Where did you go to University?

At the Sydney University. The teachers at PLC were the sort of women - it wasn't even under discussion. Girls could do anything they wanted to do. And I certainly quite liked the idea of becoming a doctor. Now, my parents had both left school at fourteen, and I certainly was the first person in the whole extended family who had gone to University, so they didn't have much notion of what was involved. So they consulted the local

doctor, Dr Andrews, who said "Well, yes, if she's interested in hospitals, perhaps she could be a bacteriologist in a hospital but to do medicine was really a waste of time for girls. It was a long course and they only got married at the end of it." And that was the end of it.

My mother was quite keen on pharmacy. She was a business woman and she could see me set up in a chemist shop in Picton. And I think it was really a compromise that I went to Sydney University to do science.

And which of the sciences did you go into?

In first year, it was the standard – Chemistry, Botany, Zoology.

Where was the maths?

No maths

No maths?

I was poor at maths at school and I avoided it at university and I've suffered ever since.

But what would you say to the people who say, unless you've got maths, you can't succeed in sciences?

It's not true.

It may be true in some sciences. It was certainly a disadvantage to me that I was never very good at statistics. And some parts of my scientific career involved maths. I needed that and I just had to go and get help at the time.

Well that's one of the wonderful things, being intelligent, you can do. You can actually say to yourself I need help for this and then you can go and get it. Once you got that first degree, what happened after that?

I did well. I got First Class Honours in Biochemistry and I was quite keen to do research. In the last two years of the science degree the old professor who had been there for many a year, Professor Priestly, and who was rather old fashioned, retired. And two young lecturers were appointed who influenced me in various ways. George Humphries was quite sarcastic and crushing and he developed some of my attributes so that I could in fact dare to argue with a person in authority.

With a bit of laughter...

Jack Still had just come back from Cambridge where he did a PhD and, with my love of English culture and his great stories of Cambridge, as well as which he had been in touch with the latest development in science and all the wonderful things that were happening or about to happen I should say – just that feeling in the air at the end of the forties that science was about to make great bounds. So I wanted to go and do a PhD overseas. And they couldn't be done in Australia at that time, so I did an M.Sc.

So you mean to say that you couldn't do a PhD in science? A woman couldn't do PhD in biochemistry?

Nobody. Nobody. I think towards the end, perhaps the first PhDs in science were given about that time, somewhere about '49 or '50. But they weren't offering them in Sydney, so I did an M.Sc which could be internal to Sydney University and I seemed to do that in very short time. I got that in a year after my Honours, so it couldn't have been of a very high standard, I don't think.

Well, you never know. [Laughter]

And so I started to look round for ways of getting to England. I had, when I graduated in 1947, joined AFUW partly, in fact mostly, because of the scholarships they offered and while I was doing M.Sc I was placed on the short lists. In fact I was the runner-up for an IFUW overseas scholarship.

I never did get that but almost at the same time, thanks to Jack Still's encouragement I applied for an 1851 Exhibition Science Scholarship. The background of this is that in 1851, you probably know, there was a Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace.

Mmm – the Crystal Palace. Three cheers for Prince Albert.

And it made a lot of money, a great deal of money and they set up a scholarship scheme which in 1922 was opened for Empire Scholarships. There were two for each country and they were open for women. The Rhodes Scholarship wasn't. They were well provided for. They were funded on the same level as the Rhodes. And the year before me, Jack Still had encouraged another one of his Honours students, June Lascelles, to apply for one and she got one. So he repeated the trick the next year with me. And June and I were, I think, the fifth and sixth women to get one of those overseas scholarships since they were opened for women in 1922.

It was a really wonderful thing to have a mentor like that and I'll be forever grateful to Jack Still for opening up that opportunity for me.

And you went to Cambridge: which College?

Girton and with Jack's recommendation I had got Robert Hill to take me on as a student. He was known to everybody at Cambridge as Robin Hill and he had made a great discovery of one of the reactions that took place in the photosynthetic chain in plants and it was called the Hill Reaction.

So Robin took me on. Girton took me on and Girton got me accommodation in the Women Graduates' Club in Mill Lane in Cambridge just a short distance from the Biochemistry Department in Tennis Court Road. So I really had a sort of dream run into Cambridge.

Oh, that's absolutely wonderful. But AFUW might not know that Girton, the school in Adelaide, set up for girls, was named for Girton College in Cambridge.

Was it?

And, of course, no one will remember that anymore because Girton has been sort of morphed into Pembroke.

Yes, I remember that now.

Which is now co-educational.

I remember that history.

And I'm just throwing that in because it's one of the connections we don't really think about.

When was Girton School set up?

I don't know the date but it was well and truly in existence while I was at Saints Girls which was set up by Anglican Kilburn Sisters of London to develop leadership in young women. Similar to PLC.

Mm

You were at Presbyterian Ladies College weren't you?

Yes – was Presbyterian Ladies College Sydney. Of course it's Presbyterian Girls School here in Adelaide.

It was a Ladies College once upon a time. It was PLC – now that's changed too. Now you are in Cambridge. And you're in this wonderful situation, this amazing place with its incredible scientific history.

Yes

What did Cambridge give you?

Well, Cambridge, in the three years I was there are probably the happiest of my life. Full of discovery. Full of contact with brilliant people, not only in science, although there were certainly great scientific names passing through Cambridge. Every week we had what was called a tea club which, apart from having tea, we often had a visitor from all around the world which in the end of the 1940's, they all came to Cambridge if they came to England. And so we had the best of the best.

Would you have known Max Perutz?

Oh, yes

How wonderful.

[Laughs]

He got Nobel Prize for? What did he do? Work on haemoglobin?

Yes, yes. That's right.

So you knew Max Perutz? Heavens.

He had a very disconcerting habit of twiddling his handkerchief. I won't tell you the rest of it. [Laughs]

All right, well of course, I'm interested in him because he was [the] Editor of "Nature" at the time when the DNA article was written which left Rosalind Franklin out and he later, sort of, apologised for that. He more or less concentrated on the men who were involved, Watson and Crick in Cambridge, in the DNA work. And they left out Rosalind Franklin. I've read the way in which he apologized and he tried to change it around later on.

Interesting

Yes. It reminds you that scientists are human beings first of all. Everyone is.

Ok. So you are having this wonderful time at Cambridge.

Mmm

How do you think that affected your life? You got your PhD?

Yes I got my PhD and I met my future husband. He was a year or two ahead of me and we actually did a piece of work together there which was quite – well I won't say it was world shaking – but it did change the direction of a certain line of biochemical work and which, because we weren't able to continue on with it, when we both left Cambridge – we were never able to follow it to its full completion. But it was quite a ground breaking piece of research. And at the end of that time we had decided we wanted to get married.

Bill had a Rockefeller Scholarship in America. I had a job waiting for me in the CSIRO in Adelaide and we thought we would try and it wasn't a separation, it was a fulfilment of these commitments. And he hoped, and I hoped that we would meet up again at the end of this somewhere.

In Australia I had a job with the CSIRO and there was every possibility that he had a job waiting for him at the ANU and then he was offered a job in Oxford that was definite, and sure. So, it was decided that we would take the Oxford alternative. And so, for three years we lived in Oxford.

I'm speechless, of course.

[Laughs]

And what did Oxford give you? Anything different from Cambridge?

I had a job in the Botany Department there. He was in the Biochemistry department had a Nuffield Scholarship and I did some reasonably good work there. And he did some reasonably good work in the biochemistry department. But really I did want to be back in Australia and, against the better judgement of all his friends who all said he was quite mad, we were married in America. By the way before, in the middle of this year between Cambridge and Oxford – and I guess that what else happened! You'll have to

What made you want to come back to Australia?

Family, I think.

Family, right.

Hmm

Have you had any children by now?

We had one child in England, three years after we were married. Jane. Yes, that's right, and I came back to Australia then just to see my parents. I think it was at that point I was convinced that – I think I was fairly happy to go after we first got married to go to England to see what offered but, after I came back with Jane to show her off to my parents, I became convinced that the Australian life style was what we needed for bringing up a family and I dare say that, at that stage, I was just a little bit brainwashed about the place of women.

Right. We'll stop here for a second.

Now we're recording again. Tell me what Australia had for you that England didn't have for your children?

I think it had family. My family on both my father's and mother's side were very strong family influences. I have to say that both of them were fifth generation Australians, so they had a lot in common in that way which I inherited. And so Australia meant a lot to me and I realised in bringing up children it was a much better, easier place and gave them more advantages. So, apart from family influences – and these weren't really as strong in Bill's case. Two of his brothers had left the family precincts. One had gone to South Africa and the other one was living quite a distance away from his parents. – So his family influences weren't quite as strong as mine, and I suppose that was one of the reasons I felt that I wanted Australia to be the place where I brought up a family.

As well as that, just after the war, there was a very determined government push to get women back into the home. Everything was aimed to make the home the place to be and I was just brainwashed; in this, with many others. So that for a long while, I thought

that my job in life was to help my husband's career and I certainly did this in my early years of marriage, after Jane was born in 1965, Michael in 1968. And you know I had a set of tea towels which said, beautifully decorated, Monday – washing – Tuesday – ironing – Wednesday, Thursday and throughout the week. And it was my job to help my husband's career.

I had those too. Only I embroidered them on aprons that my aunts got me to embroider.

Well, all those men coming back from the war had to have jobs, so I could understand that.

Things started to change a little bit in Canberra. I became re-connected with AFUW there. I'd been a member before in 1947, '48 and I re-joined when I came back in 1965 or 1966. The Canberra branch was a delightful erudite place to have the odd evening and it really gave me a great deal in the way of social setting and away from children all the time.

So when we built a house there and we built a garden with the 100 shrubs and 40 trees that the government supplied in those days, and I'd just finished the last of the curtains when Bill decided that a pure research job was not what he wanted. He wanted some teaching as well. And I won't go into the various overtures that were made and how he came to the final decision to take the Chair in Adelaide. But I can tell you it was the week that I put up the last curtain in our new house in Mullaway. But I was not too keen on this trip. Our youngest child, third child, was also six weeks old. It was not a happy move for me.

Ah!

Especially when, having looked around Adelaide and its suburbs, there was nothing here, like our new house in Mullaway. Then we spent a year in a government home in Klemzig. So, altogether it was a very bad year!

And then what happened? After you had your three children and survived a year in a government house in Klemzig? What got you back into your own career?

Right, well I was back into AFUW almost as soon as I got into Adelaide because the ACT branch asked me to be their representative on the new council in Adelaide which was started in 1965 – the triennium started then. And so, I agreed to that and Thenie Baddams was the Secretary.

She was Head at Woodlands, I remember.

Hmm?

She used to be the Headmistress at Woodlands.

Yes, she was – and I've just had a mental block about the President and I know her so well. A lawyer.

Jean Gilmore?

Jean Gilmore, of course. Jean Gilmore was the President. So I became the ACT representative on that council in Adelaide. It was the first time that the President and the Council had both come from the same city. That was quite a change for AFUW and I really enjoyed that, because most of the time I was still at home – and I really enjoyed that contact with university life, university politics. Thenie Baddams headed up a sub-committee of which I was part, on preparing for a permanent home for AFUW. And of course, that's been a recurring theme for all the rest of the time I've been involved with it. We had a conference at the end of that year and Lady Bastian, who was the wife of the Governor, herself a member of the AFUW, opened the conference and, altogether that was very good – that was my first AFUW conference and a very good way of getting back into the organisation.

What did you feel AFUW was really doing at that time?

It was fairly conventional but it had some big names.

Jean Gilmore was a very big name.

Jean Gilmore and the person who was President at the time whose – and my memory is deserting me again.

We can pause while it comes back.

The name's Jessie Cooper, isn't it?

Yes, Jessie Cooper was the President and then at the end of that three year period, we went on study leave. It was '69. And while I was away I had a letter from Margaret Crase the Secretary, asking me if I would be the new President of AFUW – SA. Of course I hadn't had very much experience of AFUW things so it was quite a step to take that on. But it really forced me to take stock of women's affairs and, from being a housewife and a mother I became again involved in the big wide world after taking on that Presidency.

And were you on the staff of Flinders then?

I had very soon after we came to Adelaide – we became friendly with the Professor of Biochemistry in the next street to us, Maurice Atkinson, and one day, when David our youngest child was about two, he came up to see us and said "Come on. It's time you got back to work." He said "I've got to write a review on (purine) salvage pathway and I want you to do the literature survey in preparation for this."

We had purposely built a new house after our year in Klemzig looking around just so that it would be near the Waite Institute and the Waite Library, and so this was a marvellous way to get back into biochemistry.

I had been doing some work while we were in Canberra because we had started a book with the Oxford University Press while we were in Oxford; data for biochemical research and we were preparing for a second edition of that, so I had done a little bit of

keeping up with biochemistry because of that but it almost was a new subject to come back after thirteen years at home. And it certainly was a challenge which, after a year of that, Maurice said, "Why don't you really come back and be a demonstrator at Flinders." And so I took that challenge up with great trepidation because I had almost forgotten how to use a balance and I was thrown into the third year class of the first lot of students at Flinders in 1968.

That was the first year I went up – No, I went up to Flinders in 1969.

Hmm

Max Clark. Was he the Professor?

He was the Chair of . . . What was it called then? Biological sciences Department was it? School of Biological Sciences.

School! Yes – 'cause I remember him from Flinders Council. How did you go up the academic ladder at Flinders? Was it easy?

Well, being appointed as a demonstrator - the lowest of the low - and no career path, it was very difficult. Hmmm. Two years after I became a demonstrator, I applied for a senior lectureship – senior demonstratorship, sorry! And I remember being somewhat put out when my immediate superior biochemist expressed some surprise at this, that I might want to apply for a promotion. However, I persevered. I did apply for it and I got it. There was another rung after this – that was a principal demonstratorship. After that it was full stop.

So, when I applied for a principal demonstratorship, which had a fairly hefty requirement on it, although I did meet it because right from the beginning I was taking up my research projects again and getting grants. Even so, that also was rather forward of me, to think that after coming back to work after four years I might apply for yet another promotion.

And then there was some difficulty because they were thinking of doing away with the principal demonstratorship. And this went on for eighteen months, while they hummed and hah-ed about whether they would have a principal demonstratorship. And all the time my application was sitting there. I had a great - John Rice was in a similar position in the, in the. . .

Mathematics?

Mathematics Department. And John and I were good pals. He, of course, was much more politically active and was probably a great help in the negotiation that the Staff Association continued to have through all this period. Therefore, I felt really quite stymied. There was also nowhere else I could go because Bill was a Professor in Adelaide University and it was quite unthought-of for husband and wife, to work in the same university at that time.

However, a lectureship did come up in 1972. I had been back at work for four years. I had published papers. I had got university grants from the very beginning to do research and, that year, I'd got an ARC grant, so I applied for this job and sent in my application – quite a few applications by that time – and heard nothing. Then I suddenly got my publications sent back from the Registry. Thank you for your application – I forget just how it was worded. In any case it was clear they had appointed somebody else. I was absolutely furious that I had had no interview which was, even then, the thing to do.

The correct thing.

Certainly the correct thing to do for somebody in the School applying. Not a word from any of my colleagues. Two at least of which were on the selection committee. And [laughs] I won't tell you the way some of these comments came to me. Certainly the one from the Chair of the School was rather dramatic, when he told me – when he said "Well," he said, looking rather shamefaced, "we had Daphne and there was a feeling that if we appointed her, we would lose the senior demonstratorship." So it was a bad show.

It must have reinforced the value of the Australian Federation of University Women, as far as you were concerned.

Well. . .

This was happening to you. You were being undermined in fact, of your chances to rise for all kinds of reasons.

Hmm.

One of the stories I heard was that they decided that they did not want to put you on the same sort of salary level that might be the equivalent of your husband's salary level – if you went really up the ladder. You didn't need a high salary because Bill already had one. That story was still around Flinders Council in 1990.

That's very interesting Erica because one of the comments I had, from a very good friend – and I'm sorry I didn't pursue it – was, and this he told me quite a long while afterwards, was because my husband was a university professor. I thought at the time – perhaps there's some professional jealousy there. It never occurred to me that it might be financial.

Well!

Who knows!

In any case it's another of the instances of prejudice and discrimination.

It was upsetting and I think it probably had this effect that I certainly put it behind me and it didn't affect any of my relationships with any of my colleagues – it's probably, well it's certainly the reason I didn't get on the ladder earlier and therefore get to a higher position where I might have been more attractive to honour students, to do

PhDs and things like that. And it might have made a difference in applying for grants. It might have been more difficult.

In any case, I eventually did get on the ladder because they changed the rules so that there could be a progression from senior demonstrator to lecturer. And John Rice and I were two of the first four that were able to make that change. But by now it was within about five years of my retirement. So I became a lecturer and I think when, the next year, I applied for senior lectureship it really shook people. [Laugh]. And it was only because of support from two people on the selection – on the promotions committee – I'm pretty sure who one of them was – a woman we both know – the other was one of two males from the school who spoke very strongly about me and about how important I was to the school and how I should have this reward, against the remarks of some one else (and I'm being very indiscreet here) who said, "Oh she only wants it because of superannuation." [Laughs]. I'm glad I didn't know that at the time.

Yes

[Laughs]

One of the things you were doing and all this time you were involved with AFUW – one of the things you were doing at Flinders, that I think matters very much, is your involvement in the Foundation courses to help mature age people, very often women, to sort of overcome the disadvantages that they had in secondary education and to proceed and show that they could succeed in higher education. I think Vic Beasley, for example, valued your support incredibly.

It is true that I did become quite deeply involved in the Foundation courses. I was one of – I think I was almost the only woman on the south side of the lake who was on the permanent staff.

[Interrupts] So you were on the Science side of the lake! Yes!

I could see that in practical classes, that women need support. They needed pushing. They needed to get on the machines. And so I always made it a point of seeing that didn't happen in my practical classes. And I applied, with Vic's blessing and help, for a CETECH grant – some sort of government grant. (I can't remember what CETECH stands for now.)

Anyway I got about \$4,000 to run the courses in science and mathematics for women in spite of my mathematical background. And for these courses I got lectures, and so on, and ran them. Yes. They were a great source of satisfaction to me that I was able to do that. And I was also working with schools. I was the schools secondary liaison person for going out and giving lectures at school. And I guess that in many ways because of my own setbacks, I became very involved in trying to get more women and girls to do science and mathematics.

That's still a very important thing. What I'd like to move to now, if I can, is the role that you took up with AFUW, and because your position as a senior lecturer in science – with your background in science and with the suffering (I use the word 'suffering') and the encouragement of girls not to enter the sciences that was going on in schools. How did you see your role in AFUW, modelling, perhaps, examples for other people to aim high? Did you see AFUW having any role in all that?

Yes. Well I do remember occasions when my scientific background did influence me. For instance, in the eighties, I was quite active in going to at least two UNESCO meetings and giving papers. So, in the wider educational fields I used my science. And I went there as an AFUW representative to those UNESCO meetings to give AFUW a voice and a presence. And it was when I later held positions in IFUW it was always that aspect of girls and women and education in science that I gravitated towards.

What were all the roles you had with IFUW? This is [was!] all before you had become National President.

Uh

Eighties

Yes. It was, it was, I'd had quite a bit of experience by the time I became involved in IFUW. Let me see, first of all, after I had done my three years as President of the South Australian branch – that was fairly early on – my next involvement came because Council then next came to Adelaide. Thenie Baddams, this time, was the President. That was in '82 to '85 and I was CIR in that Council.

That's Coordinator for International Relations.

Yes, yes. And, according to the constitution it was the CIR who went to IFUW Council meetings in Geneva. And, even as head of the Australian delegation to the IFUW conference at the end of Thenie's presidency when the President would normally have led the delegation. Thenie also at that time didn't take that role because, at that time, there was no funding of any sort for the AFUW President to go to the meeting and because I was always able to manage to tack on a few weeks at the end of study leaves, and the Vice-Chancellor at Flinders was always very supportive in allowing this and sometimes giving me little bits of grants to help, then I was always able to do that instead of Thenie. So, I was able to become involved at that level because of my frequent trips to Geneva and because I led the conference in Gröningham I think it must have been 1985. But as for being a scientist, yes, there were times – I'm trying to think of the meeting we held in science and technology in Brisbane, just before the Brisbane Conference of which I was convener. I just can't remember what that was...

Well, I think it would be useful to stop now just for a minute and take a little bit of time and come back to the Brisbane conference.

End of Disc I

Disc II

We are into the second hour Daphne and you're at Brisbane for a conference 1985 when was it?

Yes, that must have been – No, I'm not too sure. No. 1985 was the end of the period when Thenie Baddams was President. That would have been an Adelaide conference at the end of that time. I think after that I became – I'm not sure what it was – the next point of my AFUW history that really sticks out with me was when I became President and that was in 1997 and so it is really fast forward quite a way up to then.

Right.

And when I became President in 1997 I was giving my time full time to AFUW. I'd retired from Flinders and so I worked solidly for three years, wrote many, many – 60 I think – full submissions to government during that time on various issues to do with women's education and status of women and it was a very full programme of representing AFUW in other ways as well, at conferences, UNESCO conference where I joined the IFUW team in Paris. And some had a more scientific basis that I remember going to in Sydney and in the Philippines. So, I was using the whole of my academic experience in writing grant applications, writing reports and submissions and anywhere I saw AFUW could have a voice in women's education or in the status of women.

And two of the biggest efforts during this time were the two conferences that come under – well – my supervision I suppose. I was looking very hard for a source of funding that we could use to use AFUW's big stores of experience in running conferences and in doing projects. And I found one that was very close to my heart in the grants that were being made available for Aboriginal education. So, with the help of a working party in Adelaide, which I think you were part of, Erica.

Yes I was.

We got together a grant application to run a conference on Indigenous education next and that was held in 1998.

1998.

And we were very successful in running a two-day conference where we were, mainly I think, [addressed by] Aboriginal speakers and with a lot of help from the Flinders Department, Yunggorendi.

Yunggorendi. And the University of South Australia

And the University of South Australia who were very generous with the accommodation that they offered for that and Basil Hetzel, who was the Chancellor at the time, was kind enough to open that conference. Altogether it was a great conference. It had widespread publicity and as I say widespread funding from government.

It was when Amanda Vanstone was Minister for Education that you got that money.

Yes.

And you were able to bring Veronica Arbon down from Batchelor College in the Northern Territory. You had Marcia Langton.

Marcia Langton

You had Aboriginal women from Western Australia from Curtin University? I can't remember which university. You had Maria Lane who was the Manager.

Yes.

Of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Support Unit at the University of South Australia.

And speakers from Flinders, of course.

Yes. You had these women who told it as it was and who, sort of, made us aware of the barriers that existed before Aboriginal women could get to university, the depth and range of those barriers.

Yes. We then put this on record.

Yes.

And published a fine record of the papers including a beautiful cover by an Aboriginal artist.

I don't know her name.

Who we paid royalties to.

Oh, good! [Laughter]

And it was something of which I am very proud. It has a Library number.

Well, as far as I know, as far as Aboriginal women are concerned, it's the first significant effort by non-Aboriginal women academic organisations to make the rest of Australia aware of what needed to be done. It produced a significant number of active responses after that. For example, AFUW-SA discovered what kind of problems were going on in the Northern Territory regarding bi-cultural education. Howard had been in control of government since 1996.

Yes.

This was 1998 and there were significant changes to approaches to English teaching. I'm never going to forget Veronica Arbon's talk.

We even had a book launch at Flinders Art Gallery

[The City Art Gallery] Yes

With the Chancellor there, with a beautiful parasol I remember.

Personally, seeing I have only been part of AFUW since 1993 when I was dragged into it, that was a very significant event for me and so was the national conference, the triennial conference that was held at the Adelaide University.

Yes, in 2000 and the day-long seminar that we held, that day, on life long learning had some very good contributors! In particular the conference was opened by the Vice-Chancellor of Adelaide.

Mary Kane?

Mary Kane. And the major speaker was the present Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Australia.

Denise Bradley [Now former VC]

Denise Bradley. And others from the Department of Education and the Department of Further Learning at Flinders were involved. In fact the Department of Further Learning helped us with some finance for that day. That also resulted in the publication with an IBN number. They were both very solid.

Academically sound.

[Laughs] I'm trying to think of another word. Not LMs. Something to hand on from the Presidency and something in writing from the Presidency in Adelaide, those three years.

That's quite a while – and, of course, Louise Souter was here and she was the President of IFUW at the time at that conference.

Yes.

And she's the one who proposed the idea Australia becoming the place for the next triennial conference of IFUW that ended up being held in Perth in 2004.

It ended up there. Due to some misplaced enthusiasm that started it off.

Very misplaced enthusiasm.

Around the – I'm just trying to place when we got the grant for the – I think it was both the conference in 1985 when Thenie was President and that conference in 2000 for both those conferences I think I got money from ADAB to bring people from

The Pacific Islands?

The Pacific Islands, yes.

A woman came from Thailand too.

Yes, Thailand and Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka was at the '85 conference but the –

It was quite something to bring women from the Pacific Islands.

That shortly afterwards resulted in the formation of the offshoot, – one of the regional associations of IFUW – Pacific Women Graduates Association.

New Zealand had considerable influence –

New Zealand was also involved in that.

I think that was when I more or less decided that this international aspect of IFUW is important.

One of the things I have found in the time that I have been part of it, is the problems of the name – Australian Federation of University Women. We've had people saying that it's only academics of universities.

Looking at AFUW now, seven years on from that conference, or even from the 2004 triennial conference in Perth, what would you say were the main achievements of that for AFUW? I'll ask you that question first, then I'll ask you the next one.

I think it has moved to give AFUW a solid reputation as perhaps being the voice of women graduates. It has certainly, during the time when we had more active involvement – when we had offices for the status of women – in Canberra, it was the organisation that government came to on a number of questions [where] they wanted the opinion of graduates. Of course since that time we've lost that voice – we may be getting it back again, I don't know.

[Interrupting] We are getting it back because we lost it during the Howard years, but Tanya Plibersek is the Minister for the Status of Women and we have just signed the protocol, I think, of support for opposition to domestic violence.

Oh, yes.

And I need to have a look at my machine and see what Women Speak are saying but – how else do you see its influences?

What about the bursaries, for example, do you see them as significant in what we've been doing?

Certainly for the people who get them, they're an absolute stepping stone for applying for other, bigger fellowships and proving that they were worth something for their CVs that they have had one. So I think they are very, very important for the people who get them and they are something for which AFUW is well known, especially in Queensland and South Australia. Other states haven't been quite as active in that area but they all have some sort of programme.

The other thing I was going to ask – and it'll be the last question. – What do you think we need to do now? How do you see the future for AFUW from now on?

I think, like all organisations, whether they are women's or men's, they have trouble with membership. People are so involved in their careers and the things that they have to do in order to keep their foot on the ladder if you like, or to keep their profile, that they just haven't got time for outside interests in that way. And if they do have time, then they go to the gym to try and keep healthy. And yet it is so important.

Well.

[goes on] I think people who have opinions and voice them in newspaper columns and so on, would support the idea that the sort of involvement with an organisation that is either charitable or, like AFUW, that have defined aims, that are worthy, is very important for people to do that kind of voluntary work. And so it's a matter of publicity I think, trying to explain what the aims are in the organisation. We work on this continuously in IFUW and AFUW but it is difficult to get it out into the public arena.

Do you think the Internet is going to help it?

It is so important to have a very good website. Very important.

Thank you, Daphne

It's been a pleasure, Erica.

End Disc II