Claremont cameos: women teachers and the building of social capital in Australia

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This book is dedicated to the women who participated in its development and to all women who nurture the education of children.

In particular, *Claremont Cameos*, is dedicated to Alma Hardy, who represents all mothers who support the education of their daughters.
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Above all, we thank Ruth, Sam, Lyall, Zoë and Colin for reminding us that there is a life beyond writing books.

Lynne Hunt and Janina Trotman
Claremont Teachers' College. Front elevation, showing the on-site model, one-teacher school erected in 1911.

‘Claremont College was the first and only teachers' training college in Western Australia for many years. I thought Claremont College was the most beautiful place I'd ever seen, with beautiful grounds and a very handsome-looking old building’.  

RICA ERICKSON
The centenary of Edith Cowan University is a significant event in the history of Western Australia: it celebrates the opening of the State's first tertiary institution, Claremont Teachers' College, in 1902. Being a primary teachers' college, most of its students were young women. This book, *Claremont Cameos* , tells their story. It is a storyline that stretches from the 'Stolen Generation' of Aboriginal children to Freud; it touches on the discovery of rare orchids and recounts the development of a fashion empire. Environmentalism, feminism, discrimination, resistance and commitment form part of the fabric of the book. The women's stories are powerful, whimsical, intelligent and funny. Together they make a good read that traverses the history of education in this State. In so doing, the stories encompass important themes in twentieth century history including rural expansion, the Great Depression, World War II, and post-war migration. Most importantly, in ECU's centenary year, *Claremont Cameos* highlights the contribution its graduates have made to the social capital of Australia. These women started special education, secured equal pay for women teachers, wrote internationally recognised novels, poems and plays, initiated child psychology, started alternative schools, worked with migrant groups, developed domestic violence refuges, and became leaders in local government. This dynamic patchwork of achievement is the century-old foundation of cultural capital on which ECU's contemporary mission of service, professionalism and enterprise stands. Since 1902, ECU has been Western Australia's major provider of teacher education. There would be few people in the State whose lives have not in some way been influenced by a teacher who trained at ECU. This is your story, as well as theirs.

January 2002

Professor Millicent Poole
Vice-Chancellor
Edith Cowan University
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THE CONTEXT OF THE STORIES

I don’t know why I wanted to be a teacher, but I always did. Long before I went to school I used to run a class at home with all the Christmas cards! I named them, put them into classes and gave them examinations! From the day I started school I announced that I was going to be a teacher. My parents were rather worried about this because they felt that I’d set my heart on it and that there would be no opportunity for me to do this. They had very little money and they didn’t want me to be disappointed when I couldn’t do it.

Who is the woman talking? Why is the story interesting? What does it illustrate? The woman is Alice Myers. She speaks of Western Australia, and of the hard economic times in the inter-war years of the twentieth century. Most importantly, she speaks of teaching. In just a few words she shows that teaching is a passion and that access to training was not easy for those of limited means. This is the power of storytelling: it conveys so much more than the tale told. Stories provide interpretations of the world and lock the teller of the tale and those who listen into a common understanding and tradition. As a consequence, storytelling lies at the core of human cultures. Long before the written word, stories told or sung were a means of transmitting the accumulated wisdom of a group. It can, therefore, be a conservative and cautionary appeal to tradition but it can also be transformative. The consciousness-raising sessions of many revolutionary movements rely on storytelling to reconstitute history in a manner that befits the group. Feminist consciousness-raising is one such example, of which this book forms a part. Used in this way, personal stories challenge received wisdom and make credible claims about new knowledge generated from voices previously silenced.

The aim of this book is to document the stories of women graduates of Claremont Teachers’ College, the first post-secondary educational institution in Western Australia, established in 1902. The stories are transformative because
histories of Australian education often focus on 'acts and facts' and on the biographies of great men rather than on classroom teaching. In contrast, *Claremont Cameos* reveals the humour and humanity of life in the classroom. The intelligence and drive of women graduates of Claremont Teachers' College was often thwarted because, until 1969, women had to resign from teaching when they married, although they were often retained as temporary teachers. Of those who did not re-enter teaching many turned their considerable energies outwards to become highly involved in building the social capital of Australia. Some Claremont students became nationally and internationally known for their accomplishments, notably, poet, novelist and playwright, Dorothy Hewett and fashion entrepreneur and environmentalist, Liz Davenport. Others showed initiative in instigating a range of 'firsts' such as Alice Myers, who started special education in Western Australia, and Margaret Nadebaum, who was the first woman to be director-general of the Western Australian Education Department [at that stage entitled chief executive officer of the Ministry of Education]. Evelyn Parker was the first woman to be elected a city mayor in Western Australia; Hanifa Deen demonstrated leadership in developing multiculturalism in Western Australia; Nennie Harken led the charge for equal pay for women; and Rica Erickson, naturalist and historian, has been a key figure in the preservation of records of Western Australian immigration. Starting with a focus on Claremont, the stories of its women students, the famous and the quiet achievers, becomes an expansive and interesting account of Australian social history.

The women's stories are set in Western Australia. The State is large, covering over two and a half million square kilometres – a third of the Australian continent. Yet its population is small and clings to the seaboard, thereby creating particular problems in the provision of education for its sparse and widely-dispersed rural and mining populations. Western Australia is young. It began as a British colony – the Swan River Colony – in 1829. However, its development was limited until the 1890s. Consequently, a considerable part of the story of its non-Aboriginal population remains within living memory and can be revealed not only through documentation but also by oral evidence. For example, the oldest of the women interviewed for this book, Annie Andersen, studied at Claremont Teachers' College in 1911, only nine years after the College opened.

Despite the unique qualities of the Western Australian setting, the stories in this book provide insights into the evolution of formal education in Western societies. The autonomous development of its system of schooling in a geographically isolated setting means that its history is finite, defined by the tyranny of distance. Yet its multicultural population, dominated at first by the British, brought with it models of social and educational development that mirror broader trends in the Western world, for its early administrators had been trained and gained teaching experience in the United Kingdom.

Clearly delineated by time and space, this book gains further definition by focusing on the graduates of Claremont Teachers' College. Established in 1902,
the College was the State's first post-secondary educational institution. Until 1912, when the University of Western Australia emerged, Claremont College provided the only opportunity in Western Australia for students to proceed past a high-school education. For the first half of the twentieth century it was the only Westralian teacher training college. As such, its influence was enormous. All Western Australians of the time were taught, at least in part, by its graduates. Now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Edith Cowan University has emerged from its origins in Claremont Teachers’ College to celebrate its centenary in 2002. Together with the former teachers’ colleges it absorbed, Edith Cowan University can lay claim to educating around 90% of Western Australia’s teachers.

At its inception, Claremont Teachers’ College was part of the Western Australian government’s plan to respond to the educational needs of a rapidly-expanding population. The period before the Great War saw a significant increase in the population and its spread to the remote goldfields and rural areas. When Western Australia was granted responsible government in 1890 its non-Aboriginal population was only 46,290. In the next two decades the population grew six-fold under the impetus of the gold rush of the 1890s and the subsequent spread of farming. This growth fuelled a hectic demand for new schools, particularly isolated one-teacher schools, which by 1910 constituted fifty per cent of all schools in the State. To meet the demand for schools the Education Department was created in 1893. Under its highly centralised administrative control a statewide system of education quickly evolved. Initially, schools were staffed by teachers drawn from the other Australian States – the ‘wise men from the East’, as they were known. Locally-grown teachers were little more than primary-school educated, although the department had introduced annual examinations in an effort to raise the standard of their education. By 1902 the strong demand for qualified teachers led to the creation of Claremont Teachers’ College. Enrolments at the College in 1902 showed the predominance of female students. There were thirty women and only eleven men. This imbalance was to continue, with only minor variations, over the decades until the doors of the College were closed to teacher training in 1989.

In the 1980s, motivated by demands for economies of scale, many small, teacher education campuses around Australia fell victim to the juggernaut of fiscal constraint and new educational philosophies. The grand old lady, Claremont, whose turreted splendour reeked of establishment and turn-of-the-century optimism, finally closed its doors to teacher trainees in 1989. The closing ceremonies provided the specific motivation for this book because, in honouring College staff and students, past and present, men spoke of men, and women were forgotten. An impassioned letter to the POST, a suburban newspaper, and the cartoon that it inspired, provided the starting point of Claremont Cameos.

Gender coloured and shaped the development of Claremont and this book seeks to tell a little of that tale. From the beginning, the curriculum reflected not only the needs of the day but the assumptions of its time so that, in addition to the
Teachers’ college salute forgot female students

I recently attended the Salute to 87 Years of Claremont, a garden party to celebrate the closure of the Claremont Teachers’ College as an institution for training teachers.

The occasion had been widely advertised to attract ex-students of the college, and was very well organised.

However, as a former student, I was very disappointed in the spirit of the function, which I believe was reflected in the speeches.

Three very listenable speeches were presented by three men, one of whom spoke on behalf of former students.

In my time at the college, in the early 60s, female students outnumbered male students somewhere in the ratio of five to one.

This was necessary due to the wasteful practice of enforcing women to resign on marriage, and the absence of any sort of maternity leave.

I believe the gender ratio was little different at any time during the college’s history.

Yet, despite the fact that there have been more women trained as teachers during the college’s history, and that women are the dominant sex in the teaching profession, not one woman was invited to speak!

While I cannot presume to speak for all women who were students, the man who spoke on behalf of former graduates, though he delivered a very entertaining speech — did not reflect my experience as a student at the college.

To make matters worse, another speaker had browsed through some of the college yearbooks to find former students who had “made good”.

Yes, you guessed it! Those students he found to name as post-college achievers were all men.

My memory of my teachers’ college days are those in which I recall feeling that women, despite their greater numerical strength, were not considered to have any future in the system.

And it does not appear things have changed much in the intervening 27 years.

A. White
Martins Avenue
C/aremont-Nedlands


(Cartoon and letter reproduced by kind permission of the editor).
courses studied by all students, women were required to do kindergarten studies, needlework and 'domestic economy', while men studied chemistry, physics, algebra and manual training. Gendered expectations were interwoven with broader curriculum concerns such as educational standards, which still resonate in contemporary debates about higher education. In its early years the College curriculum could scarcely be dignified with the title of a tertiary education. Indeed, some subjects were taught at secondary-school level to raise the educational standard of students, who otherwise had only a primary-school level of achievement.

At different times the pre-service training lasted for three months, six months, one year and two years before achieving three-year status in the second half of the twentieth century. In the early years the pressure to provide teachers for bush schools led to the development of short courses for rural teachers, which started as three-month programs in 1908. By 1924 the demand for teachers had accelerated due to rural expansion. As a consequence, flexible entry points were instituted for the one-year course starting in February, June and September each year. At about this time conditions of service for teachers improved after a teachers' strike resulted in considerably higher salaries that attracted more men into the training program of the College.

During the Great War the shortage of male College students and teachers led to the closure of some bush schools. Protective attitudes towards women prevailed and tough conditions in outback areas were seen as unsuitable for women teachers. Nevertheless, many women did teach in rural areas and continued to train in the short courses for bush schools. However, subsequent cost-saving policies, which included the concentration of effort into fewer rural schools, as well as the emergence of larger country towns, eventually led to the demise of most one-teacher, bush schools.

In any case, matters of national and international significance were bearing on the State, its education system and Claremont College. The Great Depression of the 1930s saw the temporary closure of the College and the permanent closure of its boarding facilities. The institution closed at the end of 1930 and re-opened in mid-1934, when the short courses were reduced to their 1919 length of six months. Debate about the inadequacy of the preparation of rural teachers raged in the Teachers' Union and in the corridors of power of the Education Department throughout the 1930s, but World War II forestalled all hopes of any real change.

During World War II the programs of Claremont Teachers' College were transferred to the University of Western Australia while the College buildings were used for military purposes and as a temporary high school for girls. One of the high-school teachers of that era, Dorothy Tangney, was later to be the first woman elected to the Australian Senate.

Significant features of the Western Australia demographic structure after 1946 were a high birth rate and an influx of migrants whose presence was designed to shore-up the economy and the relatively small population. The sudden
increase in children, together with the decision to extend secondary education to all, caused major changes in the education system, in particular a shift of concern away from rural schools. Teachers were in demand and financial support was extended to attract high-school graduates into teacher training. This caused a rapid increase in enrolments at Claremont from 229 in 1946 to 427 in 1948. For the first time, male students outnumbered female students.

Financial assistance in the form of bursaries attracted students from working-class backgrounds who otherwise would not have been able to afford a tertiary education. It also assured Western Australia of an army of teachers, because graduating students were not only guaranteed a job but were, in fact, bonded to teach for a specified period as a condition of accepting a bursary. Expanding numbers of teacher trainees led to the development of other teacher training colleges. Over the period 1955-1972 Claremont lost its monopoly to emerging colleges at Graylands, Nedlands, Mount Lawley and Churchlands.

In this period, the two-year, Teacher Training Certificate course became a three-year Diploma of Education. Two-year trained teachers re-entering service, who had not had ten years of continuous service, were required to take a one-year conversion course. This requirement kept the colleges busy in the early 1970s with a population of mature-age, female students whose opportunity to complete ten years of continuous service had been blocked by discriminatory regulations that had obliged them to resign upon marriage. The move to longer periods of training for teachers was also a function of pressure to professionalise teaching. The improving status of teachers has traditionally been connected with a push for better credentials. Reflecting this, the three-year diploma program has now been transformed into a four-year Bachelor of Education degree, itself a preliminary to masters and doctoral studies.

The several teachers' colleges were amalgamated in 1982 to become the Western Australian College of Advanced Education. In turn, in 1991, the diversification of the College of Advanced Education into areas other than teacher training was recognised in its redesignation as the State's newest university, Edith Cowan University, named after the first woman politician in Western Australia. The University still trains many of the State's teachers through its School of Education.

While women speak for themselves in Claremont Cameos, their stories also chart the course of educational history in Australia, Western Australia in particular. More generally, the stories illustrate aspects of social development and change with particular reference to the role of women in the twentieth century. The ordering of their stories is chronological, by birth date, so that the scope of social history over the last one hundred years can be absorbed through the detail of the events described. The stories were selected to cover the diversity of women's achievements and experiences. The interviewees ranged in age from Annie Andersen, who attended Claremont Teachers' College in 1911, only nine years after it opened, to students who graduated in the 1980s, just before Claremont closed its doors to teacher education. Included are a nun,
women of Aboriginal and migrant descent, career women and stay-at-home mothers, married and single women, and urban and rural graduates.

Although the aim was to avoid repetition by presenting a variety of personal experiences, repetition did become important to the study because it established patterns and continuities in women’s lives, which indicate that apparently isolated events are socially formed. The stories reveal systematic discrimination against women teachers including lower pay than men and enforced resignation on marriage, resulting in the loss of leave entitlements and of seniority, which was the basis of promotion. The result was a significant ‘brain drain’ of women from the teaching force, particularly from promotional positions in the Education Department. However, for the community in general, there was some gain. Many of these intelligent and well-educated women graduates of Claremont College, blocked in their career aspirations, re-directed their energies and talents to build the social capital of Australia through their engagement in social and political processes that enhanced the quality of life for all. A few were recognised in honours lists for their contributions: For those who were not, we offer this book as a bouquet in recognition of their achievements.
TELLING THE TALE

Storytelling has gained respectability as oral history, which acknowledges the importance of lived experience through the collection of people's memories and stories. The subjectivity of personal narratives has often been ignored as a source of evidence and rejected as biased by Western paradigms of science, yet it shows that truth has many faces and counterbalances the evidence of official documents with varying interpretations of events. As such, oral history has a democratising influence on recorded history that renders visible the voices of those less heard. It is the history of ordinary people: yet a distinction needs to be made between ordinary people and ordinary circumstances. Traditional histories mostly describe the more extraordinary and well-documented circumstances of political and economic events. In contrast, the ordinary circumstances of daily social life have succoured some extraordinary people whose stories have been neglected, partly because they are inadequately documented and, in the case of women, also because of the sexist assumptions of academic historians. Women are far from being a sub-group in teaching. Although men secured the positions of power in the Western Australian Education Department, women always were the majority of its teachers. In Claremont Cameos – a history of an occupation – the intention is to honour the ordinary and extraordinary lives of teachers through the eyes of women. The aim is to explore the impact on their careers of wider social expectations about women's role in society, as well as the changes they have wrought to liberate themselves from limiting social constraints.

The Interviews

The act of interviewing women whose achievements have been largely ignored is, in itself, a form of social action through which the respondents receive public recognition of their work. However, the nature of interviewing presents particular problems in women's history. The traditional style of scientific detachment, in which one person asks questions and another answers, has been
found to be unsuccessful with women, who generally demand some reciprocity in the conversation. Further, interviews need to be conducted in a way that allows each woman to speak her own mind. This approach was adopted in the interviews for Claremont Cameos.

The apparent danger in a highly personalised approach to interviewing is that of leading the interviewee to respond in a particular way. This need not be so. Respondents can and do disagree with interviewers and the intrusion of one’s own views can present a point of view against which respondents can react. In this manner interviews become conversations that can reveal rich information. The importance of egalitarian and reciprocal relationships in the interview setting resulted in a firm decision to have only women interviewers for Claremont Cameos to avoid any power dynamic that may arise in conversations between men and women.

The interviewers for the project were women from many walks of life, who volunteered to participate in what became a collective research endeavour. The plan was to spread the workload so that each interviewer was responsible for only a few interviews – in most cases just one. The volunteers were helped in planning their interviews in a day-long workshop and by a list of about ninety questions, which was provided as a guide to the issues to be covered. In general, the rule was that there were no rules. A conversational approach to interviewing requires flexibility. Each interviewer was able to explore unique highways and byways while maintaining links to common themes. By drawing on the list of suggested questions, some of the older interviewees took the trouble to write down their thoughts before the interview. This enabled interviewers to tailor questions accordingly. It also elicited information that might not have been gleaned through the normal line of questioning. For example, when reminiscing about her days of boarding at Claremont College, Mabel Guy wrote of her astonishment at the laundering arrangements for sanitary pads!

Not all information emerged so easily and a number of interviewers noted a reticence, a barrier, a curtain beyond which they felt they could not trespass. Some suspected an old-fashioned propriety that kept interviewees from being critical of people and events in the past. That propriety itself, though, suggests how these women teachers might have responded during their careers and may point to a reason why discrimination against women was allowed to continue for so long. It was deemed improper to complain.

Some interviewers felt, at times, that they were listening to a public relations speech but this probably was not so. The simple fact is that older women do not make the same judgments as their younger sisters, nor would they be shaken into doing so. Many saw their experiences as purely personal and made no connection to discriminatory employment practices. Others made the connection between the personal and the political, even if, in those earlier days, they lacked the language of feminism to express their thoughts.
A particular problem encountered in interviewing women was that it was often hard to keep them talking about themselves. This was notable in the pre-interview conversations that the project coordinators held with the interviewees. It was also evident in the memoirs which some of the women decided to write. Instead of talking about themselves they chose to discuss Claremont College lecturers, school principals and colleagues, many of whom, of course, were male. They were quite taken aback when the spotlight was placed on themselves.

The majority of the interviews were recorded at broadcast quality level by student sound-recordists of the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. A purist approach to oral history would suggest that the presence of a person other than the interviewer and interviewee might distort the interview, but the benefits of releasing interviewers from the technicalities of recording outweighed the possible problems. The sound recordists were women and the feedback was positive. Nobody seemed disturbed by the presence of a third person. The high quality of the sound recording facilitated the development of a series of Claremont Cameos radio programs. So it was that an initially small research project blossomed into a three-pronged research venture, the outcome of which is a book, a radio series and an archival collection of tapes, transcripts, photographs and memorabilia about women teachers.

The outcomes of the project are not all practical or material. Most importantly, women teachers have finally been given their 'done good accolade'. The younger women who did the interviewing learnt valuable lessons, not only about interviewing, but also about their own attitudes towards the aged and growing old. Friendships have been established and cemented and cross-generational links forged. These qualitative outcomes are immeasurable but nonetheless important – they indicate something of what feminists say about the interactive process of research.

Interpreting Women's Words

There is some debate about the nature of the material produced through oral history interviews. Does oral history merely create evidence – provide the putty in the spaces between documentary material – for later historical analysis? Or is oral-evidence history per se, one truth among many, an interpretation in its own right?

Oral evidence is certainly an interpretation of past events representing a personal appraisal of issues based on selective memory. Biased though such information may be, it reveals the philosophical and ideological bases on which people have conducted and shaped their lives. Such perceptions are a significant historical reality. If that which is real to people is real in its consequences, there seems little reason to interpret beyond the face value of what has been said. Yet there is a case for interpreting stories beyond the perspective of the storyteller. In brief, there are lessons to be learned from stories.
The interpretation of women's stories is an unusually delicate matter because the respondents may disagree vehemently with the researchers' subsequent analysis of the interview material. For example, many of the teachers interviewed for this book are not feminists but the authors and many of the interviewers are. To avoid this problem, the integrity of each woman's perspective has been respected in each chapter by reporting as closely as practicable the transcript of her interview. Some changes have been made to render the spoken word more readable and each respondent has approved the chapter arising from the transcript of her interview.

From a feminist perspective, the very process of analysing stories requires critical reflection. It does not mean that the person analysing knows better than the respondent the meaning of her words. What it means is that the patterns in the women's stories, and the exceptional tales, indicate something of the social, political and economic context in which each woman lived. There are lessons to be learned from this and these are explored in the last chapter of Claremont Cameos.
ANNIE ANDERSEN

talks to
Heather Tunmore

Annie Andersen, the eldest daughter of Scottish migrants was born on Christmas Day 1892 and celebrated her 100th birthday in Western Australia in 1992. She was born in Victoria and travelled with her family to Fremantle when she was two years old. She entered Claremont Teachers' College in 1911 and eventually became headmistress of Princess May Girls' School, Fremantle, and Perth Girls' School.

My father had a dairy farm but when the land boom happened he lost it so he joined the gold rush to Western Australia. He landed in Fremantle and walked straight into a job. At the end of the year, he sent over for my mother and me, aged two. We came by the old Dimboola over to Fremantle. He rented a house for us and we lived in that for a little while. When he was able to, he started building a home. There were a half a dozen Scotsmen there and so Dad directed them and they built their homes in Edmund Street, Beaconsfield, during weekends and after work. We finally had a six-roomed house, and a front and a back verandah, a two-storey shed and a stable, with a pony and trap in it.

I was the eldest of six children. I had a brother and sister (twins), then a brother and then two sisters, both of whom became teachers, like me. All six of us attended Beaconsfield Primary School. Then we moved from there nearer into town, just near Monument Hill. We'd scattered by then. I went to Perth Girls', my two brothers and sister went to Modern School and my two other sisters went to Princess May. We all had primary and secondary education and some of us went on to tertiary. I liked school very much. At Beaconsfield School we had a headmaster who was very keen on mathematics. He put us through mathematics up to, I suppose, first or second year university standard. It was thrilling for me. I loved maths – algebra and arithmetic – but I didn't do geometry until I went to College much later. Also at Beaconsfield was a male teacher, a returned soldier from the Boer War. He gave us a wonderful interest in South Africa, and from
that I developed an interest in geography. He was a good teacher. Unfortunately, stepping into the train one day going home after school, he slipped and was killed. It was very sad really - just a young fellow, I suppose he would have been about thirty.

I took the Adelaide University Primary examination when I would have been fourteen and went on to Perth Girls'. I had one unhappy experience at Perth Girls'. Somebody in the class spoke, and the headmistress said, 'Who spoke?'. Nobody owned up, and so she accused me. It was the girl behind me who had spoken but she accused me of it and I said, 'No, I didn't'. She made me sit out on a form in front until I owned up. I stood it for about a fortnight, sitting out there on my own. When I became a teacher that experience reminded me to always give the child the benefit of the doubt. Even if I'd been wrong it wasn't doing me any good, and I despised that girl always for not owning up.

We had some amusing teachers. There was one teacher who was very Irish and she had a hot temper. She used to take singing. My teacher, who was the first-mistress, sent me around with a message to all the teachers. When I opened the door she wagged her stick and said, 'Get out of this! Get out of this! Get out of this!'. I got out pretty quickly! I went on to the next room and there was a little scrap as Scottish as they come, and she said, 'What do you want interrupting me for? Go on, get out of it! Get out of it!'. So I didn't go to any more of the teachers. I just went back to Miss Smith and put the thing on the table. They were both nice teachers, really. The little Scots one was at Modern School later. My brother went to the war from school and she used to knit socks and send them out to Gallipoli, so she was forgiven!

Overall, I enjoyed Perth Girls' School. I worked hard and enjoyed reading and studying. My greatest pleasure was playing hockey and I was the hockey captain of the school for a couple of years. I was fond of Miss Lawe who promised my mother to see Annie safely through to a teaching career - and she did. I took the Adelaide Junior Examination and left school to become a monitor.

It was Mum who decided that teaching was the thing to do, so she just went ahead and visited the Department and got me appointed. I never thought of anything else, really. I just did as it was arranged. I wouldn't have been interested in nursing, except with little ones. I wouldn't have been any good at sewing. There weren't very many choices for a girl, really. Teaching, nursing, in a shop or housework. So teaching it was. And I've never regretted it. I was appointed to a school as a monitor, and did monitor jobs, such as collecting the rolls and assisting as the head felt I needed to be used. I didn't have the complete responsibility of a class, but helped the teachers, took lessons sometimes, and gave a criticism lesson once a week. I was a monitor out at Hamilton Hill for half the year and at South Terrace for the other half of the year, before I went into Training College.

I went to Claremont Training College in 1911, when there was a choice of a two-year course, a one-year course or a six-months' course. I was one of thirty people
enrolled in the two-year course. My father supported me at College, but in our second year the Department introduced an allowance of a pound a month, which had to be paid back when we started teaching. After that we had a bond of three years, which I think was very necessary. It wasn’t fair to take all that from the government for nothing and not make some return for it.

Students boarded at College in those days. The building consisted of the principal’s home, two boys’ dormitories, three girls’ dormitories and a tower. There were more girls than boys, usually. In our year, for instance, there were about thirty of us and ten of them were boys. Our dormitory had twelve in it and the others had more, and then the tower took the overflow of either boys or girls. On Wednesday afternoons we were free but we had to be in in-time for prayers at nine o’clock. There was a bell to arise and bathe and dress at 7.00 a.m.; a bell for breakfast (porridge, toast and tea) at 8.00 a.m., and a bell for lectures at 9.00 a.m.

I was terribly shy, and terribly nervous. I think my general impression was awe, but I was very interested in some of the lectures. I liked Mr Rooney’s lectures on education. He knew what he was talking about. I was quite respectful about it all. I felt I was getting plenty of good education. There was one lecturer who used to pass around specimens or get us to read, but he didn’t lecture. There was another one who took us for Latin. I hadn’t done any Latin but the others had, so he simply got the class to read Latin and translate it right around the class, and that filled in the period. I didn’t enjoy those at all because I didn’t know the Latin. I used to stay in on Saturday afternoons and swot this Latin. I got my Latin pass in the end but it was hard work. Miss Sutton’s geography was good, and Miss Houghton’s maths were good. We had some visiting teachers too. Miss Alder used to come from Perth Infants’ to teach us sewing, and Mr Bailey used to come and teach us singing. That was one terror I had.

In the final year we were told that we all had to have our voices tested. I could no more sing than this chair could, and they thoroughly enjoyed the terror that put me into. It was all nonsense, of course. They did tease us a bit. There was one lecturer I rather liked. We each had a locker along the passage way where we kept our books. My locker was just outside this lecturer’s door. Quite often I used to find an apple or an orange or a bit of cake in my locker, that had been brought around to him for his morning or afternoon tea and I suppose he just had a little bit too much, and it got slipped into my locker. I quite enjoyed that! We were hungry kids at that age.

As well as lectures we had to go out on prac. as well as do criticism lessons. We all hated the criticism lesson because the whole assembly watched while one student gave a lesson. Afterwards everyone had the opportunity to criticise the lesson. I remember one student who was terribly nervous. She was giving a reading lesson. Before they started reading, the class was asked to do breathing exercises. So she had the children standing up doing the breathing exercises, and she said, ‘Now take in a deep breath and let it out in short pants’. The whole
audience roared laughing, the boys particularly. Apparently she had written this in her notes so they were waiting for it.

When you came out of College you could get a 'B2' certificate, but the Department classified teachers 'C3', 'C2', 'C1'; 'B2', 'B1'; 'A3', 'A2', 'A1'; and a lot of that occurred just through experience. But if you were lucky from College you could start on the 'B2'. Then you had to do so many years (two or three years) before you went on to a 'B1'. Then you had to pass an examination before you went on to 'A3'. You couldn't hold the 'A3' until you held a first-assistantship position. Then you went from the 'A3' to 'A2' and you couldn't have an 'A1' unless you were the head of a school of a certain size. For women there were fewer openings to achieve 'A1' status. There were first-male and first-female assistants at the schools, so women had an opportunity there. The Infant schools had women heads, but the primary schools all had male heads, so did the high schools. The two girls' schools (Perth Girls' and Princess May) had women heads who had 'A1' certificates, and when Girdlestone was established (the third girls' school) likewise, but later all those three schools were absorbed into mixed schools with a male head – with one exception. For one short period there was a woman head of Midland Junction High. Mr McLeod retired and a woman followed him as the head.

Students after my time had one advantage. I think it was in 1913, the year I started teaching. Those who had their 'B' certificates could be admitted to the new University of Western Australia as undergraduates. As monitors they could go to university lectures during the day.

Well, when I first started I was appointed to Beaconsfield Infants' School for a month because the teacher concerned was on long service leave. During that month the headmistress sat in the room all the time. You can imagine how distressing that would be for a young student just beginning to teach. However, when the teacher came back, I had the choice of going to Cottesloe Infants' or to Princess May. I chose Princess May. I was not interested in the senior school so I was given the first class there, the Standard Two (the school started at Second Standard because there was an Infants' school from which the children passed up into Princess May or Fremantle Boys'). Lovely bright little girls, about forty of them, but in those days children weren't promoted automatically year by year. The little ones were seven years old and there were one or two that were fourteen or fifteen – backward girls – as well. But it was a very happy year, really. We got quite a good report in the end.

We were in a room across the yard from the boys' school there. There was a boys' master there who had a very loud voice and, occasionally I used to say, 'Girls, pencils down while we listen to Mr So-and-So'. We were thoroughly amused! One difficulty was that I couldn't teach singing. I didn't have an ear for music, but I had to take all my own subjects, so I wheeled a piano into the room and, as one of the girls could play, she played and they sang and I tried to sing with them. That's how the singing started for the first term. The headmistress must have heard me because at the end of the term, she just wrote in the
examination book, 'In future, Miss Andersen will be taking the Third Standard for reading lessons and Miss Parry will take her singing lessons'.

I had to take sewing amongst other things. The inspectress was a stern old Scots lady, who came in unexpectedly to take a sewing exam. She came into my room to take sewing, so the girls got their sewing out, and she discovered that quite a lot of them didn't have their thimbles. She called out all those who didn't and lined them along the back. They weren't allowed to be examined. So she examined the class on the few that were left in the desks, but I don't think we suffered much as a result of that. She was very Scottish, and I talked Scotland to her, so I think we evened it up.

I taught the story of Hiawatha as literature. They drew their pictures of it as they went along. Part of the story was where the crowd was sitting around and trying to get in touch with the holy spirit of whatever their God was. So I said they'd better draw a picture of them sitting there. One little girl was terribly, terribly worried, and I said, 'What's the matter, Florrie?'. And she said, 'Miss Andersen, I can't draw God good enough', and I thought, 'Goodness me!'. So I said, 'Oh, that's all right, Florrie. See, God is right up above your picture so you don't need to put Him in'. She got to work on her picture. A year or two ago I was coming up in the lift in Boans, and an elderly lady said to me, 'Hello, Miss Andersen, do you remember me?', and I said, 'Yes, Florrie Leslie'. That was the same girl! That would have been about seventy years later.

Well, I had that class for the whole year. We had drill competitions in those days. They were conducted on the Claremont Oval and there were different groups competing; our Second and Third Standards were one group. That year we won the competition against the other schools and so, when the competition was over, I, along with two of the girls and the Third Standard teacher, had to go up to be congratulated by the Governor. He said to us, 'I must come down and see you'. So we quite accepted that. Later on he indicated that he was coming down to see us, and the headmistress was very cross with me because I hadn't told her. It hadn't entered my head. I thought he was just making conversation, you see. However, he did come and presented us with a shield which hung on the entrance wall all the rest of my days at Princess May. He presented it to a couple of the girls from the Second and a couple of the girls from the Third Standard. When he had presented it, he gave each one of them a kiss. When he had gone, Miss Sutton came into the class and she said, 'You got a kiss from the Governor. You musn't wash your faces for a week'. They looked at me, distressed, and said, 'Can't we?'. I don't know what my answer was but I think they washed their faces!

There were two little scamps of girls. They used to sit just in the second seat there. They were real little mischiefs and used to try and catch my eye to make me smile. I did quite often too. Very recently, my sister went to a hairdresser in East Fremantle, where she lived, and one of those girls was the hairdresser. She remembered! Her name was Edna Lewis.
In my third year the inspector suggested that I take Fifth Standard. I had wanted to be an Infant teacher, and I was rather terrified about it. The teacher who held them was a very high-spirited Scots lady who used to yell at them, and I thought, 'Oh, I couldn't do that'. However, he made me take the class and as I said, in those days they didn't put children up year by year, and some of the girls (a couple of them) were backward girls of fourteen and fifteen years of age, so I used to keep one or two of them back after school, and give them extra help — extra arithmetic. One day I had one of them there whose name was the same as mine, as a matter of fact ('sen' instead of 'son'). A boy came bursting into the room and said, 'Christina, why aren't you home? You know quite well Mum wants you at home'. So Christina looked at him and she looked at me and she didn't know what to do. Anyhow, she decided to go with her brother because Mum needed her at home. I dashed down to the office and the inspector happened to be there with the headmistress talking to him. He went dashing after the boy but they'd disappeared, so Christina didn't get any more lessons after school.

Then I went on to Sixth Standard. We did very well in scholarships in Sixth Standard. That year we had a particularly bright lot of girls, and we did particularly well in geography. The result was that next year I was put on to a Seventh Standard and the headmistress gave me lots of classes in geography. I was mad about it. I wanted my own class to take my own subjects, and of all things, she gave one teacher mathematics, which was my pet subject. This teacher announced at the lunch table to the other teachers that I was going to take her geography. I said, 'I'm not! I'm not going to take anybody else's geography'. Well, she was rather friendly with the headmistress and apparently reported this, and the headmistress reproved me for saying such a thing. However, I didn't take her geography.

When we took on Seventh Standard, we got a special allowance, an extra twenty-five pounds a year, so that was quite a pleasure, of course. Then I took on the Eighth Standard, commercial girls. We had three courses: a home-making course, a commercial course, and a professional course. These were commercial girls, and I had them the next year. Miss Brockway had gone and Miss Wright had taken over as headmistress for the year. I went down again and took the Seventh professional girls and lo and behold some of those were my little Second Standards that had got up to this class, so I had a lot of pleasure teaching them. We were particularly interested in art, and the art director came in one day to examine their art and, of course, they were all agog. Well, from our room you could look out on to the Fremantle wharf down there, and so he had all the girls sitting with their backs to us, drawing what they could see through the window. When they turned around and had a look at the blackboard they found that, while they'd been doing that, he'd been drawing a sketch of me. I was standing at the door and there was a sketch of me drawn on the blackboard. Of course, they were thrilled to the back teeth! I don't know that I was!
The next year Miss Bell became head teacher. I meanwhile had been studying for my 'A' certificate. I had passed the examinations, but one had to have the position of a first-assistant in order to have it granted. I applied for the first-assistantship at Princess May but another lady who was a lot older and more experienced got it instead, so I had to go up to Boulder to be the first-assistant there, and had my 'A3' fixed in that way.

That was an interesting experience, too. I had a class of Seventh and Eighth Standard boys. I'd been in a girls' school and an Infants' school, and these boys were completely out of hand -- completely out of hand! The first day, as I put my hat and bag on top of the cupboard, I felt a cane there. Well, that didn't mean a thing to me, I didn't have anything to do with canes, but the second day, the boys were playing up terribly as they had been doing all along. So to two, Seventh Standard boys and one, Eighth Standard boy, I said, 'You go out into the hat room', and I put my hand up on top of the cupboard and produced this cane. There was dead silence in the room. I went out there and I looked at the Eighth Standard boy (he'd be about fifteen or sixteen) I said, 'Well, if you haven't got the decency at your age to behave properly, this cane's not going to do you any good. Go back into your class'. And I said, 'You two go back and behave as well'. There was dead silence all the rest of the afternoon. We got the discipline. The next morning when I came to school, there was a lovely big bunch of flowers on my table. I didn't dare to ask where they came from. I just said how lovely they were and it was so nice to have them and went and got a vase to put them in. We were good friends all the rest of that year.

They had had Scripture lessons and had to do memory work. Only two boys knew the memory work. The headmaster was testing them for the term exam. He said, 'I'll come back next week and see that you can say it'. The next week there wasn't one boy who could. He caned every one of those boys! Well, I took the Scripture lessons. I never attempted to make them learn the Scripture. He left it at that, but I felt that that was a very stupid way to make them appreciate Scripture.

The first-master made a habit of using the cane. He said, 'Oh, it's good to cane someone to begin the day with', and I said, 'Well, you leave my boys alone. I can discipline them without the cane so don't you cane them'. He called them out to be caned just to sort of set the tone. I heard that in Boulder some of the fathers were on his back, so he backed-off with his cane.

The next year or two I had a mixed class of girls and boys and I used to come home for the term holidays. On one occasion I went back after the August holidays. The first day there was a restlessness all the way through the room, and I realised what it was. In those days our hair was long and I had had it cut for the first time. They saw me writing on the blackboard and I turned around and I realised the ado and said, 'Well, do you like it?'. And some voices said, 'Yes', and so I said, 'Well, all right, now go on with your arithmetic!'.
At the end of that time (two and a half years) the position of first-mistress at Princess May fell vacant again, and Miss Bell applied for me, and I applied too, so I was transferred to Princess May as first-assistant. Well, I'd got my 'A3', of course, from going to Boulder. Then things went very evenly. It was a case in mid-year of taking the Ninth girls for the Junior Examination. So I had to immediately take these Junior girls for English, mathematics, geography, art and history. Well, the first four of them were all right but history, I couldn't remember it! Anyhow, the teacher who had preceded me with the class had made them learn everything off by heart and so the girls knew their history. She'd gone off on long service leave and had covered the course before she went in the middle of the year, so they knew it all. The inspector came to test the teaching and he got them on to history because he was particularly good at it! He told me to question them. So I said to one girl, 'You start, Mary, now go on, June, go on so-and-so'. Then we stopped. He said, 'Go on, Miss Andersen'. I said, 'That's all the history I know, Mr Klein'. So he then proceeded to do the history by questioning, and I did all the other subject questioning.

Princess May looked out on the Boys' School. Well, the girls all liked to sit on the row near the window, so they could look out there. I meet some of them now, once a year, and they giggle when I mention this to them. It was a very happy time. I don't know whether I should tell you this. One girl was very religious and she thought she had a mission. She used to put texts in the girls' books and that sort of thing, which was a bit embarrassing both for me and the girls. I knew her mother so I went to see her and she directed her daughter just to be kind and friendly. The parents knew us because Miss Bell, the headmistress, and I were old Fremantle girls. They had known us as girls. This made it easier to communicate with parents when we had a problem with their daughters. For instance, there was a pawnbroker in Fremantle who came to see me about a girl who was selling overcoats. This girl in Seventh Standard was bringing along overcoats for her to buy, and she was a bit concerned about it. She went to the police. The policewoman came to see me. She had found out by investigation that this lass and her brother were in the charge of grandma who made a great fuss of the boy but couldn't be bothered with the girl. Mum went out to work. Well, I had to solve that problem. I sent for Mum, who was an old Princess May girl, and I told her exactly what was wrong. She at once gave up her job and stayed home to look after her children. I think the thing is for the mother to stay at home, if she's got children. I'm not keen on these centres for minding children. I think mum should be there, at home.

All the rest of my career, except the last year, I taught the Ninth girls until Miss Bell resigned and then I was appointed as head there. I had taught right through the school — bubs right up to leavers. This proved wonderful background experience when I became headmistress. For example, we always had big classes of fifty or sixty pupils. An average of forty was quite good. So when, as headmistress, I graded mine, the 'A' class got the biggest number and the C, D, E and F got smaller groups because my experience had shown that these were more difficult to handle.
Princess May Girls' School had been established in 1901 when the Duke and Duchess of York came to establish the Commonwealth (the Federation). Miss Peacock was the first head. Miss Sutton followed her and then Miss Brockway. Miss Wright was there for one year, and then Miss Bell was there from 1924 to 1940, and then I was there for the rest of the time, 1940 to 1956. I was headmistress during the Second World War when our school was taken over by the Air Force. They were all parked in our building and the girls' school was parked out in four different places, so that my job was going around these four places each day, just to see my school, give instructions and find what they needed. Well, you see, we had girls from as far away as Claremont, so I had one group at Cottesloe (primary and Infants). One of the best teachers I know was in charge there. She had the lowest certificate of any of them but she was wonderful. Then the girls who were doing the commercial junior course were down at Fremantle Technical School, because Mr Jennings let us use his typewriters and his room. Out at Palmyra there was another group of two, Seventh Standard classes using the school for the latter half of each day. At Bicton, there was the biggest group – Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Standards. They likewise had the second half of the school day. The boys were better off because their school was taken over too, but they had North Fremantle Infants' as a whole, so they had a much easier job.

As headmistress, there was one class I was particularly interested in which had the very backward, retarded children. I had a special teacher for them in a special class. Among them there was a girl who, at East Fremantle, had been kept down in the Infants. She was thirteen. The headmaster asked if I would take her. I said, 'Yes', and put her into this class. She had her hat on and she wouldn't take it off; just wouldn't take her hat off! Anyhow, the teacher was a very understanding person, and she found that her hair was just alive. So we went to the father and told him. We got the hat off and we got the hair cleaned up. (On the whole they were very cleanly, really). Before the year was out, she was not joining in the sport, but she was out there and interested. Previously she had just sat and sat. One Anzac Day her father stopped me and thanked us very much for what we'd done for his little girl. That's the sort of thing that one appreciated. Teachers' actions live on in the memory and I find even now that I'm stopped and thanked by former parents and pupils. For example, the schools were equipped with dual desks which were very uncomfortable for some of the tall boys I had taught in Boulder. Very recently, I was going down to the booksellers, Dwyer and Carrolls. There was a group of men standing talking there, and one man broke away from the group and came over to me and said, 'Do you remember me?'. I replied, 'Les Godfrey!'. He said, 'I've always wanted to thank you for understanding how cramped I was in that desk and needed to do that little bit of a walk around'. I was so pleased about that. Well, of course, if I'd had sense at the time I'd have said, 'Les, come and sit at the table'.

When I first went to Princess May it had primary right through, but in 1928 the lower classes were sent to South Terrace and we just had the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth and became a high school. Strange to say, without a word from
anybody, the girls that year all turned up in uniforms. All except three little Salvation Army girls and they turned up in pink dresses. So I contacted their home and we got them into uniforms as well. Well, that was the attitude to uniforms in those days, and I still feel that that is good. The girls were all equal and they all looked so nice. Our uniform was navy blue, royal blue and white. Navy blue for strength, royal blue for loyalty and white for purity. I've still got a school badge in the school colours.

When Fremantle Boys' and Princess May amalgamated to become John Curtin High School there was no thought of a woman getting the job as headmistress. It was just taken for granted that the headmaster of Fremantle Boys' would take over. The thought never came into my mind that I should be. I'm old-fashioned enough to think that there are certain positions that I think men are best fitted for. I think it's a bit infra dig for the men to be bossed by women. However, I did resent that women teachers did not have equal pay. The head teacher over at the Boys' School and I were great friends, but we had a lot more functions than he had and I think my pay was about four-fifths of his.

When Mr Howieson took over as principal of John Curtin High School and I was transferred to Perth Girls' I was rather thrilled in a way because I had started out as a Perth Girl and I finished up as Perth Girls' head, which was rather nice. It was my last year and quite a happy year too. The Fremantle Council gave me a farewell at the end, as did all the teachers at Fremantle. That cabinet and the easy chair in my bedroom came from the Fremantle teachers. Hundreds and hundreds of ex-Princess May girls gave me a wonderful farewell. One girl came from as far away as Sydney. The council lit up the grounds for the evening. Most of these things around me now are from schoolgirls of the past.

I was employed as a teacher for forty-three years altogether, 1913-1957, and during that time I travelled and worked overseas. In 1927 I took long service leave with my friend, Hazel Barnett. I had written to the director (Dr Andrews it was at the time) and got letters of introduction to schools in London. We visited the Dalton School, for instance, and also an East End school where there were backward children who were being trained for some means of earning a living during their lives.

When I came home again I tried to establish the Dalton system at Princess May, but it wasn't really possible because of the Junior Examination. You know, with the Dalton system children went to whatever grade in maths they were, and perhaps another grade for English, and so on according to their standard in the respective subjects. But we couldn't do that because they had to get through so much for the Junior Certificate in each subject. All the professional girls and the commercial girls sat for the Junior. Furthermore, there were one or two old-fashioned teachers who didn't co-operate as well as they should have done. They kept their girls for what they wanted them for, which made it a bit difficult.

I got a year's exchange to New Zealand in '37. I was sent first of all to a country high school. I was only there for perhaps a month or so, then I was transferred
to an intermediate school of specialists. They were all highly qualified. My little BA hardly counted with their MAs, Doctors, and all the rest. It was very, very nice, and I was allowed to do the outings with the children, and see various aspects of teaching. I was quite happy there for the first term. That was in Auckland. Then, to give me more experience, I was transferred to Wellington to a Primary school (Sixth Standard girls and boys). The headmaster was very keen on the morning cup of tea and he used to go and make it, and he made it a staff meeting, which was rather nice. Nothing particularly outstanding happened there. One feature was a weekly visit from the Red Cross giving suitable training. Then for the third term I was transferred to Dunedin Girls' High School. That was girls-only again. It was while I was there that I saw snow falling for the first time. I stood out in it! I was given French and something else to teach. Well, I had done a couple of years French at school, but I couldn't teach French. Fortunately, there was a girl appointed at the same time as me, and she was given maths, which she couldn't teach, so we did a swap and we were both very happy! The staff were nice and friendly in all the schools and I kept in touch with them for a while after I returned to Princess May in 1938.

Overall, I think teaching is a profession in which you have a mission. You can have a tremendous influence on a lot of young people. I've heard lots of girls say, 'I remember you said so-and-so, when you did so-and-so', that sort of thing, so that I think that it's a very responsible profession to have. It is the most important next to that of the parents, even more influential, perhaps, than the parents in some cases. I think teaching keeps you interested in young people, no matter how old you get. I think it's really a very satisfying profession. My feeling is that we're here in life for some particular purpose, and that one should be fulfilling the purpose of helping others as far as ever one can.
May Knowles and Mary Hargreaves on their first visit to the Pinnacles, Western Australia, 1967.

'We travelled across through bush country and then through a very stony region. I remember saying, 'Golly, you would think we were in a cemetery'. Then we saw the Pinnacles'.

MAY KNOWLES
May Knowles was born in West Perth in 1901, the daughter of migrants from the North of England. She was principal of Girdlestone and Perth Girls' School and a leading member of the National Trust of Australia (WA).

My father was a cabinetmaker with an important firm in Liverpool. Because of his knowledge of wood, he was invited to go to Sweden to choose timber for them. However, his own father had had bad luck in Sweden. He had part-owned forest there and had lost everything in a fire in the days before insurance. My grandfather became so agitated about the idea of his son going to Sweden that it caused friction and my father decided he would leave Liverpool. He went down to the wharf and got a berth on a ship to Australia. My mother joined him two years later. They had been engaged for four years and they were married at the Anglican Cathedral in Perth in 1900, the day after she arrived by train from Albany, where she had landed. In their early, married life they boarded with Mr and Mrs Sibbge. Father had previously boarded with the Thompsons next door, but there wasn't room there for a married couple. That's how I got my names, from May Thompson and Violet Sibble — my mother was a diplomat! I was born in 1901. It wasn't usual to travel back home in those days but my mother took me to England in 1904 to prove to relatives that she had me!

When I was six months old I was taken to West Leederville where my father had built a wooden house, later converted to brick. There I stayed until I was eight years old. In 1907, when I was six, my mother took me to the nearest school in Thomas Street only to be told that there was no room but that there would be an Infants' school built the following year. So I spent a year looking after all the babies in the street! I started school in February 1908 in the first, Infants' class at Thomas Street Infants' School, the day it opened. Evidently I could read but I couldn't write. I was addicted to books. I used to get a Chatterbox — an annual...
book — every year from my grandmother in England. Oh, you've missed a lot if you haven't seen a Chatterbox!

Then we went bush. This was the beginning of the Civil Servants' Settlement in 1909. My father built a house on our land near Burran Rock. There was no school nearby, so I didn't start school again until 1913, when I was twelve. It was a one-teacher school that never had more than sixteen pupils. When I left, four years later, with my brother, there were only seven pupils left and the school was closed some months later. At one stage the school was moved. The entire building was shifted about one and a half miles because there were some younger children further down the road! My mother and father eventually walked off the farm because the land was going salt. They gave the farm to my uncle. At first, my father went back to his job in Perth, leaving my mother, aunt, uncle and my brother and me on the farm. My uncle had four hundred acres of crop to take off on his own: Three hundred on our block and one hundred on a block he had. This was during the Great War and it was impossible to get labour, so I volunteered to help him. I was fifteen. I stooked sixty acres of hay and sewed a thousand bags of wheat. I loaded all the hay onto a wagon to cart to the stack. I only lost one load — the whole lot slipped-off! Harvesting the wheat meant I wasn't going to school. Any study I did was on the loads of hay and around the stooks with two little books on history and geography. In those wheat paddocks I learnt all about the British Empire: Havelock, Clive of India, the Heights of Abraham, the Little Karroo, South Karroo, and the geography of South Africa!

I wanted to be a doctor, a nurse or a farmer. Even in the Infants at Thomas Street, we used to play 'The War in the Crimea' and I was Florence Nightingale. I used to collect what we called 'fish flowers' — buds of the wild iris. That was the medicine! Where Perth Modern School is now was all bush. We used to have the English army up there and the Russians down at the bottom because the English army could come down the hill, you see! But to enter the professions I needed more education. When I eventually left the farm and returned to Perth I went to James Street Girls' School. Miss Lowe, the headmistress, said, 'You're late!'. I told her I had been busy taking-off the harvest. She took me by the shoulders and pushed me into Seventh Standard professional, which meant that I took algebra, geometry and French. It was a preparation class for the Junior Certificate. I went back to the farm at the end of that year and helped my uncle again. As before, I was late getting back to school. I asked the headmistress where I should go and she directed me to the hall. I glanced round and could see those people were in Ninth Standard but I thought that I should be going into Eighth. I trotted back to her and explained. She replied that I was too old. That's how I got into Ninth Standard — when I was eighteen! I thought that Ninth was all right! It meant I could consider entering Teachers' College! But I found that I had to get my Leaving Certificate and that the relevant classes were held at Perth Boys' School. So I went to Perth Boys' as a monitor and to study modern and ancient philosophy, biology and mathematics.
I am the only woman to have been a monitor at Perth Boys’. All monitors had a monitor’s book in which their lessons were written for the teacher to approve and sign. That was the year teachers had a strike and monitors’ pay came-up as an issue. Evidently Perth Boys’ was handling this, so they sent for my monitor’s book but I didn’t know a thing about it! The headmaster sent for me and said, ‘May, we want your monitor’s book’. So they wrote up all those lessons for me, in different inks, different pens, written by different men! And that was the monitor’s book that went to the courts. I wish I had that book now!

Slow Learners’ programs started in Western Australia during my years as monitor. Sixty-five of them were placed in one class at Perth Boys’. The first thing they had them do was to redecorate their room! I was supposed to teach them biology. Well, they thought I was a real treat! They’d never had a woman like this before! Some of them were out-and-outers – very difficult to watch. Eventually the staff objected. They said they couldn’t teach in adjacent rooms because of the constant noise. So the government hired a room for them in Museum Street, but the pupils were so annoyed at leaving the room that they’d decorated, they smashed every window in the place. They made a real mess of it! One day their teacher was away and I was asked to supervise. By this time they had redecorated their new room. What could I do with them? I had only assisted with the teaching of science! So I said, ‘What would be your lesson if your teacher were here?’ ‘Poetry, Miss’. So I read The Lady of Shalott to them. They just sat enraptured. Fortunately, the replacement teacher arrived soon after that!

After my time as a monitor, I enrolled at Claremont Teachers’ College. That was 1922 and I was twenty-one. I remember I had my twenty-first birthday there. I lived at the East End of College with the other female students. We were told not to switch on electric lights at night. The student in charge of the East End had a candle and we were told that we could go to her for help if needed. I found that the place was bug ridden! I was the only one who noticed. The others had bites all over but they didn’t feel them! Later, the matron said that if she wanted to find out if there was a bug anywhere she’d send me in to find out! I had never seen a bug, except under the microscope in my biology unit, but I knew what it was by the smell and the fact that I was bitten all over. Fortunately, I had a nightdress with long sleeves and wristbands. Even so, I didn’t have any sleep all night. I waited patiently and I caught a bug in the morning. I put it in a little bit of tissue paper and I took it down to breakfast with me. Everybody looked at me: ‘May, what’s the matter with your face?’ – I’d been bitten! I went to the matron. She was sure I had brought that bug with me. The Health Department was called. Our clothes were sprayed and both the East End and West End of College were cleaned of bugs. That was the only bug that was ever seen, although some said that one of the fashionable girls, who had a very pretty hat with a lovely veil, had been seen in church with something funny on the veil. It was a bug!

I was very happy in College. I lived in Welshpool and went home for the weekends. I know that the others made fun of the food, but I found it quite all
right - even the jam tarts that they called 'The Iron Duke'! We sat at tables just like a family. The man at the head of the table would carve the meat. The staff sat at high-table at the far end of the dining hall. I had university lectures and we were given meal tickets for a café if we had a series of lectures at the university in Perth because to get back to College in time for a meal at night I had to run for my life to get the train and then run from Claremont station to College. That was a bit of a fuss! I remember we had a dance every night. We had to change our dresses to dance. Somebody used to play the piano for us.

I nearly learnt to swim at College. The College had its own swimming baths down at the river and I went down there with friends who gave me a lesson. Then they went off to swim and came hurriedly back shouting, 'May! May! Keep your feet off the bottom because there are cobblers!' Now, how can you keep your feet off the bottom if you're not able to swim? So out I got and that was the end of my swimming lessons. I've still never learnt to swim.

I was doing a university course, so I took very few subjects at Claremont in my first year. However, I attended the teaching demonstration classes. They could be very funny. Primary school pupils were brought into the lecture theatre for a lesson. We had to take notes on it. The man who took the arithmetic was really quite a joke, because, for compound interest, he had to always look up the answer at the back of the book! One day he started a lesson in arithmetic. The children were expected to have completed background studies called 'knowledge presumed'. As it turned out, these children were not prepared. He walked out and left the class and all of us there! One of the senior male students got up and sent the class back to school. That was the sort of lecture we had!

In second year, all my studies were at Claremont. We went to a variety of lectures including voice production. We also were examined in singing. They were equipping us to teach in schools anywhere in the State - except Infant classes. Because I wanted to teach science, I went on science teaching practices. At the time of my first, big teaching practice, my father died unexpectedly, when he was only fifty-two. That was a terrific shock. My brother was still at school, so now I was the wage earner. I was really very worried. I've no idea what I taught or what I didn't. I was just beside myself and I got a shocking teaching practice report. The teacher damned me completely and said that my voice was entirely unsuited for teaching and she advised that I give up the idea. Bill Rooney was principal at Claremont. He called me in and he said, 'Miss Knowles, what's the matter with your voice?'. I said, 'I don't know'. We had a very good lecturer for voice production. In fact he was the man who taught George VI to speak! Bill Rooney sent for that man, who declared, 'Miss Knowles has an excellent voice'. Mr Rooney just took that report and ripped it from side to side and threw it in the rubbish bin. It never went on my file. Wasn't that lucky?

My first appointment was to Collie, but I had to have an operation. The matron at Claremont sent for me the day before we broke up and told me she had thought I was a malingerer, but had now decided I wasn't. She thought that there
was something radically wrong with me and I should go straight to the doctor because I wouldn’t last at teaching. So, against great opposition, because my mother was terrified, I went to the doctor. She found that my uterus was displaced. That was from doing all the heavy work on the farm. So I had a major operation. The doctor, Mildred George, would not allow me to go to Collie to teach until I reported to her. She said, ‘Everything I’ve done for you could be displaced immediately if you just picked up something from a chair, or if the lady where you board wants you to brush the floor’. I went straight to the Education Department. They cancelled my appointment. I was told that I would be paid from when I eventually started to work, so I lost two months pay. In contrast, a male student at College had a ‘grumbling appendix’. He waited until a week before he had to start school and went and had it out. He didn’t start teaching until later on in March of that year and he didn’t lose a penny!

When I had recovered, I was sent to Beaconsfield. I still lived at Welshpool so I had to leave home at about twenty to seven, get the train to Perth, another train to Fremantle and then a tram from Fremantle to Beaconsfield. I arrived there at five to nine! That was the earliest I could get there. So I applied for a transfer, and three weeks later I got it, to Perth Girls’ School. After three months there I was transferred to Thomas Street, Sixth Standard. I was there for six weeks when I got my appointment to Northam High, where I stayed for sixteen years.

I didn’t want to go to Northam because I was still at university. However, I was sent. I had one shilling in the bank. I bought a case, which cost me a pound, and the one shilling was to keep the bank account open. I wasn’t worried because I thought I’d be paid the following week. I said to the teacher I was boarding with that I would pay at the end of the week. He said, ‘May, you won’t get any money at the end of the week. You have to wait for three weeks’. The secondary teachers were paid once a month in those days! That was my financial position then; but when I returned to Perth in 1940, I’d paid for my house in Wembley and had sixty pounds in the bank!

At Northam, I taught all the girls sport. They were sick of playing rounders. So I became the first person to start basketball in high schools. I learnt about the rules from a book. I was also Shirley Strickland’s first coach! She came to the school as a little girl. The other girls told me she could run. So I said, ‘Well, bring her down’. She was very shy and nervous and asked could she start standing up? I dug holes for the others, you see. The men taught me how to do that—I’d never run a race in my life! She quickly saw that the others got away from her. Then she asked me to show her how to dig the holes. Later, when we went to the inter-schools competition, I bought a little trowel for her. She was the first person who ever dug holes on Perth Modern School’s oval. As well as accompanying students to inter-school athletics, I also escorted school tennis teams around the State. I was the first woman to do that and they couldn’t understand it when I arrived with boys as well as girls! They said, ‘Who’s the man with you?’ There wasn’t any man with me. Obviously I was crossing
boundaries. In fact, one of the men at Northam, nicknamed me 'the hyphen' — between the women and the men.

I finished my degree while at Northam. There was no correspondence study. I had to read the material by myself and just front-up for the exam. The first year in Northam I couldn’t do any study because I used to do my class work until nine o’clock at night. The next year I took English 3 and another section of ancient philosophy, because there was nothing else I could do. I passed those. It took me two years to get French. I got around ninety per cent in the written French and failed in the oral the first year. The following year I went for private tuition during the holidays. I don’t know whether I passed or whether they just pushed me through, but until I got French I couldn’t get my degree.

I’d never been put forward on the stage — never even given a recital as a child — yet I organised the biggest repertory out of Perth when I was in Northam. I joined the Repertory Club and the next thing I knew I was asked to take part in a play. Oh, crikey! I didn’t know what to do. I think that was the play in which I was supposed to have adenoids. Nobody knew how to talk with adenoids! So I thought about the physical structure. Knowing the physiology, I closed the back of my throat. I didn’t let them know at rehearsal what I was going to do. I had adenoids without any trouble, and they nearly died! But I always seemed to do things accidentally. In one play I had to scream. I didn’t know how to scream, so I got a book from the Literary Institute. It said to take in a deep breath and let it out on a top note. So I told my mother I’d learnt how to scream. ‘You’re not going to do that here,’ she said, ‘You’ll frighten the wits out of Mrs Fry next door’. The next morning, at school, I was running a little theatrical class, and one child said, ‘Miss Knowles, I’ve got to laugh and I don’t know how to do it on the stage’. So I told her to take in a deep breath and let it out on the low note. Then I told her how to scream and I demonstrated a beautiful scream. In one play I was in at Northam I had to swear. The headmaster objected. He didn’t think it right for a high school teacher to be swearing on the stage. The children heard about this and they stuck up for me: ‘That wasn’t Miss Knowles swearing! Miss Knowles never swears! Miss Knowles was so-and-so and she had to swear on the stage!’ When I came down to Perth to teach at Perth Modern School, during the Second World War, they already knew me at the Perth Repertory. They were short of folk, so I became a member. My family were horrified. ‘Didn’t I remember that I was a teacher at Perth Modern School? Making a fool of myself like that on the stage!’ When I came down to Perth to teach at Perth Modern School, during the Second World War, they already knew me at the Perth Repertory. They were short of folk, so I became a member. My family were horrified. ‘Didn’t I remember that I was a teacher at Perth Modern School? Making a fool of myself like that on the stage!’ They wouldn’t dream of going! They took no notice of the critiques I got. Paul Hasluck was the critic then and he could slate people, but he wrote me up to the skies. The family accepted it after that.

After teaching at Northam for sixteen years, I badly wanted to go home. I applied for a position at Perth Modern School. I was told that I hadn’t got the job but that in the next Circular there would be a position that I should apply for. It was to teach biology at Perth Modern School and to assist with the sport. I got it and became a senior assistant. When I was teaching at Perth Modern School a mother came and begged for her daughter to be discouraged from doing science.
It wasn't seen as ladylike. Sad, wasn't it? Her daughter was one of my prime scholars and she badly wanted to do biology, which she continued to do. They didn't really mind girls doing biology, as long as they didn't continue with it! But they didn't want girls to take physics and chemistry. The principal at Perth Modern School, Noel Sampson, came to me one day and asked, 'Do you know any reason why girls shouldn't take chemistry?'. I said, 'No, Mr Sampson, in fact some of them are doing it but they have to do it at Tech. because you don't let them do it here'. He showed me the previous principal's instructions to his successor at the school, 'Don't let the girls take chemistry. Keep them out of the chemistry lab'. For that year, of course, the program for the school had been set, but the next year, girls took chemistry. It was important because some of them wanted to go on to study medicine.

I had no intention of applying for anything higher but, after I had been at Perth Mod. for four years, the principal-mistress retired and Noel Sampson, said in a very casual way, 'I see you haven't put in your application yet. You won't get it if you don't apply for it'. So I applied. I wrote a very ordinary application. He brought it back to me and said, 'You don't think this will get you a job do you? Didn't you run the Repertory in Northam? Those things all count'. So I had to write it again and I was appointed. It was 1944 and I was the top woman in secondary teaching! The previous principal-mistress had left an instruction, 'Don't let the first, second or third year boys belong to the Dramatic Society and don't let them put on concerts!' Noel Sampson, a man of few words, came along to me one day and asked, 'Why can't my boys do concerts?'. I said, 'Oh, it's in the book of instructions'. He came back the next day and said, 'Do you know any reason why my boys can't have concerts?'. I said, 'No, Mr Sampson'. I was in the Repertory at that stage, so he asked, 'Would you teach them?'. I said, 'If you wish'. They loved it. They put on concerts. Rolf Harris was in that class!

Five or six years later Kent Street High School was made a five-year high school and it was going to be a practising school, which made it ten pounds a year higher pay for my job. (Noel Sampson wouldn't have student teachers practicing at Perth Modern). So I applied and was appointed. I helped manage the development of the timetable. In the first week the headmaster sent the pupils home early in the afternoon, whilst the staff stayed to work on the timetable. By the third afternoon it still wasn't done. So I told the first-master we had to do something about it but carefully because the headmaster had to be handled with kid gloves - he was very intense. The next morning I went along and I thanked the principal for what he had been doing with us and said, 'We've nutted something out. Would you have a look at it?'. He took it like a lamb! The very next day, he came tearing into my office: 'You'd better discipline your women!'. I said, 'Is that the same woman? I can't discipline
her. You came down to me yesterday and told me what a wonderful lesson she was giving'. His eyes nearly came out of his head. He'd forgotten!

After two years at Kent Street High, I became headmistress of Girdlestone High School. When I arrived at Girdlestone, there was a note for me: 'Don't allow the slow learner class to come into the building, and don't let them wear the school uniform'. Until I became head there, the timetables worked on a room-for-a-class basis. When a class had another lesson, their room was left empty. Well, you can't leave rooms empty like that! So I developed a timetable in which there was never an empty room. I arranged a room for the slow learners, put them into uniform and appointed a prefect with a badge. I allowed them little jobs in the school, like taking the mail around, so that they knew the other teachers. After she left, one girl was placed in charge of a department in the shop where she worked. Their parents appreciated the efforts. One mother cried to me, 'Oh, Miss Knowles, this is wonderful'.

It was later, when I was headmistress at Perth Girls', that the National Trust was started. I thought it was a jolly interesting thing, because I was interested in the flora and fauna of the country. I wasn't interested in buildings at all and I didn't know anything about them. When I retired at the end of 1960, I went to England to live for a couple of years in a village where nobody dared touch even a piece of chimney because it was protected by the National Trust. I thought, 'By jove! I'll join when I go home'. So I became a member of the National Trust. I thought no more about it until I rang Shirley de la Hunty, for another reason. She said, 'That's strange, Miss Knowles, because I was asked to ring you to invite you to become the honorary secretary of the National Trust'. I said, 'Shirley, what a silly idea!'. 'Oh, Miss Knowles,' she said, 'Don't say that, I've been asked to invite you to a meeting'. I went and I was mystified. I told them I didn't know anything about buildings. But they told me that I did know how to write letters. It seemed that their secretary had gone over East, and they were looking for a replacement. So I became the honorary secretary of the National Trust in the mid-1960s. I went along to one meeting and suggested having a women's committee or a social committee. Oh, no! National Trust had nothing to do with being social! But eventually I talked them into it. Thus was formed the women's committee. In no time it was the biggest fund-raiser the National Trust had ever had, because it ran tours and charged for them. They've used the money in wonderful ways.

At the National Trust, I had a room to myself to begin with. Then it became part of a room, then a little, outside corner room. I finished up on a chair with my papers down beside me. The government gave us a floor of a reconditioned building, which became the first headquarters of the National Trust in Western Australia. We had a paid secretary, so she and I shared a room. We had a chair each and she had a table with a typewriter. That's all we had in our office to begin with! One day I was looking out the window into Murray Street and I saw a man there. I said, 'There's a man down there who wants to join the National Trust. It's just the look of him'. 'Oh, you fool', she said and went back to her desk. Within about five minutes, there was a knock on the door and it was him! He
said he would like to join the National Trust. Well, she was just dumbfounded! I asked him why he wanted to join the Trust. He was a retired farmer who had continued horse riding for his health. While riding he had found what is now called the Pinnacles and he had taken photos and written an article on it and sent it to a magazine. However, they had written back, returning his article and his photos. They said that it was very interesting but they had contacted the Tourist Development, Western Australia, the Parks and Gardens of Western Australia and the Lands and Surveys of Western Australia and none of them knew anything of the area. Consequently, they didn’t feel justified in printing the article. Immediately I rang Mary Hargreaves, who was on the Conservation Committee, and told her about this. I asked the man if he could take me out there. He agreed, but said we would have to stay the night. Well, my brother’s got a beach house near there, so that’s where we stayed. We travelled across through bush country and then through a very stony region. I remember saying, ‘Golly, you would think we were in a cemetery’. Then we saw the Pinnacles. I rang the Tourist Development and the Parks and Gardens, but they all confused the ‘cemetery’ with the Pinnacles. Nobody seemed to know about the Pinnacles at all in this State in 1967. That’s how the Pinnacles were brought to public attention. Isn’t that interesting?

One of my colleagues in Northam was Mr Barton. He would do anything for anybody. He died two or three years ago. His wife told me afterwards, that he’d said, ‘The last thing I’m going to do is to make sure that May gets that Perth Boys’ School for the National Trust’. That’s how we got the Perth Boys’. It was also through me that we got the Old Observatory. I was talking to my former landlady from Northam and said, ‘Oh, I would love to have that Observatory for the National Trust. They’re talking about pulling it down’. ‘Well’, she said, ‘That’s easy enough. You can get that. Isn’t that man from Northam the minister for works?’. I said, ‘Yes, but he doesn’t know me’. She replied, ‘He knows you all right because he never heard of anything else except you from his father’. They lived next door to us at Northam, you see. I didn’t think he’d remember me because he was only a little boy when I left Northam. ‘That doesn’t matter’, said my landlady, ‘His father thought the sun, moon and stars shone out of you’. I couldn’t remember even talking to him! She told me that it was the way I looked after my car! You see, I hadn’t any money and I used to do it all myself – put in the oil, change the tyres, that sort of thing. So I got in touch with his office and said, ‘I’m very interested in the Observatory as a headquarters for National Trust. I don’t want that building to be pulled down!’. Later, we were up in York for a National Trust function and the minister announced that the Old Observatory was to be kept as the headquarters of the National Trust. I was sitting in the front row. I nearly died! Then he came down to me and said, ‘Is that what you wanted, Miss Knowles?’.
‘It was the practice to give monitors a half-day off to attend university, but my headmaster didn’t believe in this, so I had to attend at night. It was a long day’. MAY MARSHALL.
May Marshall was born in Perth in 1902. She was a member of The Australian Federation of University Women from 1926 and served as president in 1956 and 1962. She was the founder and first president of the Junior Primary Teachers' Association in 1950. In 1959 she was a foundation member of the Western Australian Chapter of the Australian College of Education and was elected a Fellow in 1971. After a successful teaching career she was appointed first women's warden of Claremont Teachers' College in 1952, a position she held until her retirement in 1967. Miss Marshall was awarded an MBE in 1979.

I think teaching is in my blood. My great uncle was the first professor of education in Dunedin and I had teacher relatives. So, in 1921 I became a monitor with the Education Department and was posted to West Leederville School, where I spent two years. The educational standard required to be a monitor was the Leaving Certificate. It was the practice to give monitors a half-day off to attend university, but my headmaster didn't believe in this, so I had to attend at night, frequently until nine o'clock. Then I'd have to come home either by train to West Leederville station or by tram to Coghlan Road; then I'd have a long walk to West Leederville station and uphill to Blencowe Street, where we lived. My mother and sister used to walk across to the station to meet me because it was necessary for me to pass Kitchener Park at that hour of the night. It was a long day, though. In 1923 I was admitted to Claremont College and I was able to attend university lectures whilst I was there. We had to take four subjects in the first year. My subjects were English, French, logic and philosophy.

I was among the first group of non-resident, full-course, two-year students. This was because, for the first time, they had more students than they could accommodate. It had been compulsory up to this date to live at College. I think there were nine of us permitted to live privately. Possibly I lost something from
it because of all the friendships that developed among resident students. But, on the other hand, I certainly was far better off at home, because the food down there was simply appalling. There were food traditions that are interesting. They had a jam tart the students named 'The Iron Duke'; they had an annual ceremony to bury it. And 'Flood' we had regularly every week. (We had the main meal with them, in the middle of the day). 'Flood' was rice. More flood than rice!

The dormitories they lived in were bitterly cold, but they managed to have a great deal of fun. Friends have told me since that they would buy three pence worth of sultanas because they couldn't afford anything else and that would be their sweets. They'd sometimes warm pies and make toast on the one and only little bit of a heater that they had.

The only financial assistance available to students at that time was a loan of five shillings per week repayable out of their first year's salary. Some students took it. I can remember one person who actually lived on it. We had no financial help for travelling. Nowadays, they get so much help in every way. But my parents felt that perhaps I'd better do without the loan because repaying it would make a big inroad into the salary I would receive when I left College (one hundred and forty-six pounds per year). As it turned out, I had no money to repay in my first year.

My first appointment after College was to Osborne Park School. At that time students automatically went to the country to teach but, as I hadn't been away from home, I wasn't very keen to do this. I was perhaps a bit fortunate that I was posted to a city school. There were only two city appointments made that year, one on compassionate grounds and mine, which was made because the headmaster of the Osborne Park School had asked for somebody who could teach Infants and who could play the piano. That appointment lasted precisely three days because, when he found out that he was getting a training student, he made such a fuss that they wired to Albany for a teacher to come up. And of course she couldn't arrive till about the next Tuesday. He had never met me when he did this. He just wouldn't have a student. So I left. On the Thursday morning I reported for duty at Buckland Hill. It was a great joy to me to leave dirty Osborne Park. I had a train journey to Mosman and a long walk down to Buckland Hill, but it was brighter, different in every way. To my sorrow, I found I was placed again in a Grade One. I really didn't particularly want this as I felt that I'd prefer older children, but as their teacher had gone on leave, I was kept with the class for twelve months.

The classes at Buckland Hill were very large and I can remember on one occasion teaching up to about eighty-five, with no assistance whatsoever. I was the victim of circumstances. The number of teachers depended on the total school enrolment. However, there were only twenty-six children in the combined Standard Five and Six class so, to balance the numbers, I had to have eighty-five in my class. The problem was made worse by the enrolment of under-age children. In those days parents used to put up the ages of their children to enrol them. I suffered because the head teacher allowed them in to make up numbers so that he could keep the extra teacher. When I investigated the ages,
eventually, I found that some children were only four. This often came out when they had their birthdays and they'd come and tell me. I'd welcome them on their birthdays and sing 'Happy Birthday' and find out they'd just turned five! This is why I was in the vanguard of those headmistresses and teachers who later fought to have a birth certificate produced upon enrolment. It was such an uphill battle, it really was. It was a hard, uphill battle! I stayed at Buckland Hill until 1933, when I was fortunate to be granted an exchange with London County Council.

Now, without any shadow of a doubt, this was the pick of the exchanges, because you weren't just posted to one school, say in a Scottish township or up in a Midlands town or something like that, you were in London with the London County Council. You were placed on the supernumerary staff. This meant that you just reported to the Divisional Officer and he sent you to fill in a vacancy. Sometimes my vacancies were half a day, sometimes a day, sometimes two days. The longest I ever had was a six weeks period. Through the course of my year there, I actually taught in forty-two different schools, and this gave me an enormous amount of confidence.

You know the biblical quotation about how you see things through a glass darkened? I felt that, until arriving in London, I had seen education through a dark glass. Suddenly, like a flash, I saw that education actually meant the development of the whole person. I was in schools in England where the headmaster or headmistress was the captain of his or her ship, more or less free to act as they wanted. Admittedly, this had faults at times, but, in many cases, marvellous things were done! For example, in some schools music was taught right throughout the school, which was superb. I came back here to find that children got only what the classroom teacher could give them. Very often, children didn't get music if the teacher wasn't interested. Moreover, because of the Depression, many people were not able to afford to give their children musical training at all.

I had always been interested in the teaching of reading and, by this time, I'd become so intensely interested in Grade One work that I was more-or-less specialising in it. While I was in London, I questioned between two hundred and fifty and three hundred teachers about reading development. At that time, they were experimenting in England with what was called the 'new sentence' method of teaching reading and I was permitted to do a day's demonstration to a school experimenting in this. It was this experience in England that brought me into contact with young children of three, four and five years, and the impact that preschooling had on children when they began to take what we now call formal work. There was such a gradual introduction to formal work that the English Grade One teacher didn't have the problems that Western Australian teachers had with the social adjustment of children, let alone the mental adjustment to school life. This is why I think I took such a keen interest later on.

Then I came back to Western Australia. I arrived back in October. When I stepped off the ship full of all sorts of bright ideas, you know, I was just raring to go
again. I was given a class of seventy-five children and I was the class's sixth teacher for the year – back at Buckland Hill!

The following year I stayed there because they turned Buckland Hill into a training school. Students came down from Claremont Teachers' College and I was made a training assistant which gave me a little weeny bit more salary. I found this quite an interesting experience, although the classes were large. The year after that, the headmaster said to me, 'Why don't you apply for a headship?'. I said, I wasn't very keen to go away from home, really. But they advertised all the training jobs that year, including one at West Leederville, just around the corner from where I was living. I applied, which was just as well because Buckland Hill was taken off the training list at that time. It would have meant that I would have lost the training assistant job. I got the West Leederville position. I'd had two years there as a monitor. Now I was going back as a training assistant.

I don't know what it was, but I really never wanted to teach in an Infants' school staffed just wholly and solely with women. I liked being in primary schools where we had mixed teachers, and things seemed to be just slightly more expansive in outlook. But then I got this request from the headmistress of Claremont Infants' to please take a demonstrating job. Now in those days if you took a demonstrating position in the only two schools that had them – Claremont or Prac. (Practising School) – and you taught there for two years, you could automatically go to a Class Four school as a headmistress or head teacher without having to go through all the classes of schools first, most of which were mill schools or one-teacher schools. Progress through them was very, very slow. So I applied for this demonstration job in a Grade One class but was actually appointed to Grade Three. Well, I didn't want this, because I didn't want to demonstrate or even practise with students in a grade I didn't know. So I did something I'd never dreamt of doing before. I went in to the Education Department to ask why I hadn't been left where I was when I hadn't got the demonstration Grade One class. Mr Coleman, who'd just gone in as the chief inspector of schools, gave me the reason why. He said that I had been unjustly treated and he took the complete blame himself, because, he said, he'd handed over the appointments to someone else. Mr Coleman said that he would know better which people to appoint. It seems he did, because he knew the regulations which I, at the time, did not know, that if you taught for two years in one of these schools you could automatically jump to a Class Four school with a headship. The daughter of his friend got one and her friend got the other of those demonstrating jobs. One of them actually got the one I'd applied for. Well, when he looked at my qualifications, he said, 'Your qualifications are far superior. You have been unjustly treated' and he took the complete blame himself, because, he said, he'd handed over the appointments to someone else. Mr Coleman said that he would know better which people to appoint. It seems he did, because he knew the regulations which I, at the time, did not know, that if you taught for two years in one of these schools you could automatically jump to a Class Four school with a headship. The daughter of his friend got one and her friend got the other of those demonstrating jobs. One of them actually got the one I'd applied for. Well, when he looked at my qualifications, he said, 'Your qualifications are far superior. You have been unjustly treated. Go down and have a talk with the staff clerk'. He added, 'Would you like to take a country headship?'. I said, 'Oh, I've never been to the country'. I wasn't very keen to leave home. But I went to the staff clerk who had a talk with me. He said, 'Collie Infants' School is available for six months because the head teacher, who was to have gone there, has asked to stay in Perth for six months. Now', he said, 'I warn you. It may be twelve months'. 
So I said, 'Please, can I go home to consider it?'. This was just before the war, 1939, and my father wasn't very well and I thought I should think about it. He said, 'Well, I'll just give you the lunch hour'. It was then nearly twelve o'clock, you see, and I had until two o'clock. So I came home and Mother and I talked it over. Then I rang up and said, 'Yes, all right, I'll take it'. It was only to be for a limited time and I thought it would be very good experience.

So I went down to Collie and was there for twelve months. At the end of the twelve months the local Masonic Lodge decided to ask the Department to keep me in the district. I had no rights, you see. I'd only been there, more or less temporarily, for a year. I had no right to jump schools, and this was a Class Four school. At first, the Department refused the local request but at the end of the vacation I was told to go back to Collie. I stayed at Collie for the war years, until the end of 1944. During this time an appeal was made against my appointment. The appeal was not heard until the fourth year I was there, three years after the permanent appointment. This was because there was no judge available during the war to sit on the tribunal or appeal court. It took all that time for Justice Wolff to sit on this appeal case and he dismissed it on the grounds it should never have been called because I had the necessary qualifications and experience. Anyway, the four years there were a marvellous experience for me because I had my first contact with country teaching. I met lots of teachers in one-teacher schools and two-teacher schools, some of whom came in sometimes for help. Later, when I went on College staff, I had this country experience and certainly knew the problems confronting teachers of grouped classes, particularly in my pet field of reading.

Accommodation was very difficult in those days. When I arrived in Collie I spoke at morning tea with some of the staff. They said that there was a woman across the road who took teachers. I slipped over in the lunch hour but she said she was terribly sorry but she was absolutely full up. In the afternoon, after the staff had gone home, a woman rode up to the school on a bicycle and said she had accommodation and was there anyone on the staff who'd like it? I said, 'Well, I will have a look at it'. It was an extremely clean place with a very nice room but I said to her, 'I must have meals, otherwise I can't take on the job of being a headmistress of a school of over three hundred children'. I didn't want to have to bother with meals. There were no such things as supermarts. You had no alternative really but to go to the butchers and get a piece of steak of something like that, or chops, or to eat eggs. There were no delicatessens with cut meats and easy things to buy. Anyway, she said, 'Yes, all right, we'll try it for the week, and I'll cook your meals'. I had beautiful meals all that week and it looked as if everything was going to be lovely; but at the end of the week she said she wouldn't cook for me again. So, there I was, thrown upon myself.

I was actually at Collie when we had an air-raid alert when they thought the Japanese were off the coast. I had a telephone in the school but the high school didn't. We had to have some kind of communication between the two schools. The system was based on a certain coloured piece of cardboard. I'm not too sure
that we didn’t have two or three different bits of cardboard for different things, but this particular one was definitely for the final alert. I was to give this to a child who was to run up as fast as he could and find the head of the high school so that he would know. The children in both schools had been trained for alerts. They had to get down under the desk. They had something to put in their mouths, to stop their teeth clenching. I think it was a piece of rubber. They also were trained to open the windows if they were shut. I suppose that was to stop the blast shattering the glass. Remember, we were dealing with fives. These little things of five to eight years were all under my care, you know. I’d absolutely dreaded the moment that this would take place. Yet all of those children did what they had to do. Not one child panicked, not one child cried. I can see them now, tiny things who were sitting by windows, who had the job of putting up the windows and opening doors and doing that sort of thing. Right throughout the school, they did it and got under their seats. When the air-raid wardens came into the school they took the burden of the big responsibility from me and I can remember that I almost wept. In fact, to this moment, I can feel the pain in my chest of pride, for those baby things of under eight who responded the way they did. We had spent some time too, building air-raid trenches way over on the hill, and the land there was very gravelly so that wasn’t an easy job in the heat.

There was one advantage of being in Collie during the war years because when the Americans came they bought up all the poultry. You couldn’t buy chickens at all. They were great buyers. Things were very hard to get, but down in Collie poultry was very easy to get. I could always come home at Christmas and Easter with a magnificent drake, a great big one, dressed, bought for six shillings. We didn’t get home often because we didn’t have cars and there wasn’t any petrol. Some of us would band together occasionally, perhaps once in mid-term, to go home with a taxi man who had a gas producer on his car. The only other way was to go by train, which meant travelling up at night and then travelling back on the Sunday night, leaving Perth about eleven thirty, arriving at Brunswick in the very early hours of the morning, possibly about five o’clock, and catching the cross-country train to Collie. It was only twenty-seven miles but it used to take two to three hours to do it. In the winter it was so bitterly cold it wasn’t funny on the train. Then, of course, after we’d arrive at Collie we’d have to walk home — it was a mile away — and then have a shower and get ourselves a cup of tea and breakfast and get to school. We always used to say that we were able to manage until about Thursday and then somehow or other the tiredness used to hit us with a bang. So we didn’t do that very often. You didn’t get home like they do today. You stayed there and you worked over weekends. Nowadays, I believe, they’re never seen after school closes on a Friday until they return again on the Monday. Admittedly, there’s a great deal of refreshment in going away but, on the other hand, we gave a lot more of our spare time to the position.

I left Collie at the end of 1944, because a position became available at Claremont Teachers’ College. I felt, at the time, that I’d like that position, but I was a bit nervous about applying for it. One of the superintendents was sent down from Perth to make sure that I did apply. I really did want it and the family
wanted me to come home, but I thought there were other people who had better qualifications for it. It was the beginning of 1945 when I was appointed to Claremont Teachers' College. I'd heard, on the grapevine, during the holidays that I was going there. I had to pack up everything belonging to me at Collie and also leave all the school records in apple-pie order and leave a list of things for the incoming person to help her.

I arrived at College on the Monday and had to start lecturing on the Wednesday. This would have been a very traumatic experience if I hadn't spent the previous year studying for the Higher Certificate in the Education Department and chosen as my subject the history of Infant education. I had, by that time, read all the books on that topic that were available in Western Australia. At least I had some background to lecture to the students on the history of education! We lectured often six hours per day with very few breaks during the week. If we had examinations the caretaker had to be called in to mind the group for a quarter of an hour while we had a cup of tea! There were only four of us on the staff. The new principal hadn't been appointed because Professor Cameron had been sent to the university at this time. He had been professor of education at the university, and also principal of the College. They divided the position at this time and called for applications. The new principal, who was to be Mr Sten, hadn't yet been appointed. The other staff members were Miss Bertha Houghton, who'd been on the staff for many years; Mr Horner, who was newly appointed and recently arrived back from overseas air service; Mr Milligan, from the nearby practising school; and myself. We also had a number of visiting staff members who came in on the Friday. Our timetabling had to be telescoped into the Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday to enable us to have some time free on a Friday for all these visiting lecturers. Kim Beazley (Senior) was one of them. He came in to do history. Mary Moir, who afterwards went on the staff and became warden of Claremont, when I left, and then warden of the Secondary College after Miss Westhaven, came to do music and speech. I took the Infant Method and Bertha Houghton took English. She filled in with other lectures. I mean, if they were ever short during the war years, and they had a history lecture, she'd fill in. She was a remarkable person.

When I went to the Teachers' College I was appointed as a junior lecturer, because the Department suddenly decided that it would not appoint senior lecturers until people had gone through a period of being junior lecturers. Professor Cameron was very annoyed about this and tried very hard to have me taken on as a main lecturer and not a junior. Because I had come from a headship, he said they were very fortunate to get someone with that experience and qualifications to apply for a junior lectureship. However, all I received for several years was the same salary that I'd received as a headmistress. He, at least, fought for that. Otherwise I'd have gone in on a lower salary. But he thought that my salary should be retained. I suffered over those years, because nothing was ever done about Teachers' College salaries. I think we were there for about three years before it was considered that we should have a little rise. Then, in June 1951, I did become a senior lecturer; but in June 1951 I also acted
as principal lecturer without additional salary, until I was appointed as warden. The change from principal lecturer to warden was made by Dr Robertson, the director-general, who met the warden of Sydney Teachers’ College and liked the title. I think this had been a fairly recent appointment at Sydney Teachers’ College, so he asked for one year to look at the position before he made a decision. I held the position until my retirement at the end of 1967.

When I was appointed warden, Dr Robertson invited me in to have morning tea with him to discuss the position. I was the first warden in Western Australia. The previous woman, Miss Harben, had been called a principal lecturer. At that time there was a principal male and a principal female lecturer. Later on, the principal male became vice-principal. Dr Robertson pointed out to me that not only did he expect me to be a warden to the women students, but also to be responsible for the conduct of the staff room and the general tone of the whole College. In other words, my influence was to extend beyond students. This, of course, was quite a new concept. Actually I was, at the same time, senior lecturer in charge of Infant Method. I retained this position alongside the other until the day I retired, being responsible for examination papers, marking and lecturing. Just towards the end of my career the number of lectures was reduced because the student population had grown to about thirteen hundred. The job was very onerous and very demanding. At this particular time we had to cope with more staff and greater student numbers, as we were also taking in returned servicemen. Mr Sten thought it would be a good idea to arrange a weekend camp at Point Walter, so that he could talk to staff about what he had in mind about College and also let us all get to know one another. He asked me if I had any special matter that I would like to bring up. Rather hesitantly I suggested to him that I didn’t think the warden’s job should include having to spend hours and hours during the week, making tea and washing-up. I felt for one thing that I was relatively highly paid (for those days) and that I had professional training and expertise. I wasn’t for one minute thinking that these were menial tasks, but we didn’t have very many women on the staff and they didn’t have time to assist me. I found that during the year I was spending hours of time, frequently after everyone had gone home, to get lunch dishes and things washed-up and put away. He agreed with me over this and we raised the matter with the staff. They were all extremely agreeable about it. Most agreed to contribute to hire someone, as there was no money available at all for this, but one man refused. He said that the tea was the women’s job and he wouldn’t join. He brought a thermos flask to work from that day on until he retired!

The change was absolutely essential, because, apart from the fact that College numbers were growing rapidly, responsibility for in-service education was also handed over to the College. Mr Sten became the director of in-service education. Added to my work, I had in-service courses to organise. When serving teachers came in, often sixty at a time, I had a morning tea to arrange on the first morning, for them to be introduced to staff. There were extra morning teas to be catered for, and usually an afternoon tea to close a conference. In addition, we had visitors from all over the world and guest speakers twice a week. In all there was
a great deal of entertaining to be done and of course the staff was growing too. From the four that we started with, I ended up with over seventy when I left. So you can see what a colossal job it would have been and how essential it was to have paid tea-room staff.

I am absolutely confident that I was also responsible for the introduction of paid tea-room staff into all the State’s high schools, because, on one occasion, one of the in-service courses that we had was for the senior-mistresses of high schools. I was asked to speak to them during the course. I spoke to them on how I saw their position within a school as not only being there to listen to girls’ problems and solve them, but also to set the tone of what I considered to be professionalism in the staff. At the time, in high schools, they were using children for washing-up and making tea. I really didn’t think this was particularly good for children. One of the senior-mistresses went straight away and hired tea-room staff. Now of course, as you know, it’s common practice in all schools.

If I was serving tea to College visitors in the staff room, I had to carry over cups from the bench where the lady was pouring. As the staff grew this became somewhat of a hazard. I remember saying to Mr Sten one day that I really would like a teapot to pour at the top table, as they called it, under the window. (It was a joke, the top table, among the men: ‘Who is going to be asked up to the top table to meet guests?’.) I had in mind a very simple, very modest little teapot. I suppose I was really thinking of one of the Swan aluminium teapots you could buy. Mr Sten looked at me and to my great amazement said, ‘Yes, see what you can do about getting a silver tea service’. So I purchased the silver tea service, over which I presided for many a long year at the top table. It, too, became a constant source of jokes among the staff, but it set a standard which was terribly important when people came to visit. I think possibly I’d been influenced a little bit by this when I travelled round the country after I went to College. We had country practices for students and I travelled with superintendents, who were conducting courses for country teachers. They asked me if I’d go with them to lecture on Infant Method and, particularly, reading. We’d go into schools, and nobody bothered much about you. You sort of found your way to the tearooms. Nobody particularly took much interest in you and often the sugar would be sitting in a tin. It was all so crude and the attitudes affected me very much. I thought, well, here we are, we should be giving these students the very best of social training to enable them to go out to take their place in the world with confidence. So we had the silver teapot and beautiful flowers in the staff room.

In addition to hostessing and lecturing and marking papers and setting papers, I had to attend to all of the interviews with women students. First of all, their absences had to be noted and reported. This job grew to mountainous proportions as College numbers grew, and I received no help whatsoever with it. In America, my counterparts had secretaries, who sat in offices attached to theirs and had telephones to take messages and pass them on. All of the clerical work was done by the secretaries unless there were referral cases that the warden had to deal with. But I had all the interviews to do as well as every
absence, even for one lecture in the day, to be recorded. Lecturers reported absences and I had to send for the students. You can imagine the hundreds and hundreds of notices each week. At morning tea time and lunch hours I would have one long procession, going down the corridors waiting to see me. Sometimes, I had arguments with students over absences. Then I had medical certificates to follow up. At first, students could have three days' sick leave without a medical certificate. Later it was extended to five. I had to check them all, pin them to the applications and file everything. Frequently, I would bring the paperwork home over the weekend and my sister would help. I remember one never-to-be-forgotten Saturday we worked right through until midnight. Finally, I had to get help from my staff in filing and filling in some of them and sending out notices and checking all the absentee slips. I did this until the day I left, but, after I left, it was handed over to the office staff to do and now, I understand, in some of the colleges, there's just no follow-up at all! If they miss lectures nobody seems to care. I don't agree altogether with that kind of thing, but I certainly did not agree that untold hours of my time should have gone into it. The interviewing, yes, that was rather important because it did keep me in touch with sick girls, so that I could be more sympathetic at examination times. It also enabled me to meet and know more of the girls and some of the problem ones. But in addition to all of that, I had a good deal of counselling to do. There were girls who came to me with their problems. Others were referred to me by staff members. Sometimes I was asked by the principal to go and see parents if the problem was a very serious one in connection with a student. That was always rather a nerve-racking experience because I never knew how I was going to be received. There was also the task of caring for the girls who were sick during examinations. Frequently it meant putting them into rooms, of a wintertime, and giving them radiators, or taking them cool drinks in summer or cups of tea to help them get through. Then, when we started to enrol married women, even getting examination papers to them in hospital. Once, I remember going to St John of God Hospital, because a student was there and she'd had a child.

The other problems that frequently arose in counselling were related to ethnic groups in which the poor daughters would be caught between two cultures and find their parents anxious for them to marry someone from their own country when they didn't want to. They were frequently keen to marry Australians because they felt that they would be freer with them and that they would have a better status. The parents kept tight control over their daughters because they read in the papers what was going on. The permissive society was rearing its head, and they were concerned. One saw this kind of problem, but there were matters of deeper significance in dealing with women students. Then there was the occasional unhappy situation when thefts occurred, as they always will when you get a group of people, no matter what the situation. These had to be followed up and it always fell to my lot to do this. I had a very good rapport with the CIB. I shall relate one rather funny experience. The local detectives knew me very well and, I know, respected me for what I did, because it often involved keeping records of lecture times over a period of weeks. As the lectures and the
numbers grew this became extremely involved, particularly as university students would sometimes be at College for just a half a day in the week. I kept close records and tried to narrow things to help them when thieving was particularly bad and persistent. On one occasion an Eastern States detective was over here on exchange. We were talking in the office and I handed over the records. He was being very uppish about it all. Then I had the most delightful wink from the local one who knew me. After the other officer went out, the local one just remained behind long enough to say, 'Don't worry, I think he thinks he's come over here to teach us all something'. However, I did have the last laugh, because I was right, and I did put them on to the right track.

At times my job involved going to court with students, just to accompany them and help them. Then often I had to precede them home, if that was their request, to notify the mother or father. Sometimes it meant getting on the phone to say, 'Your daughter's coming home. She has a problem. You will deal very kindly and sympathetically with her because she needs help'. Then there'd be cases of visiting students in hospital. There was one rather sad case of a student who tried to take her life. On two occasions I even brought students home here. One student's mother was dead and her father was in the country. The doctor said to me, 'I could let her out of hospital if she had somewhere to go, but I can't possibly let her go back to the boarding conditions she was in'. So I brought her here and my sister was remarkably good to her. Then, on another occasion, one of them had a breakdown over her examination results. She was living with a group of students and it wasn't wise to send her back. So, again, I brought her home and had to get the doctor to attend to her here. I was a wee bit nervous that weekend because she was very highly strung, and we lived near the river. However, all was well. We kept her in bed the first day and gave her plenty of rest and good food. Half the time they needed good food because if they were boarding they just didn't do anything but drink coffee.

I also organised the graduation ceremonies for Claremont College. That was quite a big responsibility each year. There were also balls, staff luncheons, farewell suppers to staff, and interstate functions when the visitors came over here. I frequently had suppers at my home after drama festivals and debates. Then there was the Anzac Day ceremony. For overseas students, I often had to deal with such things as their accommodation and going with them shopping for clothing and listening to all their problems. I often attended meetings arranged by Mr Sten with the Student Council. These were extremely valuable. I'd sit quietly in his office and solve some of their problems, particularly for those who were a little bit, you know, on the outer, wanting to be so radical about things. We had an opportunity to explain the other point of view to them.

During that time we had as students, Aboriginals, Roman Catholic sisters and the first of the students under the African Assistance Plan. As a matter of fact, we had the first woman to come to Australia under the African Assistance Plan. She came from Uganda. There were also students from Tonga, Fiji, Malaysia, Sarawak, Thailand, Borneo, Indonesia, as well as one on a UNESCO Scholarship
from Amman in Jordan. We also had Colombo Plan students and Pacific Islanders. May O’Brien, formerly May Miller, honoured in the New Year’s honours list, was the first Aboriginal brought in from a mission, Mount Margaret, with only a junior certificate, to have a year at College and then to return to the mission to help the children up there. She was especially placed under my charge to advise her and generally to see to her welfare. She returned to Mount Margaret for a while, but became restless and begged to be allowed to be brought to the city. However, the Education Department placed her at Mogumber but, finally, she persuaded them to let her come to the city and she went out to Mount Hawthorn Infants. Miss Harbeck was particularly good in preparing the way for her, both with the staff and the children of the school. She became a spokesman for the Aboriginals. I think a very great responsibility was placed on her, so I felt that she deserved the honour that she got.

In 1946 I was invited to become a member of the Education Committee at the Kindergarten Teachers’ College. Later, I was asked to be on the College Council. I stayed as a member of the Council until the year after I retired. I also lectured to Kindergarten students. But, from the beginning, I insisted that they come to me at Claremont College. I did this for a very specific reason — because I had learned that the students had a very peculiar attitude about what went on in our schools. They actually used terms such as ‘mental cruelty’ when referring to our work in the schools. So I decided, right from the beginning, that they would come down to College to be lectured by me so as to get the feel of College. I hoped that perhaps they might get to know some of my girls and realise that we didn’t indulge in mental cruelty in teaching our children. I was very dissatisfied with their course. I felt that I really wasn’t doing anything worthwhile at all. They called my lectures ‘transition to the Infant school’. In six lectures I was supposed to give them all they needed in the way of reading readiness and general transition to school. One day, when Dr Robertson, the director-general, was down at the College, he said to me, ‘How are you getting on with the Kindergarten College students?’ I said, ‘Oh sir, I’m not happy with the course. I just feel that in many ways it’s merely an introduction. We’re not getting anywhere. I’d like to give them a full course. Would that be at all possible?’ He said, ‘Why not? I’ll discuss it with the principal’. The result was that the following year I started a full course of Infant work. They then came down to me for a longer period. Thus began the very close liaison with the Kindergarten College that Claremont had, that was quite unique in Australia. This lasted right until the Kindergarten College was incorporated into the School of Teacher Education at the Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT), now Curtin University. It’s quite interesting that they later joined WAIT. They chose WAIT themselves. We had lectured to them for twenty-seven years, with no extra money at all, and some of us who started it felt a bit hurt.

In 1949, I said to the principal of Claremont that I would very much like to hold a residential in-service course for headmistresses and teachers of Infants’ schools. I was doing this at their request because they had frequently told me that they would dearly love to be able to be lectured to on modern methods. Mr
Sten said straight away, 'That's a very good idea'. He added, 'I'll let you in to a secret. The in-service courses that the Education Department are running are not being patronised. As a matter of fact, they've just had to cancel one'. I knew this because I'd been out on teaching practice and I'd seen teachers at a course at East Victoria Park School on a hot day, sitting in the children's desks, listening to different head teachers and superintendents who'd been called in to lecture to them. That evidently had been the one prior to the one that was cancelled. Mr Sten seemed enthusiastic about the idea. He said, 'After all, who better than teachers' college lecturers, who are naturally well-read in their subjects (they have to be) and specialists in each particular subject, to lecture to the teachers for refresher courses'. He was so enthusiastic, he said to me, 'How soon can you do it?'. My breath was taken away a bit, but I said, 'There is a long weekend coming up in November'. And he said right away, 'See what you can do about getting it done'. I had to go in first of all and see if the director-general would give me permission to do it and then I had to tell the Teachers' Union about it. I then had to get a notice run in the Teachers' Union paper. Fortunately, I just had time to get it into the October one because the particular weekend I had in mind came early in November. As it turned out, every Infant headmistress in the metropolitan area joined the course and some of the assistants as well. As a matter of fact I thought I'd close the camp at forty participants because that was all we could accommodate comfortably. However, I took forty-five. One of them, a Mrs Glenda Cowan, came up from Manjimup for the course. The Department deleted a day's pay from her salary because she had to travel up on the Friday to join the course. When you think of what's done today, to enable people to go to courses and things – and that's what they did to her! This was a residential refresher course for Infant head teachers and assistants. I received enthusiastic reports from the principal and also from the members of the staff who very kindly came down to lecture for nothing over the weekend. This highly successful course was attended by the director, if you please, and his wife, and the principal of the College and his wife and several members of the College staff. As if I didn't have enough to do! It was a nervous enough situation as it was, without having the two men sitting in, but they were so intensely interested in it all.

The director-general asked me to approach the Infant headmistresses attending the course to see if they'd be prepared to accept a female superintendent in Infant Method. This suggestion, a woman superintendent, amused us all immensely. Up to that point there hadn't been a women superintendent; not unless Nancy Richards had been appointed to secondary education at that time. Anyway they said 'Yes', unanimously, that they would accept a woman superintendent. When I reported to the director-general, I also asked him if he would be prepared to consider an appointment of a kindergarten graduate at the same time. We felt very strongly that it needed somebody who understood kindergartens and their work to be associated with the superintendent. Up to this moment all kindergartens approved by the government had to be inspected by the superintendents in the Education Department, many of whom knew very little about Infant work, let alone kindergartens. Dr Robertson readily agreed to
this, so I rang a graduate of the Kindergarten College, Margaret Evans, who'd had quite a long experience in one of the teachers' colleges in England, catering for children from the beginning of age two, nursery age, and taking them through to the early primary class. She got the job. I think that that's partly why the ground was so well prepared for pre-primary education in this State.

Another outcome of the course was the transfer of in-service education to Claremont Teachers' College. Mr Sten was made the superintendent of in-service education and placed in charge of it until he retired. This gave him the dual position of being the principal of the Teachers' College and the departmental person in charge of in-service education. It made him a very powerful person in a way, in regard to teacher training. It was a very successful marriage, because teachers were excited to be able to come to courses and learn from people so well versed in their subjects. However, it placed a very great load on the College staff, because we had no more money or time allocated to us. The work had to be added to what we were already doing. We sometimes had up to six hundred teachers in the College at one time. Courses were held for supply teachers in the country, supply teachers in the city, headmasters, country headmasters and headmasters in town.

I was involved in the formation of the Junior Primary Teachers' Association. We called it, then, the Infant and Junior Primary Teachers' Association. It's now the Junior Primary Teachers' Association. When I approached the Teachers' Union about the formation of an association, they expressed grave doubts that I could form a professional association without its being a branch of the Union. But I explained to them that I was already a member of the Teachers' College branch, which I didn't really want to give up, and that other members of country branches were in a similar position. It took quite a while for me to make them see that it was to be a professional association of teachers, and not a branch of the Union at all. Finally, they saw the daylight and we agreed to have this group which included lecturers, headmistresses and assistants of Infants' schools. This became the first professional association of teachers in this State and I became first president. At the end of the first year, in my report, I was able to state that the association had already made an impression on the teaching profession.
Evelyn Parker, who became the first woman mayor in Western Australia, was born on 12 October 1907 in Hangchow, China, the first child and only daughter of missionaries, Mary (nee Doherty) and James Parker, who came from Belfast. In addition to a long career in teaching, she served as a Justice of the Peace and was the Citizen of the Year in 1976. She was awarded an OBE and became Freeman of the City of Subiaco. The Subiaco library is named in her honour.

I was born in China and educated in various mission schools. Then I did a stretch in a girls' school in Hong Kong. I did not like being put into a boarding school at five and a half years of age, but that's what happened to me. I loved school itself. I loved all schools. Dedicated people were in charge of them and my parents, fortunately, could come up and have holidays with me. It took them about a fortnight's travel by boat and by foot. Those were the days before cars, remember.

My father died when I was thirteen and we returned to England, but my family came to Australia on my fourteenth birthday. We hadn't stayed long in England because mother decided it wasn't the place for young children and, as she was one of the pioneers of this world, she brought us out to Australia. We went to Sydney first and I went to a private, girls' school there for a while. I enjoyed that. It was a very nice little school but then we shifted to Perth for friendship reasons — mother had a number of friends over here — and I ended up at Perth College in Mount Lawley. I was very happy. I particularly liked Perth College. There were some marvellous teachers there. The headmistress was dear old Mrs Russell-Smith who was one of the rare creatures for that age, an MA from Oxford and an educated, cultured woman. She treated us all as young adults, which was unusual in those days.
Having changed schools so often and moved in rather a peripatetic fashion from school to school, I was rather behind, but when I reached Perth College I did the Junior Certificate in one year, and the Leaving Certificate the next year. It was hard work, but I did it and I was about nineteen when I left. Then there arose the question of what I was going to do for a living. In those days it was either nursing or teaching for women, or domestic service, and I don’t think I was born for domestic service. Nursing didn’t appeal to me much, but I loved children. I always got on with children, so I decided to go in for teaching. My mother had heard of what was then called a monitor’s job. She told me about it and we investigated further. She had a conversation with the Education Department and found that you had to do about twelve months as a teacher’s aide or cadet student to see whether you were suitable for teaching and whether you wanted to go on with it. I applied and was appointed briefly to Brookton Primary School. I lived in a hotel at Brookton. The hotel-keeper was very nice. He said that board should cost thirty-five shillings, but he took me for thirty. Well, thirty shillings was the total sum I was getting from my job. So my mother had to supply me with a few odd extra shillings to spend. I actually got just twenty-five shillings a week to pay for my board. Fortunately I was able borrow five shillings per week from the Education Department, which I had to pay back as soon as I got a job. Monitors in those days were very hard working. They all had to teach a class, or be responsible for a class, and they had to give a formal lesson every week just to see how they were absorbing the information. Women monitors always had to take the three S’s, sewing, singing and Scripture, because males didn’t like doing any of them.

When I completed the monitorship I entered Training College. At that time, the awful Depression signs were on the wall. It was the end of the 1920s. The Training College had one- and two-year courses. Students in the two-year course got an allowance of twenty-five shillings a week, which was supposed to pay for board. If you were lucky and got into the two-year course you could board at College. If you didn’t, then you boarded out at an establishment nominated by the Department. I took on a one-year course to prepare to teach at country schools. Mother had my three younger brothers to educate, so, obviously, she couldn’t keep me for another two years.

I must have been in College in 1927-1928. It was a peculiar course. It went through six months in one year and six months in the next year. I started in the third term in September and finished the following year. Halfway through I was approached by the principal who asked if I would like to switch to the two-year course and do the full course. I had to turn it down because of the lack of money. I had to get out and start earning as soon as I possibly could and be a little independent. Mother was only renting a place out in East Cannington at that time. It was all we could afford. What money she had she was determined to give to her children to provide a good education. That’s where the money went.

The short course came up periodically, not every year, but only when they were desperately short of rural teachers. I think there were thirty of us in the course.
I'd say twenty-five of them were women and five were men. I can visualise the men. I wasn't very impressed with some of them! The women students seemed to be of a higher standard educationally than the men. The women were from a variety of backgrounds, but I think they were in the same situation as me. They wanted to get out to work. Some of them wanted to get away from home, which of course is a natural ambition for a lot of girls, but several of them had to do the same as me and get a job. We were all going to go to rural schools. We were bonded to do at least two years in a country school. I ended up doing eight.

The course at Claremont College was an eye-opener to me because I had no idea of a one-teacher school, having had all my education at big schools. They had a little rural school attached to the College and we did our practical work and our demonstration lessons there. I must confess it was very interesting. Some of the lecturers, of course, were more with it than others but, generally, they did prepare us for a country school. One particular male lecturer was excellent. He had been a country school head teacher and he knew exactly what we were to face. He emphasised the loneliness of the life, the difficulty of organising your work, and what you were expected to do out of school hours, whether you wanted to do it or whether you didn't! He was excellent at planning the day's work. This was important because in a rural school you had to teach every class. We had a lot of practical teaching and demonstrations. Towards the end of our course, if I remember correctly, we had to give a demonstration to a class of children on the stage in the hall. We all dreaded it. All the other students observed, waiting for us to make a mistake. I don't think they do that today. The old curriculum was very specific. I still can see the green-backed book (everybody got one) which very clearly set out what you were expected to teach in a year, in any given subject. It was well written. We knew exactly where we were.

I enjoyed meeting people from different walks of life. I had been to private schools all my life and here, for the first time, I was meeting people who had come up through the State school system. The difference between the two was an eye opener to me. I made some very good friends, which I still have, and basically it was an enjoyable time for me except I didn't have any money. I lived in Bay View Terrace, Claremont, within walking distance of the College. I think there were ten of us living in a big home and we were looked after fairly well. I always went home at weekends, so I was only a Monday to Friday boarder.

After completing the course, you didn't apply for a job. You were offered a position and, of course, it was a rural school. I was comparatively ignorant of bush and country life in Australia and my first appointment was to a little country school called Strathern, about twenty miles east of Pingelly. Mother was a widow and my elder brother had, by this time, got himself a job on a farm, and my second brother was at Muresk Agricultural College, so she only had one boy at home. She put him in boarding school because I wanted her with me. I applied for a school with quarters. In my innocence and ignorance I thought the quarters would be a nice little cottage alongside the school. It was a devastating
welcome for me when I saw what the quarters were. They were attached to the school but they hadn't been used for years and were in a filthy state. The quarters should never have been allowed. It was unbelievable what the Education Department expected people to be satisfied with. We arrived there with our luggage and furniture and everything else. My lovely mother! I can see myself to this day as I stood in the kitchen and literally cried. I wept that I'd taken my mother to a place like that. But my mother was built of sterner stuff. She got to work with a broom and we got into it. I said, 'This is the end of it. We'll stay here for three months' (because I'd been appointed at the beginning of the final term) 'and then we'll go back to Perth'. That's what happened. But the school itself and the children were a delight. I enjoyed them. I've always had a very soft spot for country children. Fortunately the school numbers were borderline, only ten children, and the school closed at the end of the next year.

I hadn't finished my bonding and I was transferred to another small school called Jaggerup about twenty-five miles west of Gnowangerup. It was a little weatherboard school with a fibrelite roof, sitting on top of a hill. It was freezing cold in the winter and boiling hot in the summer. It was bordering on a Class Six school. (The little schools that we first went to were all Class Seven schools; that was the lowest grade.) There I had about fifteen to twenty children and my accommodation was excellent. It was in a farmhouse with a very charming couple who were very good to me, but I had a two-mile walk to school and back. They suggested that I get a bike but I couldn't afford one because I was still helping mother at home. In any case, you couldn't go across the paddocks on a bike. I don't think the exercise did me any harm. At the end of my second year there, the pupil numbers had risen and the school qualified for a Class Six grading. This led to my first brush with the Education Department because I held the school as a Class Seven, but at a Class Six level, for twelve months but they wouldn't give me any allowance because I hadn't been officially classified. Finally, I couldn't hold it any longer and a male had to be appointed. Once a school got to a Class Six level no woman was allowed to hold it and I had to be transferred again.

I think it's been standard throughout the Education Department for more years than anybody would care to remember that there have been more women teachers than men, but men always got to the top and took the cream of the positions. The fact that I'd done the job for the whole year didn't count. I was only temporary. I was just serving a qualifying period at the school. I never could understand the Department's attitude. In my opinion, they had no humanity whatsoever. I loved teaching, I loved schools, that's why I stayed with it. But the administration of the Education Department so tightly adhered to the Education Act that women were always on the receiving end of anything that could possibly be done against them. So I was transferred from Jaggerup to my third little school.

By this time I had been teaching about four years and I did three years in a lovely little country school at Marradong, which is out of Boddington. That, I thoroughly
enjoyed. The boarding was excellent. The school was a happy one and the people around were lovely. I really enjoyed that very pretty area. But my mother's health was deteriorating badly and I was needed at home. I pleaded with the Department to give me a transfer home, having done my country service and having fulfilled my bond. The one answer I got from them was: 'Your domestic affairs are no concern of ours; we regret we cannot comply'. That went on for a few months and then they did transfer me to Byford. My home was in South Perth so you can imagine how I got from South Perth to Byford by train! My mother had got herself a nice little happy home in South Perth. To get to Byford I had to catch the tram into town. There was a loop line that took anything up to half an hour. Then I had to walk down to the station and catch what was called the ‘Bunbury Flier’ at half past seven in the morning. I'd get to Byford at about half past eight or a quarter to nine and race up to school just in time for the bell. Then, in the afternoon, I'd have to wait until the return train came back from Bunbury at about half past five or six, so I had a twelve-hour day. Well, obviously, I couldn't keep that up, so, in the end, back I went to boarding in Byford and going home for weekends. The boarding arrangements were excellent.

Byford was a big school, a two-teacher school with a monitor. That was a big school! I had forty-five to fifty children in Infant school (Infants, One and Two) that would have been Grades One, Two and Three in today's language. The headmaster, with the monitor, had the rest of the school. It was a nice school in a nice area and I enjoyed my period there. In my last year, the headmaster had to go on sick leave in the final term and they appointed a relieving headmaster. Though I was now a little more knowledgeable about life, I didn't quite realise what was going on with this poor unfortunate relieving man. I never knew why he was spending so much time at night over at the school. I was getting a little suspicious, but I had nothing to go on until the monitor came to me one day and said, 'You know so-and-so's at school every night. He's an alcoholic. Did you know that?'. Of course there was nothing I could do about it. It was his private affair. We found all the evidence later stowed away in various cupboards. The upshot was that he went home one weekend and didn't come back. That was about the middle of November and, of course, I immediately told the Department that he hadn't arrived and phoned his wife to ask if he was coming. She said he wasn't well and wasn't coming back any more. The Department said they'd send a relief, but they never did. The monitor and I between us had more than one hundred children. Imagine, finishing-off the school year with one hundred and twenty children. We had to deal with examinations and with children going up to high school, and so on. I signed all the necessary documents and thought I'd be entitled to the headmaster’s allowance, having done all the work. So I wrote to the Department and claimed an allowance. They wrote back and said, 'You haven't done it long enough. You're short of one week of the period'. And so I got nothing.

We teachers shared some of the difficulties. At first I was a raw recruit. I was innocent and unused to things in the country. I was always delighted, when I was leaving the school to go home for holidays, if a fellow teacher from another
country school got into my carriage with me and enlightened me on a point or two! When I first went out, I thought the district superintendents were there to assist, to help with things. I couldn’t understand why I wasn’t getting very good teaching marks. On my first holiday, going back in the train, another women teacher was in the carriage with me. We were alone, having a real old talk about things, and I told her about my low teaching marks. She said, ‘Oh, glory, you didn’t tell him all the things that are wrong?’ ‘Yes’, I said, ‘I want to know’. She enlightened me, ‘Well, that’s what he writes down against you’. My eyes and mouth shot open, ‘Don’t tell me he judges me on that’. She said, ‘Yes, he reckons you can’t do it. Have you ever seen what he writes? There are all sorts of secret files. You never tell them anything you can’t do, ever’. From that time on, I never did, because they gave an efficiency mark at the end of the year and that depended entirely on their assessment of your work. If you couldn’t do this or wanted help with that, you weren’t considered an efficient teacher! I’m quite sure my honesty delayed promotion for three years before I realised what was happening. It never happened again.

I was in Byford for about three years, I think, and then they transferred me to Carlisle. I had written to the Department. I said I’d done enough in the semi-rural areas and asked if it would be possible, now, to get me closer to Perth. They at last relented and sent me to Carlisle. It was a big school of five or six teachers, but again it was a school bursting at the seams and the classes were big. I had Standard Three and Four with up to fifty-nine children in a grouped class. The teachers in the Infants had smaller classes. Infant teachers always had smaller classes. So, too, did those with Second and Third Year classes because they were grouped, and because the children needed an enormous amount of individual attention. When they get to eight or nine years of age you can set children to work and do something with the rest of them.

After Carlisle, a position called a ‘Training Assistantship’ came up. I thought, ‘Well, I’m going to have a go at this, too’. It was associated with the Training College. The students went out on practical work with specially chosen teachers, and I thought I’d like to be one of them. So, I applied for Cottesloe. It was a very happy association. I had a nice little class there and I was a Training Assistant. When I was teaching at Cottesloe, the district superintendent came in to speak to my class. He said, ‘You’re entitled to an increase in your efficiency mark’. I said, ‘I thought I was’, and he continued, ‘But you don’t need it so I’m giving it to the man next door’. I asked him what he meant by that. He said, ‘I’m only giving two extra marks this year. You’re entitled to one of them, but the man next door needs it more than you do. You don’t need it for your career’. I often wonder why I stayed with the Education Department. My mother was horrified at what was happening to me. Naturally, I told her all the stories and she very badly wanted me to go back with her to China. I knew she couldn’t, physically she wouldn’t be able to, but behind my back almost, she engineered a position for me in a Hong Kong private school in 1939. You can imagine what happened in 1939! I said, ‘Mother, I can go, but you can’t and I’m not going unless you can go. We’ll stay where we are’. I would have been interned in Hong Kong!
After the war, in 1948, I had a delightful career break, if you can call it a break, in my career. I was allowed to have twelve months exchange teaching in Victoria. A full twelve months! It was intensely interesting, and I enjoyed it tremendously. In the first term, I taught in various schools in the metropolitan area of Melbourne. In second term, I was sent to Wangaratta, which is very close to Mount Buffalo, so I had a whale of a time on the weekends (being much younger then than I am now) going up to Mount Buffalo and trying myself out on skis. I did part of third term in Sale and part of it back in Melbourne. The Victorian Education Department was a delight for me to deal with. Anything I asked for or requested they did what they could to get it for me, which I found most unusual, as you can imagine. It was a delightful time.

I returned to Western Australia to teach at Cottesloe. In 1950-51 I took my long service leave, after which I had another brush with the Education Department. I don't know whether I was fated to have these or not. I went on long service leave with two friends and we travelled to England on a very small allowance. We had a wonderful time and I came back refreshed. Now, it was an unwritten gentleman's agreement that when a teacher went on long service leave, he or she came back to the class and the school that he or she had left. I came back at the beginning of 1951 and went to Cottesloe expecting to be given my old class back, only to be told that I was being transferred. I asked why, but the headmaster could do nothing about it. He was obeying instructions. He was as dismayed as I was and said, 'They've sent a mature-aged returned soldier to take over your class and he's very happy here and wants to stay. He's got influence and he's staying and you're the one that has to go'. I said, 'And where are they sending me now?'. He told me I'd been posted to Princess May Girls' School in Fremantle. I said, 'I don't want to teach in secondary schools. I'm quite happy where I am, and I don't want to teach just girls'. He replied, 'You'll have to do what you're told, or otherwise . . .'. So, down I went very reluctantly to Princess May Girls' School in Fremantle and met the headmistress. She was a dear and I told her I was very reluctant and I wasn't staying. 'Oh', she said, 'this is a promotion. You should be glad'. 'I don't want to be here', I said, 'I think I should have been asked'. She said, 'The Department doesn't ask as a rule, does it?'. I replied, 'No, it doesn't, but I still want my old job back. Everybody else gets their's back. Why have I been singled out?'.

I thought there was only one thing to be done about it and so I wrote to the director-general himself. It's no good playing around with the office boys and underlings, so I wrote a very strong letter saying I thought I had been unfairly treated. Anyway, he got that letter and, after I'd been there for about three weeks, I was called to the phone and a superintendent at the other end said, 'Miss Parker, we cannot send you back to Cottesloe. I'm sorry but we just cannot'. I realised then that he was under pressure from outside. He continued, 'Will you accept a compromise?'. That was the first time that the Department had ever shown any leniency to me whatsoever. I said, 'What's the compromise?'. I had a horrible feeling it might be a job out at Eden Hill or Midland Junction or somewhere. He replied, 'Would you accept a Training
Assistant’s job at Subiaco?’. I said, ‘Thank you very much. Yes, I will’, and that’s how I got to Subiaco.

We were living in Subiaco at the time. My mother’s health had failed so I’d got her out of South Perth, because it was difficult getting her medical attention. Subiaco was close to hospitals, so I was delighted. Subiaco was a lovely school, it really was, and the children were lovely. It was what I would call a good, solid working-class suburb in those days and the parents were very keen for their children to get on. The classes were big and the staff was good. Then they decided to make it a research school for various projects, for example, the new maths. They converted it into a research school and restaffed it with some brilliant young teachers. They really picked the cream of their teachers. The first year I was there they asked me if I would be first-mistress and help them to introduce the scheme. Because I knew all about Subiaco, I said I would.

I worked for a year as first-mistress and then they threw the position open. I expected to get the appointment, having done it for twelve months, but didn’t. They gave it to somebody else. I thought, ‘No, you’re not doing that to me again’. This time I challenged the Department’s appointment, which meant I had to go before the Teachers’ Tribunal. Magistrate Bateman was in the chair and there was a Union representative and a Departmental representative. I didn’t have any money. I couldn’t afford a lawyer to take my case. I took my own case. I went before the Tribunal. What an experience! I knew nothing about court procedure, or very little, despite the fact that my brother was in the Police Force at the time. I got to this place and there was the director of education with his appointee with my file in front of him. They had refused me access to my file, which I thought was most unjust (I have been very pleased to see in recent years the Freedom of Information Act, so people can find out what’s being said about them). I still don’t know what was on my file, but it was pretty thick. I fought that case and they retired for the verdict. I felt almost like a criminal. They came back and I won the case. The other teacher was transferred and I was appointed.

The first-mistress is responsible for all the girls in a school: their behaviour, sport and activities. You assist the headmaster in that regard. Subiaco was a Class One school by now, a lovely big school. I suppose there were two hundred and fifty to three hundred girls for whom I was responsible, but if the headmaster and the deputy head both happened to be away (both were male) I could not take charge of that school! It happened, on one occasion, that both of them had to go away for some particular reason or other, and I went down to the headmaster and said, ‘Well, that makes me in charge of the school, doesn’t it?’. And he said, ‘No, it doesn’t. No woman can be a headmaster or head teacher of a Class One primary school’. And I said, ‘Well, who’s going to be in charge?’. He replied, ‘Oh, any man on the staff can be a head over you’. Some were barely out of College! So I looked at him and said, ‘Well, I know what I can do’. So, when he left I got the school bell (we had a school bell in those days), knowing that whoever controls the school bell controls the school. And I retired to my classroom with the school bell!
Working at the research school was interesting and then they decided to transfer it over to Mount Pleasant. I said, 'Why is it going over to Mount Pleasant?'. Dr Jecks (the superintendent) told me they were going to try it in a variety of areas. I said, 'That's a good idea: first in a working-class area, and now in an affluent area'. But I've been waiting for it to change ever since. It's still in an affluent area. The whole of the staff except me was transferred to Mount Pleasant because they were the research staff, you see, hand picked. Dr Jecks came to me and said, 'Why don't you go with them because you've been through the mill?'. I said, 'No, I don't want to leave Subiaco. I don't want to go to Mount Pleasant'. He said, 'It's promotion'. I asked, 'How much extra would I get a year?'. He said, 'Forty pounds a year'. I said, 'That wouldn't even pay my bus fare'. Apart from the wear and tear on the old system, I didn't want to go. So I stayed where I was, and I was happy I did.

In 1954, when I'd been in Subiaco for three or four years, I stood for Subiaco Council. I knew one of the Subiaco councillors, who was a personal friend. He came to me one day and said, 'There's a by-election. A man has been transferred and nobody is showing any interest in the seat. Why don't you stand? There's a woman on the Council now, she's all by herself'. (That was dear Mrs Rose Firman, a lovely person). I pointed out that I'd never thought about it. I didn't know what went on. He said, 'You'd find it interesting. We could do with a person like you'. I thought that was very flattering. The upshot was that I stood, although I didn't know anything about fighting elections. My friend said, 'There won't be an election. Nobody's showing any interest. You might just as well apply'. So I did nominate and the same afternoon a man nominated, backed by the mayor! I went to my friend and said, 'Look this is silly. I don't want to fight an election. I can't, I don't know what the attitude of the Department will be. It could be sticky as far as I'm concerned'. He said, 'You stick it out'. So I stayed and then my opponent rang me up and said, 'There's no need to fight about this. You don't really need this do you? How about backing out and letting me have an open go?'. I said, 'I'm sorry, but I've got an Irish background and I don't pull away from a fight. If it's a fight you want, that's what you'll get'. So there was a fight. But I won that one too. Which surprised not only me but everyone else!

Twice I was re-elected unopposed. The third time I was opposed by a person who took a violent dislike to my methods of applying the Health Act. She only got twenty votes so that was all right. I had no intention of becoming a mayor. It wasn't in my thinking at all. I had just about finished twenty-one years on Council. That was seven terms and I said to all the councillors, 'This is enough'. As a matter of fact I wondered if it wasn't too long but I stuck to it because I was the only woman on Council. Mrs Firman had long since gone. Then the mayor had to retire sooner than expected, due to ill-health and the councillors came to me and asked if I would stand as chairman. So I did. I asked if I was going to be opposed, and they doubted that. In fact I had three, male opponents and they all shouted me down. I'd done over twenty years on Council and I thought I couldn't pull out because in Subiaco the mayor is elected by franchise of the people not by the Council. So I fought an election and I won that one too. I have to admit I
had the advantage of being extremely well-known. I'd been teaching there and knew generations of citizens. They said there was nobody in Subiaco who didn't know Evelyn Parker, either through their children, or their grandchildren. Even now, when I go back, I meet half a dozen people I know who stop me and greet me, which is very heart-warming. I was mayor for nearly three years.

The men on the Council were more interested in sport than activities for the children and I was more concerned for the very young. There were not nearly enough kindergartens, playgrounds and infant health centres, and nothing for senior citizens. So I took the two extreme ends and got a tremendous amount of support from everybody. During my term we opened a kindergarten, built two infant health centres, and built a magnificent senior citizens' centre. We'd arranged for another one after I left.

I didn't have any support for my Council work from the Education Department. I don't think the Education Department cared about such issues. I never had any comment from them. At no time was I ever complimented on becoming a councillor for the City of Subiaco, which was most unusual for teachers in those days. At no time, even when I retired (and I'd done all sorts of work for the Education Department) was I given any credit for it whatsoever. None! On one occasion, I had become very interested in the problems of ageing, because there were many aged people in Subiaco and they had nowhere to go to meet. At the time, a seminar was being held in Perth to consider aged care. The organisers asked me if I would be part of a panel, because I'd shown so much interest. I said, 'I'd be delighted. When is it?'. When they told me, I went to the head and told him I'd been asked to join a panel and would need most of the morning off. He said, 'Just go', but I said, 'No, I must apply'. So I applied for half a day off on urgent private business and told them exactly what it was for. The answer came back, 'You are employed as a class teacher. Stay with your class'. I didn't go. The head told me to go in any case, but I said, 'No, they're just as likely to send someone round to see if I am there'. When I joined the Council, fortunately most councillors were businessmen or working men. They were all working, so every meeting was held after half past three. I had no problem in attending meetings. The Council went out of its way to accommodate me, but that's not what happened with the Education Department.

Looking back at teaching, I resented not being trusted. Right through my teaching career I resented the inspectors and supervisors coming into my room to check up on what I was doing. They really weren't prying, just making an assessment; but to me it created an atmosphere of distrust and I resented it bitterly. It even carried on to the day I retired. Having taught for forty years, the district superintendent came to my class in Subiaco and said, 'I've come to have a look at your class for the last time'. I said, 'You can have a look at my class, you can do what you like with my class, but I will not be there. I am not going to submit to the last one'. He was quite put out, poor old man. He was a very nice man, too. I said, 'No, I'm not. I've put up with it for forty years, so why should I put up with it now? Never, ever, have I been trusted by the Education Department to do
my job'. Other teachers just accepted it as part of the system. It must have been the Irish in me. I didn't like it!

I was a Union member. I believe you should belong to your professional organisation, but I only went to the Union once for assistance. That was when I had to go before the Teachers' Tribunal over my appeal. I went to one of the Union's hierarchy and asked for assistance. He just said, 'We don't help one teacher against another'. I said, 'Yes, I can understand that, but I want to know what happens at a Tribunal hearing, because I have no knowledge whatsoever. Who is there? What is there, and how do I go about it?'. He gave me about three minute's worth saying, 'There's a magistrate and a representative. You present your case, the Department presents their case and they come to a decision and that's it'. I said, 'Thanks very much', and walked away. However, I think we owe a lot to the Union over salaries; and conditions have improved, certainly, but they're getting a bit away from it now. They're losing their professional status, which, to me, is a pity.

I think that women felt they were the drudges of the Department because, in my time, as I have said, they couldn't be a head of a primary school above Class Seven. They wiped those schools out some years later, making children travel hundreds of miles to school, the poor young things. But it was the discrimination I resented, not only in appointments, but in salary. We were doing the work but we were not getting paid for it. On one occasion, I went to the Department and said that I had responsibilities and wanted to help my widowed mother and my brothers. They said, 'Look, single women don't have responsibilities. Only married women have responsibilities'. That was a crass statement to make by any man, but that was the attitude they had. I couldn't see the reasoning. It was that sort of discrimination that really got under everybody's skin.

By contrast, I have been honoured by the community in which I worked. Mine are community awards because the Education Department doesn't give awards, or at least doesn't give awards to women teachers. I was made Justice of the Peace, which I was very pleased about. Next, I got an OBE, a royal honour, which no longer operates in Australia, but of which I am very proud. I won the Citizen of the Year Award in 1976, for work for the community and education, and then they made me a Freeman of the City of Subiaco, which is of course just a nominal title, but a very great honour. In my acceptance speech, I pointed out that in the old days in England to be made a Freeman of a City was the highest honour which could be given to any citizen. In the country it meant that from then on the person could park her cows on the common. I said, 'That is no longer applicable and I would like to go to the Law Reform Commission and ask that it be changed now so I can park my car on a highway!'. That was a great honour. Then recently (I'm very very thrilled about this) after so many years out of public life, the Subiaco City Council, on behalf of its residents, named their library after me. The Evelyn H. Parker Library is named after me, which is a very great honour, indeed.
Claremont women's intercollegiate hockey team, 1928. Mabel Guy seated on left.

'Professor Cameron arranged for Claremont Teachers' College to take part in the inter-collegiate sports, for the very first time, over in Adelaide. I played in the hockey team and that was a marvellous experience. On the train going [over] there... We got out at all the little stops and practised our hockey'.

MABEL GUY
Mabel Guy (nee Harris) was born in Geraldton on 19 May, 1908. Her mother, Edith Ellen Branch, was born in Swansea, South Wales and her father, William Chamberlain Harris, was born in Pinjarra. Mabel left teaching when she married but returned as a war-time teacher.

I attended Boulder City Primary School in the Goldfields. I had one year at Eastern Goldfields' High School and then my father, who was a postmaster, was transferred to Albany. There was no high school in Albany and I was told I had to go to Perth Modern School on my scholarship, but I didn't want to go. So I went into Eighth Standard at Albany District High School, which was just an extension of Primary school. I think it was a very good idea to have a co-ed school. We were treated equally, I would say. We used to have lovely little socials together, and boys would take us home from the socials. We'd say, 'Did you have a black band last night?'. That was a boy's arm around your waist when you went home and a little kiss goodnight at the gate.

I loved all school except sewing because I was left-handed and I used to get the cane for bad sewing because I was made to use my right hand! There was no science, so they introduced agricultural science. I found that quite interesting. We used to go to Denmark to a farm and have practical experience as well as a bit of a party! There really wasn't much choice of subjects. We did do French for another language, but I don't know whether it was useful or not. I can remember all the French I was taught but I don't think I could make myself understood if I went to France! We had a very, very dedicated staff in Albany. There were only nine pupils - two boys and seven girls - in the Leaving class and we had nine teachers! In 1925 the new high school was built and we had to raise lots of money. We had balls and Shakespearian plays and all sorts of things to buy a piano and library books. I think we had very good teaching. I noticed, when I
went to Training College, that my thoughts were quite different to those who had been to Modern School.

I did quite well in College, really. I remember my first English lecturer was Ruth Thomas. The poem we studied was 'The Road Through the Woods', which I loved. At the end of class she said, 'Would you please write an essay on Chaucer as a writer of the grave and the gay?'. I nearly clapped my hands for joy because I loved old English. I wrote about nine foolscap pages and quoted a lot from Canterbury Tales without even looking at the text. At the next lecture, Ruth Thomas said, 'Oh, the essays were terribly disappointing. Only one was worth marking', and she read mine out. I think that was thanks to Dr Hugh Fowler, who was the English teacher at Albany High School. He just made us love Chaucer, and I still love old English.

I always loved children and I was very keen to be an Infant teacher. Just about the time I was doing my Leaving Certificate, my father came home one day and said I could have a position in 'the telephone exchange in Albany. I burst into tears and said, 'I want to be a teacher'. Little did I know! With seventy children in a class it wasn't teaching, it was trying to control an army! Three girls in our family were teachers. Really, there wasn't very much choice in those days. Once a girl got a Leaving Certificate there didn't seem much else she could do. Those who didn't do very well in their Leaving Certificate usually became nurses. Even the boys took it for granted that most of them would become teachers, which they did.

I was very lucky. I went to Katanning as a monitor. I really wanted Albany, to be at home, but I didn't get it. I was quite happy in Katanning. I was supposed to do two years. However, just for fun, I applied to go to Claremont College after one year and for some unknown reason I got it. I was at College from 1927 to 1928 doing the Infants' course. Out of about two hundred students I think there were only ten who were going to be Infant teachers. I was a year younger than everybody else and I had free board and lodging in College. We were able to board if we were country students. It was rather fun, although it had its ups and downs. We got a pound a month pocket money, to help us along the way, which we had to pay back at five shillings a week when we started teaching. Most of the money went on glue and various things for handy work, or an occasional trip to Perth. My parents also sent me ten shillings a week pocket money so I had fifteen shillings a week, but I was always broke.

I enjoyed my time at College, although teachers en masse were a little bit of a burden. My first days there I really started out on the wrong foot, through no fault of my own. There were about five of us from the country. We were admitted the night before all the other students came. The next day I didn't really know what was going on and about ten o'clock the baize doors swung open and all these shrieking females came in hugging and kissing each other. Then I found out that to iron our clothes, we had to put our name on the ironing list. So, somebody called me eventually and said it was my turn. They had left the iron on for a long while and it wasn't red hot or I'd have seen. It was white hot and I put it on the
ironing board and it went clean through everything. Everybody said, 'She's spoilt the new ironing board'. For punishment, for three weeks I was tossed out of my bed about three o'clock in the morning. I used to just stay on the floor. I wouldn't even get up. I hated the whole lot of them. I thought they were terrible. Eventually, I became very popular because my elder sister was married to an orchardist down at Manjimup and every couple of weeks he used to send me a dump case of apples with a great big bag of home grown walnuts on top. Everybody wanted to kiss me good night and take a few apples with them. I wasn't used to such a lot of women en masse. There was a lot of jealousy between them as well.

As Infant teachers we were told to make teaching aids. Another girl and I were told to make a theatre of health. Now, my boyfriend at this time lived in Katanning but to be near me he got transferred to a builder in Perth and he had a nice Chrysler Roadster car. So, when we had a bit of freedom I had quite good times, going to plays and things. I told him I had to make this theatre of health, so he took me to a relation of his. I showed him what I wanted and he built me a great big beautiful frame and I painted it and bought curtains and you pulled a cord and the curtains parted. The picture I had on it at that time was, 'Eat More Fruit'. It was really very, very nice and everyone was very pleased with it. The other girl had one of those cardboard things that you peep through the front and see the picture at the back. She said, of course, 'Oh, she has a boyfriend who made her aid'. You were sort of always up against that. I think you were in teaching days as well. There was a lot of jealousy and bitchiness.

As boarders, we also had to make special arrangements for things like the laundry. We were only allowed twelve articles each week. Everything had to be very clearly marked. If the handkarchiefs were not marked properly, they used to just put them in little bundles and they were for sale for three pence a dozen. So, we could always get a good supply of hankies. As for periods, for our monthlies, there wasn't any Modess or tampons or Kotex or anything like that in those days. All our little home-made pads we were allowed to have laundered, as long as we cleaned them fairly well and pinned them together with a big safety pin. Those, maybe about twelve, napkins counted as one object in the laundry. They all came back beautifully washed and ironed snow white. I don't know how they did it!

There were a lot of differences at College between when Bill Rooney was there, during my first two terms, and when Professor Cameron came. When I got to Claremont, Bill Rooney was nearing retiring age. He was terribly, terribly strict. You weren't allowed out at night at all. The only night out you were allowed was to go to church on Sunday nights, which I used to do. You had to be in by nine o'clock. You had to study every night till half past ten and that was followed by prayers at quarter to eleven, and then you would go to bed. Now, I think I should have been a chook! I could never stay up past nine o'clock. Eight o'clock, half past eight, I was ready and raring to go to bed but I had to stay up until then. All that changed when Professor Cameron came.
Bill Rooney, for the evening prayers, always read a little bit out of the Bible. Very often we were all pretty sombre by this time—half past ten at night. He would pop a question out of the Bible reading. One night he read something from St Mark, Chapter nine, Verse fifty which says, 'Salt is good but if the salt have lost its saltiness, wherewith will ye season it?'. 'Mr Dettman', he said, 'explain that please'. So Harry Dettman, who was sitting next to me, had to explain it and I was just thanking my lucky stars I didn't have to do it! Bill Rooney always closed with a prayer, 'The Lord Almighty, grant us a quiet night and a perfect end', which didn't happen very often.

Now, when Professor Cameron came, he was much more lenient. We had talks with him and he said we could have one night a week out for the number of weeks in the term and we could take them all at once or a few at a time or one each week, whatever suited us. That was very, very good. He also arranged for Claremont Teachers' College to take part in the inter-collegiate sports, for the very first time, over in Adelaide. I played in the hockey team and that was a marvellous experience.

During the study period of a night most of the students were kept busy re-copying their notebooks, especially geography. They'd make much prettier maps and make all their books look nice. I didn't realise that this was to help them later on when they were teachers. I thought, 'Oh, Infant teachers, we don't need geography'. So my scribbled old notebook was what I handed in. It was part of the exam and I got two out of twenty for mine. So I ended up with forty-eight per cent when fifty was a pass in geography.

Professor Cameron also let us take an optional subject, which would count as two in our final exam. I suppose being a bit lazy or something, I opted for art. I'm not very good at drawing. Anyhow, I thought I'd have a try. We had to make a folio of paintings and drawings and teaching aids and things like that. I did that all right. When the exam came we had to paint flowers and make a pattern from it. Unfortunately, I chose Iceland poppies and, oh dear, they are terribly hard to shade! I don't think my drawing was very good but the second half of the exam was a written paper. We didn't know what was coming up, but the whole question was, 'Discuss the place of arts and crafts in modern education', and I could have written a book on that. So I got very high marks for that. Maybe not so good for the practical, but I ended up with two credits for my optional subject, which was lucky.

Noel Sampson was the lecturer for that. I loved his lectures. I liked listening to men, especially. Professor Cameron said we could go to him if we had anything to discuss. He had an interview with each student in the College and I said, 'Well, I failed in geography because of my book and I came top with about 90 something in physical geography'. He said, 'Oh, I'll take an average'. That gave
me a pass. Otherwise, I'd have had to sit for geography over and over again until I eventually passed it.

We had to do prac. teaching while we were at College. Under Bill Rooney, the students had to give a prac. lesson on a little stage in the students' theatre with about two hundred students sitting there. Some of them went absolutely berserk when they had to do it. I remember one girl doing a history lesson to about Third Standard children. She stuttered out the first sentence, gave a scream and ran off the stage. Others absolutely loved it. They were motherly people with nice little Infant classes. They were quite in their element. Apart from that we had to do prac. teaching in different schools at different times. I had one very bad experience. In fact, I nearly gave up my career. At West Leederville School I was asked to take a singing lesson with the middle-primary school children. It was in the hall in front of everybody — all the other students who were on prac. there, the inspectors, the chief inspector, the director and the headmaster. Nobody told me how to do it. The song I was to teach was called, 'Bellbirds'. I don't know if anyone knows it:

Jack and I were wagging it on a summer's morning,
All at once a tinkling bell sounded out a warning;
Oh, it was too sweet by far for the school bell early,
Calling boys and girls to school.

Anyhow, I quite liked the song and I went to a lot of preparation with it. I had the song written out on a big sheet. I had pictures of bellbirds and talked about them and made a little story of it: These two little kids wagging from school who heard the bell and didn't realise it wasn't the school bell, it was only the bellbirds who were probably imitating the bells they'd heard. When it came to teaching the singing, they had their breathing exercises and their 'doh, ray, me, fah', a little bit of the tonic solfa. Then they sang me a few of the songs that they already knew. Then I said, 'Now, today we're going to learn a new song'. I unveiled the words of the song and read it to them, or maybe they read it with me. There was a little girl pianist there and she played it and I sang it. Then she played it again and the children hummed it and eventually they sang it with me and they all seemed to get a pretty good idea of the song. They were very well behaved, so they probably were enjoying the lesson quite well.

Then, at the end, came the criticism. I'm sitting up there waiting to be praised and the first words said were, 'You have just seen a very good idea of how not to take a singing lesson'. I simply could not believe my ears and I had a lump in my throat, tears in my eyes. I wasn't game to say anything to stick up for myself and nobody else volunteered. They just downed me — negative the whole way through. By the time they finished I didn't go back to College. I went into the park, next to West Leederville School, and walked around in tears till the next morning. Anyhow, I eventually got over it, but it was grossly unfair.

I think Professor Cameron was more lenient than Mr Rooney. Cameron was a great one on teaching to individual differences. That was a point he always
made in his lectures, but once you got out teaching, you had no hope of teaching to individual differences because the classes were just too big. Cameron had much more modern ideas. No doubt about it. The students responded to that, but we hadn't been trained very much to take part in discussion. He used to try and trick us into disagreeing by hurling a question at us, but most of us were too shy or too frightened to say anything, but occasionally we had good discussions. I think, perhaps, we weren't brought up to do that in our own schools. We had a few debates and things like that but we weren't used to voicing our opinions like children are today.

I think all the staff at Claremont College were very good. The only bad lecturing was in the history of education. At the first lecture I had a pristine notebook and my pen all ready to write and I started writing a summary of the lecture. Then I looked around and saw that the lecturer was reading very, very slowly. It was very boring stuff, the history of education, I mean it wasn't entertaining at all. Then I found out everybody was writing down exactly what he said, so I did the same.

We had Cam Egan for music. Actually, I was nearly branded a musical genius and I didn't really deserve it. We had to copy down in notation a song suitable to teach the children so that we had a book of songs if we had to teach music when we went out. Once Cam Egan was writing on the board three or four bars out of the next song we were to learn and he just turned around and said, 'Does any student know what this song is?'. I put my hand up. Out of two hundred students I was the only one with my hand up. I thought, 'Golly!'. He turned around and said, 'Very well Miss Harris', and I said, 'Oh, it's the Flower Song from Faust'. The student next to me gave me a dig in the ribs and said, 'Golly, you're a dark horse. You know the operas'. Little did they know that I learnt music for about a year and Faust was about lesson five in Johnson's book of teaching pianoforte. So that's the only reason I knew it, but I had a very good reputation after that!

We had a very charming young lady, Dr Holloway, for hygiene. Her lectures gave us the symptoms for childish ailments, whooping cough, measles, diphtheria, and other childish illnesses. However, we didn't have anything about sexual matters or menstruation. I can remember once, I think, we had to fill in a form about our menstruation to say the degree of pain. I remember one of the girls saying, 'Menstruation, what's that got to do with it?'. She was thinking of arithmetic instead of menstruation, but we had to fill in a form and afterwards we were sort of comparing our notes. It said, 'degree of pain' and I said, 'slight at first but quite bearable'. One girl put 'absolute agony'. She said, 'I'll get out of a bit of work', but she nearly was dismissed for it because they said she would lose several days each month when she became a teacher! It was rather terrible, really.

At College the girls were confined to one wing. The boys were on the other side, separated by a big hall. The boys would definitely not go into the girls' area nor us into theirs. At one little social we had, my boyfriend said, 'I'd love to see where you sleep so I can picture you there'. So I took him up to the West
dormitory where my little cubicle was, just to show him. Then as we walked out (we were only in there for a few minutes) we met Ruth Thomas. She apparently had followed me up and followed me out to see there was no mischief.

We made our own fun. After the evening meal we used to have a recreation period. Fred Hammond played the piano, and we all danced to his music. We had lots of songs, one about the West dormitory, which we used to sing very often:

Oh, West's the best
And West's the end for us
We rule the roost
Though others make a fuss.

You hear us praised by all
Where e'er you go
By the girls,
By the tuts
By old Bill, also.

At night we hear
The East end make a row
That's why we've furrows
On our brow
We've licked the rest of College
And sorry they must be
That they don't live
In West-end dormitory.

We had biblical songs about Adam being a gardener and Eve a gardeneress. We had songs about Prof. Cameron.

There came a Prof. from Sydney
Cameron was his name
He wanted to set the Swan aflame.

He gets up in the morning
Around about he looks
'I've ordered tons of books'.

He lectures all the students, when they blunder
And cracks them into thinking
He's a giddy wonder.

He lectures all the students
To read voraciously
But we're not so keen as he.

As I say, I was lucky with my boyfriend. I used to go to a lot of the musical comedies and that sort of thing. I know some of the tutors would see me sitting in the dress circle there. His father was a member of parliament. My boyfriend actually became a member of parliament later on, but he wasn't the one I
married. We put our marriage off owing to the Depression and somebody else got in! We were in different towns and it was very hard to keep a thing going for long. Anyhow, I was quite happily married, eventually. I think what I got was worth waiting for!

I think College was all fairly plain sailing except for the little upset I had on my first day there. I don't think I ever felt different to other students. However, I think that the country students were slightly different from the mass of the students who were from Perth Modern School. We'd had different teaching, which possibly made our thoughts, papers, exam papers and things a little bit more refreshing.

There were two students, in particular, who helped me at College. I was a very great friend of Effy Hockings. Effy had lots of gumption. She was another one who failed in geography. When she got her marks she went to the tutor, Frank Bradshaw, and said, 'Would you show me the paper that got the top mark?'. So he showed her: Myrtle James was top. So Effy got Myrtle James’ paper and her own paper. One got seventy eight and Effy was, like me, about forty-eight. She went through question by question and she said, 'I've got pretty well the same answers as her but she's got more padding'. So Frank said, 'Oh, very well Miss Hocking, I'll give you fifty-two (or whatever was a pass)'. Now Effy was not content with that and went to Professor Cameron. She said, 'What sort of a College is this? Because I've got enough guts to ask, they can put up my mark to a pass, which means more money when I become a teacher. It's not fair to shy students who wouldn't be game to do this'. I don't know what the outcome of all that was, but that was the sort of person she was.

I didn't do any further study after finishing my course at Claremont. I passed a 'B' certificate in Training College which had ever so many funny little subjects: arithmetic; geography; French; art; history of education; physical geography. Once you'd passed in those, for the next three years you had to get marks from an inspector's visit. You had to get between eighty and ninety for three years running before your certificate was confirmed and you got your full salary. By then most girls would have been twenty-four to twenty-five years-of-age. So if they got married between then and the time they were thirty, they didn't really teach for very long. Had I been in Perth, I think I might have gone to uni. While I was monitoring in Katanning the teachers in Albany advised me to try university externally. I very optimistically took English and economics but I had no hope on earth of ever passing economics. I didn't have time to even read half the books they sent down. Professor Murdoch was the professor of English in those days and I had to write an essay once a week and send it up to him. I remember once I wrote on shark fishing because I'd seen this in Albany. I described this great big monster that was shot and pulled in. It was too big to pull over the deep-water jetty but its head was there. I described how a little boy could have dived down the throat of this monster. Murdoch wrote back and said, 'Have you seen one like this?'. So I sent him a tooth out of the shark just for fun! I would have really liked
to have got a university degree but by the time I got to the metropolitan area I'd gone cold on it.

When I first got out of Claremont College, it was the beginning of the Depression, 1929, and after we had been teaching for about a year we were told that a good many of us would lose our jobs. The only alternative to that was to have quite a big drop in salary. Now, I had saved up a deposit on a little Baby-Austin motor car, one of those tiny little ones — the Prams! I had tied myself down to six pounds a month for eighteen months to pay off the car. So I was very poor when I had a drop in salary. However, I managed.

South Bunbury was my first appointment. I would have preferred Bunbury Infants' School. I'd rather have had an Infant class than a two-teacher school. Multi-classes with one teacher are very difficult to teach. I don't know why they ever had a short course for that and a long course for students who were going to teach in cities and big towns. I had half the school - forty-five children in classes up to Third Standard - you're teaching all the time! Looking back, I really would have much preferred to have been a kindergarten teacher. For a start, you had thirty-five children and no inspections. You did have a helpful woman who used to come and see how you were getting on, but there was no picking you to pieces with your salary depending on your marks.

During my first year out I was filled with enthusiasm and dying to try all the things we had learned in College. Golly, it cost me a fortune, and when the inspector came, he was very pleased. I suppose I had things that nobody else had thought of. We did leather pokerwork. I used to send to a shop in King Street (Perth) for two lambskins, one green and one brown. The children made a little brown rectangle and put green leaves on it. Then to do the pokerwork I made the little lamps that we were shown how to make in College using a little cigarette tin with methylated spirits and a hole in the top with a wick in it which was lit. The poker needle itself was a big darning needle put upside down in a pin handle. They heated the needle and did all the designs with that. Other pokerwork was done on cigar boxes - wooden boxes, which were rather nice and plentiful in those days.

Another thing we had was bigger cigarette tins, which we painted with enamel. We did sealing wax flowers on those. Hot sealing wax was pressed into shapes of flowers and things using a little pen. We also did pochettes. Instead of ordinary raffia, I bought coloured raffia and we made these little pochettes — and bag work — that was easier. We got sugar bags and did wool designs and made a sort of a bag out of them. I did all these lovely things. When the first inspector came, he was very pleased with the handwork. He was very kind to me, all round, but he congratulated me on the variety of handwork I had done. He even added, 'What about if you went to a bigger school and specialised in that sort of work?'. I suppose most schools he went to for 'manual' just presented him with the raffia. Anyhow, I didn't go on with that because it was too costly.
At the end of the year, for the parents’ day, I asked the children to bring little pots of jam or anything and I put a little stall there to sell some of the things. The kids took home some of the things they’d made, but I put a little stall up. I had been secretary of the Parents and Citizens’ and had gone to all their meetings and their little dances that they had. They used to make the Infant room into a dance floor and someone played a concertina. I used to go to them very regularly. They said, ‘What are you going to do with the money from the stall?’. I said, ‘Well, I’ll reimburse myself for what I have spent’. Naturally, I had kept account of what money I’d spent myself. ‘If there’s anything over I’ll put it into the funds’. They declared me black because I was holding a stall in aid of myself. Strange people!

If I hadn’t used my own money to buy the extra materials, I’d have had to work with the basic material the Department gave me. It would have been a sheer waste of time. Eventually, I stopped doing that. Instead, I often took the children out to weed the garden or do something like that because it was too long a period inside for the little ones. They had a great big ball of plasticine, which they modelled with, and it got filthier and filthier. I didn’t let them draw in their drawing books because they would have filled them up too quickly. I used to buy butcher’s paper and give them a great big square of paper to draw on. Sometimes they used to have coloured chalks and draw on the blackboard. They were so little that they had to stand on a great big jarrah form.

Once, a big heavy form fell on one little boy’s foot and squashed it very badly. I was terribly upset and I rushed him to the next room where the head teacher was. She was very difficult to get on with. I told her about the accident. I had a car at this time and I said, ‘Shall I take the little boy home or take him to the hospital or what?’. She said, ‘Oh, send him in to me and I’ll have a look at it’. So I went in and I carried this little boy in my arms as far as the door. Then I said, ‘You’ll have to try and hop the rest of the way darling’. So in he went and she had a look at his foot and just plastered it with vaseline and sent him back into the room. After school I had made up my mind I would take the little boy home and explain what had happened and she said, ‘I think you might get into trouble over that!’. They had to take him to hospital and he was there for some time. The parents didn’t take any action. At that time teachers were not given any instructions about their legal responsibilities.

Actually, I didn’t hear until afterwards that the previous three teachers would not stay with this principal. She was a very peculiar sort of a person. I used to apply for everything that was advertised in the Teachers’ Journal, especially in the metropolitan area, to try and get away. All my applications had to go through her. At the end of three years she was leaving to get married and I thought, ‘Oh well, a two-teacher school, I’ve got no hope of getting a transfer’. She said, ‘I never ever sent any of your applications in because you suited me’. I thought, ‘Right!’. I got into my little motor car and came straight up to Perth and had an interview. They showed me ten foolscap pages of names of teachers who wanted the metropolitan area. I said, ‘Anywhere between Armadale and Fremantle, but metropolitan area’. They said, ‘No, you’ve really no hope’.
I have quite a long tale about inspectors. When I went to South Bunbury School, my first inspector, Horry Thomas, gave me a very, very good report and I was quite happy. My second inspector came to me about the middle of the next year and said to me, 'I've had a very bad night. I've been bogged at Busselton and I haven't slept at all. I feel terrible, but I've heard good reports of you and I've come to see. I think I'll have an easy inspection'. From then on the whole inspection was an absolute disaster. First of all he said to me, 'What method of reading do you teach?'. I said, 'Well, I teach phonoscript' (which was the one we were trained to teach at Claremont College; I never liked it). He said, 'What are your objections to it?'. I said, 'Well, the children can read quite difficult things but they can't comprehend what they're reading. It absolutely ruins their spelling'. I just said, 'I have to teach it but I don't like it'. Later on, I learnt that he had been instrumental in introducing phonoscript I think he might have had something to do with making it up in the first place. So my comment was not a very good move on my part.

Then the inspector said to me, 'I note you are left-handed. Being left-handed you should never have been an Infant teacher'. I said, 'Why, what are the objections?'. He said, 'You've got four left-handed children in the Infants' class'. There were eight twins in the class and, with identical twins, one is usually left-handed and one right-handed. In Claremont College we were told to test left-handed children by handing them scissors and if they put their left hand out for the scissors and proceeded to cut with the left hand, there was no doubt that they were left-handed. This inspector said to me, 'I don't believe anything you've told me. You will please write to all their mothers and find out if they were left-handed babies, and used their rattles in their left hand when they were in their prams'. Such a lot of rubbish! So that wasn't a very good start.

The inspector said to me at the end of the exam, 'I've heard good reports of you but I can't see anything to justify it at all and I certainly couldn't give you your marks'. By this time I was in tears with my head in the cupboard and sobbing away on a dirty handkerchief. He said, 'All right, I'll come back in about September and I'll give you another try'. So he came back in September. He gave me, 'Good, Very good and Excellent', which was eighty-three marks out of ninety. Then he put his arm around me and said, 'Is that better dear?'. I said, 'Well, it's very glowing, I think it really might be a bit too glowing but thank you very much just the same'. He was a bit of a ladies man. So maybe that was his tactics, to sort of run you down and then ...

Anyhow, just before school started I had a telegram to say I was appointed to Leederville School. So we went up. We boarded at the Melbourne Hotel for three months while Mum and Dad looked around for a house. My very first day at Leederville School, I was absolutely shocked. I went to West Leederville School by mistake and then realised it was not Leederville and I was running a bit late by the time I changed direction. When I got there, there were five new teachers on the staff but there was no head teacher. So we all waited. Nobody rang the bell. Nobody got the children into school. I don't know why. About quarter to ten
this figure rolled in the front door in a tussore silk suit with a fox terrier dog behind him, looking really the worse for wear. It was the head teacher. So the five new ones had to go for an interview. I went in and was told, 'Infant school down there'. It was a separate building. So I went down to the Infant school.

It was chaos, actually, but the headmaster got away with it in those days. He was supposed to have been an excellent teacher. He was an alcoholic and that made it a little bit awkward, but the staff used to cover up for him. I used to take him into town, every dinner time, drop him off at the hotel where he had his meal, possibly a liquid meal. I'd take him in to the Royal Hotel, I think, on the corner of Wellington Street and William Street and he'd have his meal. Then I'd pick him up again and take him back but often he was drunk when the inspectors came. They would say, 'Drunk again (so-and-so)?'. He'd say, 'A man's not a man who doesn't have a drink when the temperature's one hundred and ten'. He got away with it, really.

When I was twenty-nine and had been teaching at Leederville School for about nine years, I needed some tooth extractions. I arranged leave during Show Week as I thought the extra three days' leave, added to the usual holidays, would be sufficient, but I was very ill. I had a temperature of one hundred and four degrees, my face was all bruised from an horrific experience under a local anaesthetic, which hadn't really worked very well. I had to apply for an extra week's leave, then another and then another, until I was fit enough to speak with my new dentures and go back to school. I had four weeks off altogether. To my astonishment, I received a letter from the chief inspector to say that, as I had inconvenienced them, the Department would fine me a month's pay. You could imagine a strike on that today! Up till then I had had no sick leave in nine years.

One of the Infant teachers, and a special friend of the chief inspector, offered to accompany me in her T-model Ford to the Terrace headquarters. We were last in the full waiting room but the first interviewed for when the chief inspector saw us he gave us the nod to enter his office. After I had stated my case he said, 'Tear up the letter'. Then he turned to Edie and said, 'Get rid of your girl friend and amuse me for a while'. I escaped and went home to my parents.

Now I come to my very last year teaching at Leederville School. In February of 1939 the lower Infant class had a huge number of children waiting for admission. Instead of the logical remedy of making the very small upper Infants' class into two sections, I was given charge of just under seventy new children while the surplus waited in the hall. They were mostly supervised by a boy or a girl from Standard Six. As fast as my brighter pupils became readers they were promoted and their places filled from the overflow waiting in the hall. By early March I had lost my thirty-four brightest pupils. No Infant teacher would have tolerated this until after the May inspection. The second lot of children would be admitted in June, those who turned six in the second half of the year. As well as that, there was an epidemic of diphtheria at the beginning of 1939. By March, eleven children from my class had been hospitalised. My throat had been sore for some days and I certainly felt ill. So, finally, I consulted a doctor. He took a swab and,
when later he received positive results, he called at my parents' home to apprise me of the fact that I had diphtheria and an ambulance was coming to take me to the infectious diseases hospital. He also had the form for my application for sick leave. Owing to my experience with leave for the dentistry, I said, 'You had better give me the maximum leave as one has to know in advance how long an illness will last in the Education Department'. So he gave me six weeks.

I returned to school early in May and the inspector arrived on my second day back. I said to him, 'Surely you're not going to examine'. The class had been minded, often by older pupils, and at other times a supply teacher was in charge. He replied, 'I cannot possibly alter my schedule'. His report after the exam said, 'Only seven children can read'. I said, 'Well, I'm surprised that even seven can read'. He said, 'No subject's worth examining except rhythm'. Anyhow, I played the piano for that in the hall and probably the other teacher took all the school for rhythm while I was sick. I said, 'What about the children I promoted? Don't I get any credit for that?'. He said, 'Oh, yes. They were very good. They were up to standard'. But no pat on the back for me! So I found inspectors could be bugbears. They were very powerful and your money depended on them. Everything depended on them. That's why teachers used to really go paranoid when the inspector was due to visit. My last inspection was at King River School in 1942-43. Mr Tom Sten was the inspector. He was very helpful. I said to him, 'I'm doing all this with trepidation. I'm an Infant teacher'. He said, 'We find Infant teachers make the best country teachers'. I said, 'Well, I'll do my best'. The school had been closed for about six months and I had two children in Sixth Standard who wanted to do scholarships. I said, 'You'll have to do a lot of homework and work pretty hard'. Anyhow, the boy, Douglas Bain, got a scholarship, so my shares went up.

There was nothing much in the way of non-teaching tasks we had to do. There's not much preparation for an Infant class. You're teaching different children the same subjects. It's not like where you've got a lot of marking and preparation to do. I can remember once, at Leederville School, I was told to take about thirty or forty little children into the Health Department in Perth in a tram for them to get their needles. I don't know whether it was polio needles or what it was in those days, but I had to take them. A lot of children were there, hundreds of children with teachers. Instead of taking them school by school, they took them alphabetically. So I had to wait. I was there all day and I had to wait till quite late in the afternoon before I took the children home. I took Minties with me and if they cried when they got their needle, I gave them a Mintie and tried to quieten them down! Eventually, I took them in the tram back to Leederville and had to more or less see that they were able to get home from there. That was given to me as a job. We just took it for granted, really. I suppose we were dedicated to the children and had their health and welfare in our minds.

When I was thirty-one, I got engaged and I was thirty-two or thirty-three when I had my first baby. I just loved being a mother. I only went back to teaching during the War when I had to go back because women were conscripted to work
anywhere they were needed. A friend of mine was sent to the biscuit factory in Fremantle and she wasn’t a very strong girl. She said she had to carry great big trays of hot biscuits out of the oven. I thought, ‘Golly, I’d better opt for teaching’. So I applied for teaching, thinking I would get the metropolitan area, but to my surprise I was sent to King River School. My son, Robert, was nine months old and my husband was in the army. King River School had about twenty pupils with all classes up to Eighth. Due to the lack of a teacher, the school had been closed for some time. To get to Albany, I travelled by day-train with my baby and a friend who agreed to housekeep while we lived in the quarters attached to the school. I had sent some furniture ahead. We arrived in Albany on a Saturday night about nine o’clock to a complete blackout. There wasn’t a light anywhere. We, including some of the passengers, formed a crocodile with me at the head of it clutching my infant, nine months old, as I knew the layout. We groped our way to the Freemasons’ Hotel only to learn that there was absolutely no accommodation available anywhere in Albany. Everything was taken over by the Yanks (American Forces). We finally spent the night sitting on cane chairs chez a good samaritan. Sunday morning I had great difficulty in getting the furniture from a closed van in the railway yard but eventually everything was cleared and we arrived at the school. More trouble there! My friend was told she had to go back to Perth immediately as neighbours had phoned the King River tearooms to say her divorced husband had taken over her house and was going to sell it. Maybe she wasn’t too impressed so far and glad of an excuse. I wouldn’t blame her for that.

Well, the lass who worked at Happy Day Tearooms was about to give notice. So she volunteered to help me out temporarily. As my baby was used to his own room, I put his cot in the bathroom off the verandah. He seemed very disturbed and no wonder, for on investigation I saw half a dozen huge rats cavorting around the room and the cot. I moved him into my bedroom, much to his delight, and he spent most of the night standing draped in green mosquito netting and jabbering to me in his baby language. Later the biggest schoolboy set rat-traps and cleared the pests. He also attended to the school toilet empties, for which he was paid quarterly, quite a well-earned fee, by the government. Someone had dumped a very sick old cat at the school quarters. The baby crawled after it with glee. I paid the son of the butcher, Mr Chafner, ten shillings to put it out of its misery using the butcher’s gun. He said it was the easiest money he had ever earned. Eventually, my friends, Mr and Mrs Lance Shaw, from the lovely King River property, Ballymena, came to my rescue and looked after my baby and me handsomely for the rest of my stay. Cecily was marvellous. Without her I could not have managed.

Just before I took over King River School a woman had made a valiant effort to hold the fort. She had a son, John, six years old and a baby daughter, Irene. They had fled from the Japanese at the fall of Singapore but her husband was taken prisoner. She told me they had crouched in the gutters, while Japanese planes strafed the streets, while fleeing to catch a boat to Western Australia. She did not know if her children were safely aboard until they were discovered after a
frantic search of the boat. She had been a tertiary, probably university, educator in Singapore. Mrs Plane, of King River, took these refugees into her home and looked after them for the duration of the War. A couple of times when my husband came down in uniform, probably AWL from Northam camp, and was kissing me goodbye, she said, ‘Don’t ever do that in front of me. It upsets me too much’. I was, of course, not thinking about that. John, who was seven years old, was able to do maths and English with the upper school but he was hopeless at manual skills. I had great difficulty in teaching him to ride his bike. The little girl had pulled patches out of her hair by the roots. I might tell you John used to dirty his pants and the big kids used to laugh about him and hold their noses. I just had to explain to them that he had been through a terrible, traumatic experience and they must be kind. I used to just clean him up and take no notice of it, but this sort of thing would happen, of course.

We all had bikes so we combined nature-study in the bush with collecting plentiful boronia and ferns for stalls in towns along the Great Southern Railway. I’d get a letter from Wagin asking me to send a box of boronia up, or from Narrogin or somewhere; or one of the hotels wanted ferns. We’d get them and send them off. On the whole I enjoyed the eighteen months. They were delightful pupils and the parents cooperated very, very well. I was able to pay off the mortgage on my house in Perth. Actually, when I went to the manager of the bank to tell him about the arrangements I had made he said, ‘You’ll be getting seven pounds a week. That is a man’s pay’. He sounded a bit envious, as if I shouldn’t be getting all that money. Actually, when I was at South Sunbury School and eventually got my three years with my eighty-two marks, or whatever it was, the head teacher there said to me, ‘You are getting nearly as much as me and I’ve been teaching for years’. She possibly had a ‘C’ Certificate and I had a ‘B’. So what?

Anyhow, I had let our home, furnished with everything supplied, in Buxton Street for thirty-five shillings weekly to a couple with three children. They told me that they only had one daughter. They did not mention two teenage boys. He was a preacher, as advertised on the trams. Big canvas signs were on the trams advertising him as, a ‘Preacher from South Africa’. After six months they returned to Africa having paid no rent into the Bank of New South Wales. (They didn’t tell me this). The water and power were cut off as no bills had been paid and lots of my treasures had been stolen. I had been to Singapore in 1938 and all the wooden heads and things I bought were missing. They had gone. Worst of all, many of the roof tiles of my nice little home were broken because the boys had played chasey over the roof. Owing to the War, no tiles were available so workmen took verandah tiles to repair the damage as the kitchen was flooded when it rained. Talking of shortages during the War, when I was notified of my teaching job at King River, I scrounged clothing coupons from friends in order to buy warm skirts and jumpers at Bairds shop in Wellington Street.

I think that women who went back to work during the War were looked on as a stopgap measure, really. The school in Albany had been closed for a good while.
Once I was criticised at a teachers’ meeting there. Actually, it was reported in the local newspaper in Albany. The problem was that at lunchtime I spent every minute cleaning the boards and putting up work for the classes I wasn’t teaching. The school was divided roughly into three, but I had to teach all the time. Apparently, we’d been talking about bows and arrows. There were canes growing behind the quarters at the school. The children made a bow and arrow and one of the boys got shot in the eye with the arrow. He came in and we had been taught how to lift up eyelids and clean out an eye, which I did, but I didn’t quite know what to do but I knew his parents were coming through later on to go to Kalgoorlie. I think it was all right afterwards but the Albany Advertiser said, ‘It’s a pity that Mrs Tyler did not supervise the children at play and see that they did not use bows and arrows!’ That was the only criticism that I really resented. The other teacher said, ‘Why don’t you put him on the right track?’ I said, ‘Can’t be bothered. I don’t care. My conscience is clear!’ I left King River when I got pregnant. I was very glad of an excuse! I was dying to have another baby and it just happened on one of my husband’s leaves. By then, I had a different attitude to teaching than when I was a single woman. When I returned to teaching at King River I was doing them a favour, almost, whereas it was an obligation in the early days.

In my day, once we got married, we were out, really, but nearly everybody was quite in favour of that because marriage was different. The whole world today, it’s a different ball game altogether. Society, morals, everything is different. So you really can’t compare it. I think that a two-people income is almost a necessity nowadays, whereas in our day, when you got married and left, had a family and a husband who was bringing in the money, you could do the things you wanted to do. Only a widow or someone who was in dire necessity could go back teaching. We were quite happy to leave. Women’s liberation then was being liberated from earning a living and having a man to support me, and becoming a wife and mother.

I wouldn’t have liked to have tried to combine a career with motherhood. I enjoyed what I did, actually. I taught at the kindergarten in Kalgoorlie for about nine months. It was a new kindergarten at Lamington and the teacher was leaving. She was getting married and they couldn’t get a teacher. They didn’t have enough teachers to replace her. She heard I was an Infant teacher and she begged me. I said, ‘Look, I’ll do it until you get another teacher, but keep looking’. I was hoping it would be about six weeks, but it went on for nine months. I loved the teaching and enjoyed it immensely but I didn’t want to undermine my man. He was the bread-winner and I probably would have earned more money than him. I was glad to give it away. I didn’t recommend teaching to any of my family. I said, ‘Stay away from it!’ I think it was too strenuous and the money wasn’t that marvellous for a profession.
Frederica (Rica) Lucy Erickson, naturalist, illustrator, historian, playwright and biographer, was born in Boulder on 10 August 1908, the eldest of eight children. Her parents, Christopher and Phoebe Sandilands (nee Cooke), had moved to the Western Australian goldfields from Victoria. She is a Fellow of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society; and has Honorary Life Membership of the Fellowship of Writers and the Naturalists' Club. She was named Western Australian of the Year in 1980 and has been awarded an Honorary Doctor of Letters by the University of Western Australia and the Order of Australia.

I went to Boulder Central, one of the biggest primary schools in the State at that time. Miss Wellstead, who taught me in Third Standard, was the one who first introduced me to writing as a literary effort. We used to get up early in the morning just to see what a sunrise was like. We could all write about sunsets but when we were told to write about sunrises, that was another matter. I remember Miss Wellstead very well. I loved her very much, and every day when I walked to school, I went through the public gardens at the tennis courts and I'd steal a flower to take to her because I didn't have an apple to give her. I was in the senior class in Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Standards. The pupils were destined for the professions or something like that; otherwise, if you were not very bright, they left you in the bottom class and you were supposed to be destined for a labourer's job. Everyone was divided off according to exam results.

After primary school, I completed five years at Eastern Goldfields High School, situated between Boulder and Kalgoorlie. It was built in a rectangle around an open-air assembly area, which was asphalted over. It had been the hospital before they built the new Kalgoorlie Hospital. I found Eastern Goldfields High School very stimulating. It had a very good library, and we had eurhythmics for the first time while I was there. We also learnt the rudiments of ironing and
laundry work and some cooking, although I think that only lasted for a couple of years. But everything about school was wonderful, I thought. I didn’t hate anything. However, thinking back, it could have been improved by having better school grounds to play in. There were hundreds of children in those main schools and, of course, water was scarce and gardeners weren’t employed as they are today. On hot or wet days we spent most of our time in big sheds, which were asphalted and had long benches across at the walls. The year that I went to Eastern Goldfields High School my family went down to Kendenup to start farming on a new settlement scheme there, and I was left with my grandmother. My sister, Fran, was offered the job as assistant to the teacher at Kendenup when she turned fourteen, and was teaching in that way as a pupil-teacher for a year before I finished high school.

We were kept apart from the boys, once we got into the senior school. It was all right in the juniors, down at intermediate and lower, they all played together. Once you got into the senior school there was a fence between the girls’ and boys’ play areas but you could hear what was happening on each side. Those girls who wanted to communicate with the boys did so very readily. In senior school, if you misbehaved you were made to sit next to a boy. I remember this being a terrible thing, because girls and boys were very shy with each other.

I enjoyed school very much, especially English, history and geography, and sport. I was a tomboy and fairly good at sports – running and jumping – but I loved tennis. I remember that my folk weren’t able to buy everything that I required for school, so Grandma bought me a racquet, which was all bent out of shape. Every time I played a ball it did silly things on the court and really bamboozled people. When I got a proper racquet I wasn’t nearly as good!

I had a cousin much older than me, who was a teacher. I always thought she was just marvellous. All my teachers were little gods and goddesses to me. I felt that teaching would be the greatest ambition I could achieve. I always loved school so much. In later life, I found out that I’d had teachers in my family in every generation back to my great-grandparents in Victoria between 1840 and early 1850. So I suppose it was just a natural thing, wanting to be a teacher. I always enjoyed teaching. I used to teach my younger brothers and sisters.

In 1925, my parents applied for me to be appointed as monitor at Kendenup School because there were enough pupils for two assistants. A monitor was a higher grading than a pupil-teacher. So I went there and my sister, Fran, lost her job. She could never have become a teacher because she had only primary school education. In any case it was very hard for women to get into the Department then. There was a lot of competition. They’d take men in without any trouble at all, whether they had a Leaving Certificate or not, but we women had to get our Leaving Certificate to get in.

From Kendenup School I was transferred to Mount Barker within a few months. As a monitor I was given a boarding allowance, and just a very small amount was left over on which I had to live. I was only there for about six weeks and
was transferred to Dumbleyung for a couple of months. From there I went to
Gnowangerup, where I was appointed teacher 'on supply' with full pay, which
meant a great deal to me, because I'd been earning so little as a monitor. Being
' on supply' meant that I was not on permanent staff but received the equivalent
annual pay.

While I was a monitor, I had applied to go into Training College but, having
suddenly been promoted and given a lot of extra money all at once, I was
thinking perhaps I shouldn't go into Training College after all. But I decided that
I would go when the time came, because I realised that I needed formal training.
I was just teaching by instinct. Apparently I was doing fairly well because I was
shifted into supply teaching after only a relatively short time as a monitor. In
those days if you could get into the Civil Service you were there for life. There
weren't many opportunities for a girl to get into the Civil Service, especially in
the country. My family thought it was very good for me. They approved of it
heartily.

Claremont College was the first and only teachers' training college in Western
Australia for many years. I thought Claremont College was the most beautiful
place I'd ever seen, with beautiful grounds and a very handsome-looking old
building. It quite lived up to its name as a College. I loved the spaciousness of it
inside. I liked the lecture rooms and the steep steps of chairs looking down on
to a podium. I loved every part of it. I was just sorry I wasn't living in it.

If you entered College in January or February you were given accommodation at
the Training College itself; but if you entered in the second term, as I did, or the
third term like others, you were boarded out at approved boarding houses. We
received an allowance that paid for board and lodging. I think we had to get our
own books, or we could borrow them, but I think we got them second-hand. We
were allowed half-a-crown [twenty-five cents] a week pocket money. Mr Noel
Sampson (later, president of the State School Teachers' Union of W.A.), who was
on the staff at the time, urged us to join the Teachers' Union and to agitate for
better allowances. He used to stand up there after lectures telling us it was our
own fault if we only got half-a-crown a week. He said what we had to do was
to get together, join the Union and put in a protest, But I don't think we did.

I boarded at a house in Walter Street that was run by Mrs Strickland. It had been
added on to over the years, and had three or four rooms each side of a passage.
At the end she had built on a toilet, bathroom and kitchen, and a very big dining
room which would take about twelve girls, I suppose. There were bedrooms on
that side as well. Mrs Strickland was a very good woman with the girls. She
didn't try to discipline us in any way. The girls disciplined themselves. I don't
know how the boys were boarded, but the girls didn't complain. If they were
dissatisfied they could take complaints to the College and then the boarding
house keeper would lose her right to be recognised. We walked from Walter
Street, across Stirling Highway and down to the College every day. It was close.
When I got to College and found I was boarded out, I was disappointed at first,
But I think I realised afterwards it was a freer life, because we weren't tied down to College discipline at night.

The curriculum was very full and adequate as far as teaching classes went, but was absolutely negligent when it came to managing a school. Those of us training for one-teacher schools knew that we would have to go out and take charge on our own. I wasn't the only one to be sent out to a newly opening school not having seen a roll or a journal, or any of the forms that were required to be filled in – requisition forms, stocktaking, cleaning contracts and sanitary arrangements. None of those had been explained to us.

College life was always very free and open. There were no restrictions between the sexes in our classes or in our social life. In fact, several people paired up very early and later married. I remember that we were introduced to a series of sex lectures by Dr Stang, which were revolutionary. Dr Stang expounded to us the differences between the sexes, naming the various parts and their functions, and then went on to childbirth and so on. I suppose this was done because at the time they were beginning to think that we should at least know something about these matters, in case there might be something that we met with in the schools that we were going to take charge of. We weren't taught how to teach sex education in schools, we were just enlightened in our own ideas.

For practical training we had 'Prac' school. I believe that some students in our course were sent out to different schools around town to get practical training; but I got all my practice teaching at the training school in the College grounds. I was very fortunate because Charles Hamilton was there. He was a marvellous man, very gentle in his approach in every way and a very keen naturalist. So was Mr Milligan who was the second-in-charge at the College. We couldn't have had better than Mr Milligan or Charlie Hamilton. The teaching, I thought, was very imaginative. We had some very good lecturers, all involved and interested in their work. They weren't just earning a dollar for the sake of a dollar, or a pound as it was in those days.

The impression that we got while we were there was that, if you were going up the ladder of promotion, a boy would get there faster than a girl, even though a girl got her qualifications. I had completed nearly all of my 'B' Certificate before I left, but I wasn't wanting to do anything but teach in a one-teacher school. If I had been ambitious enough and wanted to go into the two, or three-year course, then I would have come up against it for the Education Department promoted men faster than women, because they wanted men to take the headmasterships. They didn't want women as headmistresses except in Infants' schools. One of the men in my group at Training College finished up at the College as a lecturer, ultimately. He was a student the same year that I was, and he didn't have Junior English, and he didn't have his Leaving Certificate. He still didn't have his qualification in English right to the end of his career.

I don't think I suffered any disadvantages training as a teacher as compared with the boys. We were all treated alike. The only distinction female and male
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students faced that I remember, was that if you hadn't passed a certain maths certificate (I hadn't passed Leaving maths) you had to attend maths classes. If you already had your maths certificate you didn't have to attend. The men on those occasions (for they all had their maths) walked across to a room and played quoits or something. They just took leave. That was the only distinction that I can remember, and that was a difference based on learning, not a sex distinction in any way.

When Mr Rooney was there as College head, things were very easy although everyone respected him, and they didn't impose on him in any way; it was a very easy atmosphere. I can remember the first day that Professor Cameron came in. We were just chattering away and waiting for the usual bang, bang on the table that Mr Rooney used to give to draw our attention, and we suddenly realised that Professor Cameron was standing there. He had a very imposing presence, although he wasn't a very big man. He was erect and his eyes were piercing. He just stood there and looked around and waited, and suddenly we all realised he was waiting for us to come to attention, not for him to tell us to come to attention. We were adults and we were expected to act like adults, so we promptly became adults.

There was nothing prescribed for standards of behaviour or dress. You knew they expected you to behave decently. I don't remember any restrictions on smoking in the grounds. I don't know of any girls who smoked there. I don't think any did. The boys couldn't smoke inside. You just appeared as best you could, and looked after your finger nails. You had to set an example for pupils but it wasn't laid down for us; it was just a natural thing. You thought that if you were going to be a teacher you set the standard. There were some who were better than others, of course. I can remember one girl who didn't always darn the holes in her stockings well enough, but the girls used to tease her themselves, not the boys. I can remember she had little tufts where she had broken the wool off and not cut it off short. I don't remember anything in the way of deportment being instilled into us. When we were boarding-out, I think we had to be in by ten except if we notified Mrs Strickland that we were going to a picture theatre or something, but we usually reserved that for weekends.

College social life was left to committees to organise. We could go and board-out over weekends. We could visit other people, or join in anything we wanted to. The whole thing was just a grand ball as far as I was concerned. I remember having quite a good year at hockey. I was the captain of the hockey team. They were sending a team over east, but as I was leaving College just before they went I can remember taking a newcomer under my wing and tutoring her as to which position she should work on so she would get a place in the team to go over. I made some very good friends there. A number of them had been friends from high school days.

I was prepared for the world of work before I went into College, because I'd been out monitoring and also had been teaching 'on supply'. If I'd been raw, without any teaching experience in handling a class, I would say that I would have
needed to have had more teaching in schools before going out. But as it was I was lucky enough not to need it. On the other hand, I know that in my own class people who hadn’t been monitoring beforehand turned out very well later, so I think if you are left to yourself and your own devices in a country school, you can work out a lot of things. College training prepared me to be a better teacher and I certainly learned to mix with a different lot of people. As far as the world of work goes, I think it was just a natural progression. I was open ground to receive the training that I got in College.

After graduating I completed the 'B' Certificate studies I’d started while I was in College. Then I did further studies for my 'A'. When I realised that I wanted to go overseas on exchange I wrote to the Education Department to apply to study for the 'A' Certificate. I had to nominate my subjects and they asked me to submit a list of books for those subjects. When it came to my choice of the optional subject, which was orchids, I obtained a lot of help from the orchid people over east. There were eminent people in that particular field of work in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales. Each of them gave me books. I later went over to visit them. They introduced me to the world of botany. I'd been very interested in orchid work, and I had been given a book on the orchids of Western Australia written by Mrs Pelloe.

I wasn’t disappointed when I married instead of going overseas on exchange and not completing the 'A' Certificate, because instead of that I produced a book. I don’t think I had any disappointments in teaching. My aim was to help the children achieve as well as they could. If you go into a teaching career without having a wish to teach, it would be the most damning thing that you could do. I think that you have to want to be a teacher and not want to just earn a packet of money. I went to the College to learn how to teach, and it certainly broadened my horizon. When I went out teaching from College there were no formalities to go through. I passed my exams at the College and just waited for my appointment. I was told where I would go and where I could get lodgings, and that was all there was to it.

My first appointment was to a little school called Aurora. It was named after the farm it was situated on. A block of land had been given for a school by the owner of Aurora, who had several children — four I think. His neighbour had five children and there was another couple from somewhere else. Just as I was going down there, the farmer sold the place to a man who wasn't even married, so four of the scholars were wiped off straight away. We had to enrol a four-year old girl to make up the ten to keep the school open.

There I was queen of all I surveyed with nine or ten scholars in a little school with three long desks in it, a couple of cupboards but no clock or equipment. I had to take my own boxes of books and everything that I used. There was no library or anything like that.

The ten children had never been to school before. I started off from scratch with Infants. The oldest boy was fourteen. At the end of the year when he left school
he'd reached Third or Fourth Standard. I was there for four years and by that
time they'd all got to the standard the age required. They were very bright
children; it was just lack of teaching that had held them back. I can remember
one boy, John Neil, who was being taught at home by his parents. He used to
ride his horse over occasionally just to sit in the school to see what it was like.
He never came while the children were sitting in class, but we used to have long
talks there.

In country schools, you didn't have manual training, but I used to give the girls
what sewing lessons were required. I don't remember giving the boys sewing
lessons, except in the earlier years. They used to do the same as the youngsters
in the first two classes – darning with wool on to bag mats. I can remember a
mother asking me to teach her boy to sew on buttons and do button-holes. I
taught the children how to make toys. That required stitching and the boys did
the cutting out as well as the girls, and helped with the stitching on of eyes. We
made a little theatre out of two kerosene boxes joined together. That's what the
senior boys did for me. They were very clever. I suppose you'd call that manual
training, but the girls made the curtains to go across the front, and they each
made the little figures and stood behind the screen and manipulated the figures.
They made up their own little plays.

In rural schools you couldn't do anything but teach uni-sex because the classes
were small and you had no facilities for teaching anything but just one group,
one curriculum. We used to divide the girls and boys equally as teams for sports.
There was no difference between boys and girls. The girls dug the garden the
same as the boys; and the boys learnt to wash the dishes if we had morning
cocoa, and they took their turn at making the cocoa the same as the girls.

There was another one-teacher school about fifteen miles up the road. There
was a boy there whose parents lived midway between the two schools. They
thought he wasn't doing well enough there, and wanted him to get his entrance
into a high school. They took him away from that school and brought him down
to my school, which I didn't think was fair on the other teacher. The boy had a
lot of work to pull up. It was pretty hard work for him, and I was sorry for him
when I came to think of it afterwards. I really loaded him up with work. He got
his entrance all right, but I don't think he liked me much. I had to force him to
work.

There wasn't a proper Parents and Citizens' Association at Aurora, but I had daily
contact with the parents, and they helped me in every way that they could. There
were only about two or three parents. I had to clean the school because there
was no one else who could do it. I mean, the youngsters couldn't do it after
school as they had to walk home. At my next school – Young's Siding – there
was supposed to be a cleaner from among the senior girls, but she didn't always
do it to the best of her ability. She was about thirteen or fourteen; but things
weren't dusted and sometimes the corners were neglected; but she was from a
large family and they needed the little bit of money, so I just overlooked that and
dusted the bits myself, and helped around without them knowing. The cleaning
was done by contract. I didn't know about cleaning contracts and things when I first went to Aurora School. I had to fish around and find someone who would be willing to do it, sign them up and then send the contract to Perth. It had to be approved by the Department and they sent the money down by cheque to the people concerned.

I loved being with the people I boarded with at Aurora. The woman was a descendant of the Muirs and Moirs, who first settled on the south coast. I was introduced to a lot of very early social history through that dear lady. She looked after me marvellously well. I can still remember waking up after having had 'that drink', being fanned by her so carefully. She'd been looking after me for a day and wondering what on earth was the matter. She rang the neighbour and found out that I'd had too much to drink! It happened after a long walk to school. It would have been about two miles or more, most of it through bush country and then down through the paddock to the school. It must have been a very hot day, I don't know, but I was standing up there in the school, the children lined up in front of me: 'Good morning' and 'Show your nails' and all the rest of it. As I stood up there in front of them on the verandah edge, without realising it I just keeled over and fainted. The eldest boy, who was fourteen, dashed straight up to the farmhouse about three hundred yards away, and told the woman that I'd fainted. She instantly sent him down with a little bottle of whisky and told him to try to revive me. She came down as soon as she could after ringing the other people to come to get me. When the boy came back he poured this whisky down my throat, but I didn't respond. It's a wonder I didn't choke on it. They had to come with their car and take me back home. I didn't come to my senses for a day or two. It was very hot and the flies were bad, and I can remember waking up and finding this dear lady fanning me and mopping my brow and asking me how I felt. Well, I had a very big thirst for something – it might have been water, I don't know, and I wanted something special to eat. I've forgotten what that was too. She was giggling for a while. She said, 'You know, we were very worried about you at first. We didn't know what was wrong, until we heard how much whisky the boys had put down your throat'. They'd put down enough to put me to sleep for a day or two! It was really a funny episode!

It was a particular highlight, living with those people who looked after me despite them being very poor. Every afternoon when I came home after school there were some fresh baked scones, or cakes, or something fresh for me to eat because she was worried about me not taking cut-lunches to school. The man had built the house out of log-ends. It was a rough hewn, four-roomed cottage with a back and front verandah, and a place enclosed at the back for the boys to sleep. The three girls were in one bedroom. I shared it with them. I often wonder now, how on earth I put up with it, but I really loved the people. They were marvellous to me. As I was only thirty miles away from my own parents, they drove me once a month into Cranbrook so I could catch the train to go down and
be with my people at Kendenup. Later, I bought a second-hand motor bike, and used that instead.

I was ten years in the Department altogether, counting the time that I started as a monitor. There were four years at Aurora and then a couple of years or more down at Young's Siding. I had a wonderful time down there; and an entirely different outlook altogether. I met up with a lot more young people because it was a centre that was more densely settled. There had been teacher's accommodation at Young's Siding, but it had been condemned. I had to walk about a mile and a half to school every day. I boarded with an elderly English couple who had a house on a swampy patch of ground that was supposed to be a farm, but they didn't farm, they were retired. They used to go into Albany every weekend to do their shopping, and I'd go in with them and have a swim every week, whether it was winter or summer. The house had been painted throughout for my coming I think, or at least my room was, in a bright sky-blue paint. The walls were stamped iron and the pattern had been picked out in little gold lines. I used to get razzle-dazzles looking at it. But they did it to please me.

I was a bit unhappy to be changed from Young's Siding, although I wanted a bit more variety. I was transferred suddenly from swamp country - ditches, potato-growing, near the coast - up into the wheat-belt at Bolgart. I was there for a couple of years. That's where I met my husband. He was the captain of the tennis club and a tomboy the same as I was, I suppose. We had the same ideas that way. I was rather taken with him. I got to Bolgart in a thunderstorm on a Saturday and on the Sunday I went playing tennis. I was quite untutored, very unorthodox, I think, in my style. But they had what they called a 'ladder' in the shed at the tennis club. You were placed at the bottom of the ladder as a newcomer, and you could challenge anyone. If you beat them, you took their place and then worked up the ladder. I was in the top group there after the first weekend. It was a very friendly club. I met all the children and I thought the parents were great.

I arrived in Bolgart in the height of summer and was greeted by the storekeeper's wife, who accommodated me. She and her husband also had the postmistress living with them. They had enclosed part of the verandah, which was alongside their dining room. It was easily the best place I'd had to stay in because they'd built a desk and shelves for me in my room. We had our meals at the railway refreshment rooms that they ran, and I had good company there. I was in a town for the first time. In fact, I used to go to school with my gloves on!

When I got to Bolgart I decided it was a big enough place to support a Parents and Citizens' Association -- they hadn't had one before. We used to have a lot of social engagements because we were so close to town. There were dances, football, cricket, tennis, and hockey. I introduced hockey. We had a great time, organising concerts and so on. Bolgart School had all classes from Infants up to Junior Standard - that's up to fifteen years of age. I think I employed the eldest scholar, May Smith, as the cleaner. I introduced the children to tennis and hockey, but none of them could swim. One of the parents offered to build a dam
across Bolgart Brook, and I used to take the children down for swimming lessons on Friday afternoons in the summer time. The children at Bolgart all learnt to swim in that little dam. It lasted for some years, and people used to go and bathe there on hot days. It was only about half a mile out of town. Until the big flood came and washed it away, it was quite a regular place for people to take children to swim. It didn't go over my head at one end, and was only ankle deep at the other.

No minister called at any of the schools that I was at because we were distant from ministers of religion, but I told stories from the Bible. I think I consulted the parents as to whether they objected or not. I had no difficulty with Catholics and Protestants being told stories from the Bible. They arose as naturally as Robert Louis Stevenson stories and other classics that I read. They were just accepted as part of story-telling, and I liked to acquaint the children with what was in the Bible as well as the other classics. I don't recall having to teach morals. They had to learn not to tell lies, and to stick up for the weak. You always taught the children to behave, otherwise you couldn't control them - respect for their elders and so on; this was just natural behaviour that was expected of children in those days. It was taught at home as well as at school.

As the principal of a one-teacher school I felt isolated. I had no colleagues. I didn't see other teachers except when we went to seminars - but that came later in my teaching. The seminars were very big meetings of excited people exchanging ideas. Once or twice a year inspectors visited from the Department. I had very good relationships with the inspectors. Some of them were judged to be hard, and some teachers were afraid of them. I know one teacher who fainted when she saw his car out of the window one day. But they were just. The chief problem was the element of surprise. I think the surprise was what got to people. They rather liked to be warned in advance. I must admit that the longer I was in the Department the more I came in contact with easy-mannered inspectors - easy to get on with. They were most helpful.

You were secure if you were a good teacher. I don't know of any girl who was dismissed because she was a bad teacher. Most girls were good. They had to be to get into the Education Department. There was competition among girls to get in. Men could get in without any qualifications at all, practically; and we certainly didn't get the same rate of pay as the men. I don't remember exactly what the pay was. As a monitor I had sufficient money to pay for my board while I was living away from home, and ended up with about half-a-crown pocket money. There was never any thought of superannuation. You barked what you wanted to put aside for yourself and looked out for your own future. My family responsibilities were only to my parents. As times were hard I passed over the major portion of my pay for a while to help at home. When one of my brothers went to agricultural school, I funded him with a little bit more than half-a-crown a week pocket money. I knew what it was like to be short of money. In fact, I had to think twice before I bought a stamp; and I used to walk down the smooth side of the road so I wouldn't wear my shoes out.
In our draft of students at Training College, we'd had nearly as many men as women, and were counted to be very lucky on that score. Usually they had about three or four men to about twenty women. I don't know why we were so fortunate — country school teaching I suppose. It may have been because the Depression was coming on, and people were aware of the fact that men could get good steady teaching jobs with fairly low credentials. They couldn't get jobs elsewhere, easily. The boys often found it very hard to get board when they went out, and they had hard times. They were generally posted to schools that were difficult — very isolated — and they often had to bach under trying circumstances. In contrast, the girls were always put where they could find places to board.

I resigned when I married and became a wife and mother. That was a full career as far as I was concerned. In everything I did, the family came first. I didn't return to teaching. At the time that I was thinking of marriage, I had already passed two subjects for my 'A' exam. Of course, it was useless once I was married. I gave up any thought of completing the 'A' exams. But, I had done a thesis on orchids and their fertilisation. It lay fallow for a long time.

I had been a member of the Naturalists' Club for some years before I married. When they started again after the War with their first Wildlife Show, I volunteered to put on exhibition a series of seventy or eighty paintings that I had made of orchids before I'd married. When the paintings were exhibited I went to see how they looked on the display boards. I found a man there trying to pick a flower off with his fingernail! At the exhibition I met Dr Serventy and Major Whittell [Major Hubert Massey Whittell, OBE] who had just brought out their book on the birds of Western Australia. They both said to me, 'You've got enough material here to make a book on orchids'. I said, 'Oh, don't be silly, Emily Pelloe's book on orchids fills the need'. They said, 'Why don't you go to our publisher and see whether, following on the success of our bird book, he would publish a book on orchids?' My husband and I saw Mr Paterson of Paterson Brokensha who had published the bird book. We showed him my paintings and the things I had written about them, and he became interested. So we all agreed and it was published.

I was particularly interested in trigger plants and I thought that the experience I had gained making the book on orchids would enable me to produce a trigger plant book. I'd had Emily Pelloe to guide me with the orchid book. I had nothing to guide me with the trigger plant book, except something that had been written in Latin and German. A very fine old man down at Kendenup, 'Doc' Rowe [Frederick Walton Rowe], who was a family friend, was so helpful. He translated the Latin for me. Then, a family called Schwartzbach, who had been brought out from Austria by the abbot of New Norcia Mission to be the wine-maker at Wyeing Farm, offered to translate the German for me. With the help of these people, Mr Rowe and the Schwartzbachs, I produced the book on the trigger plants. I was able to do this because, although for ten years I hadn't put pen to paper, or paintbrush to paper, once the children were off my hands, I could spend more time writing. It was really exciting getting that book out. Others just flowed
on after that – studies of the plants of prey, sundews, rainbows and the pitcher plant.

After we retired and came down to Perth, I was asked to write a note on the botanist, James Drummond, for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. They were getting desperate to complete the book and Molly Lukis, the state archivist and a member of the committee in charge of the selection of entries, asked me if I would like to do something on Drummond. I'd researched him quite a bit, so I accepted. That was my introduction to the ADB, and I've put items into the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* ever since.

I soon realised that I had enough material to write a book about Drummond. I'd researched him very thoroughly. When my daughter went over to England I gave her an assignment to do some research for me in Kew Gardens. I had been writing to Kew Gardens myself, and they gave her open access so that I found it very easy to write the Drummond story. It was a fascinating story for me and it's become quite a book for botanists too.

After that I became interested in the history of the Victoria Plains, the area beyond Toodyay, where my husband had been a councillor for the Shire. They wanted to produce a history so I took it up because the Drummonds had explored that area, and it was a natural follow-on from my earlier work. I also used the New Norcia records because I had good rapport with Dom William, their historian, and he let me use monastery records, although I couldn't read all of what they had.

At about this time the local policeman, who was visiting our farm on his rounds, told me that he had found a lot of records under the old Toodyay courthouse. I pricked up my ears and said, 'Oh! I'd be fascinated to see them'. He let me borrow them. They were the resident magistrates' letterbooks going back to the 1850s. So I read through everything and made notes. Having done all that I realised I could write a history of the Toodyay Shire as well as the history of the Victoria Plains.

When it came to the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Western Australia, I knew about ten or twelve years before that there'd be much delving into history because, at the one hundredth anniversary in 1929, there'd been much acclamation given to people who could trace their roots back. Whenever I wrote my histories I talked with old people and got their stories. Then I checked them historically, and it was interesting to be able to search back and tell those people just where they had come from and when, and get their reaction. I found that a lot of the early families had passed on the first name of their ancestors. Until the First World War, practically every family gave the eldest son the name of his father, and you could trace genealogies through by the naming of the children. The first son was named after the father, the first daughter was named after the mother, and you could follow this through. The problem was that by the time you got to the sixth generation, things were muddled as to what had happened to the earlier generations. Recording family trees accurately was a very interesting
proposition with the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary coming up in 1979. I'd traced a lot of family trees to make sure I'd got things right in my areas. I knew that Sister Albertus had done the same thing up at Greenough. I knew that other people had done the same thing down at Albany, and other places, and I thought that if we could only put our notes together, and put them in a file in the Battye Library, people would be able to consult them and find out about their families.

I started twelve or thirteen years before the one hundred and fiftieth celebrations, and organised a very good committee including academic people – the archivist at the Battye Library, Miss Medcalf, Professor Bolton, Professor Appleyard, Dr Tom Stannage, Pamela Statham – and myself. Sandra Bowman-Taylor later joined the committee. I got them together and proposed that we launch a public appeal for people to put their family histories in. I got help from every direction. People were so very interested. I don't know how many talks I gave. The idea, initially, was to get enough material to put in a lever-arch file that could be added to over the years. Well, it soon went beyond the one or two or three lever-arch files. The historical societies offered to help and I soon had a liaison officer in every part of the State willing to help with the filing and carding and there came a time when I couldn't walk into my study. I found myself setting up card tables to take the extra cards. I had quite a lot of book shelving and I had card tables filled. I had shoe boxes filled with cards, and I had to crawl in under the card tables to get to my writing desk. It was out of control.

I approached the Battye Library and they allowed me space to work in and gave me a filing cabinet. By that time I had a very wide clientele of people sending in material. Really, I didn't know when I started that I'd got a tiger by the tail. But it worked, though. We approached the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary committee for funding to help with stationery and a typist, who was essential by this time for we were typing out the entries because a lot of hand-writing wasn't legible. Well, they gave us the typist and they gave us the funding that we required. Then we approached the University of Western Australia Press to see whether it would publish it. With the help of the academics on my committee, I got a good reception and they volunteered to publish the first three volumes.

I knew that if we didn't have the convicts in the books we would be only half-filling the need; but 'convict' was a taboo topic. You could get information from the Battye Library about a convict only if you were a descendant. So I rang up the comptroller of prisons and asked him whether it would be okay to publish all the names. He said, 'Yes, it would be a very good job'. So I went ahead with that and my researcher, Sandra Bowman-Taylor, went through all the files at the Battye Library listing all the convicts. She was a marvellous person to work with. She really put volume two into shape. I couldn't have done it without her. My hands were full doing volume three. That meant we had Pamela Statham doing volume one, because she had a listing of all the people who had arrived up to 1850. I worked on 1850 to 1868 for the free settlers; and Sandra Bowman-Taylor was paid to do the research and collating of material in volume two about the convicts.
Since then I've had thousands of letters from people saying how pleased they are being able to find out who their ancestors were and where they came from. I've had only two protests - both about the publication of the names of convicts. Most people have been very pleased to be able to find out about their ancestors from the convict records. It's opened up a floodgate of research in many areas, not least my own in writing *The Brand on His Coat*.

No other place in the world has tried to produce a dictionary of a population from the beginning of European settlement for four or more generations, such as we've done. All of the people who contributed are well aware of its value. We had a party when I finished the volume, 1868 to 1888, which was published with the help of the Perth Building Society. At that time I handed over all my original material to the Battye Library. The librarians were very glad to have it because it had been very much used by them for some years. They allowed some approved members of the Genealogical Society to carry on the work, to receive additions and corrections. We thought we'd have a party at the handing over, so I got in touch with various people who had been helping me. They came from Northam and from Bindoon and from around the metropolitan area, but they were only a small part of the great number of people all through the State who'd been of help. There were over fifty people there. It was a marvellous reunion.

I'm stunned a bit by it these days. If I'd known at the beginning what I'd started, I doubt that I could ever have dreamt of achieving it. I've been writing since I can remember, and I had good guidance. 'Doc' Rowe was a major force in my studies. He was a very fine old man and one of the prime inspirations for me to study. I like sharing knowledge with people. I've been able to hand on to my family an interest in books and education. When my husband died a few years ago I filled my time with writing, and I'm very active in most of the things that I've joined up with. I still go to the Country Women's Association meetings. I'm a Fellow of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society; and I have an Honorary Life Membership of the Fellowship of Writers. I'm also an Honorary Life Member of the Naturalists' Club. I've had awards come to me for the work that I've done in history and nature study. I was named Western Australian of the Year in 1980 and was given an Honorary Doctor of Letters by the University of Western Australia. Then I was awarded the Order of Australia. That was after Syd died. He would have been glad to see that.
NANCY STEWART

talks to
Loraine Abernethie

Nancy Stewart, born in Claremont in 1919, is well-known as a courageous and insightful advocate for children in Western Australia. She is a Fellow of the Australian Psychological Society and highly regarded for her contribution to the establishment of the profession of psychology in Australia.

I always say that I never got past the age of four, which is the stage of a great deal of enquiry in children. I had this deep curiosity from when I was young, which my parents encouraged. In particular, I was always curious about people and what made them do what they do. So it's not surprising that I became an educational psychologist.

I was born in 1919 into a family with a strong tradition of teaching. My father was a headmaster; my mother had been a teacher before she had children; and my maternal uncle became deputy director of education. I was the middle child of three sisters. For all that psychologists talked about the middle child, I really don't agree with it! One sister was nearly four years older than me, the other about four years younger. Both trained as teachers. I was fortunate in my parents because they loved teaching. They loved having children and they loved being with children. So I grew up in an environment that would be given a Triple A rating these days! I used to have wonderful times expressing my imagination, right from when I was little. I didn't have a lot of toys but I used the natural things around. My father was a great gardener and he didn't mind if I picked the flowers for a game. So I would pick a flower, like a poppy, and turn it upside down so that it became a lady in a crinoline. I had a whole town laid out under a huge tree! As I got bigger I made bigger things. My family had packing boxes that were so big I could walk in them and I would play house and invite my mother in to have afternoon tea!
I was born in Claremont, but remember little of it because my father was soon transferred to be headmaster at Katanning School. That’s where I started school in 1924. I couldn’t wait to go to school. I had good teachers even though teaching was so much more formal in those days. Because of my father’s job, we moved quite often. When I was nine, my father was transferred to Mount Lawley and later we moved to Geraldton before he was transferred to Fremantle. I was at school during the Great Depression. Life was pretty tough in those days, but people did prize learning. Even so, nearly everybody left school at fourteen. For the lucky ones it was possible to do another three years and take the Leaving Certificate, which gave access to university if students’ families had money to keep them there. But for girls the career choice was nursing or teaching. The banks gave only typing jobs to girls. In any case, I intended to take up teaching. In those days, the monitor system operated through which students learned about teaching by learning from a teacher. We were sent to a school and it was entirely accidental whether it was an Infant, a primary or a high school. I landed-up at Fremantle’s Princess May Girls’ School, which was a three-year high school. As a monitor I was allowed so many hours off a week to attend university. So I enrolled at the University of Western Australia in 1937, and completed a joint major in English literature and psychology in 1940.

The University of Western Australia was the second university in Australia to offer a major in psychology. Doctor Hugh Fowler (‘Chooky’ Fowler) was the head of the Department of Psychology. He also taught at Claremont College. He had been a teacher himself so his teaching was entirely practical and that appealed to me. That’s how I came to study child psychology, in which I became really interested even though psychology, as a job, didn’t exist. In 1939 I went to Claremont Teachers’ College but enrolled in three university units at the same time, which was more or less full-time, and I still squeezed in College as well! You see, I knew that when I graduated from Claremont I’d probably be sent to the country, which would mean I couldn’t undertake a scientific course (as psychology was called) because I wouldn’t be able to complete the practical component of my studies.

In my first year out of College I wanted to complete my degree so my father suggested that I write to the Education Department to ask if I could remain in the city as a monitor. I was duly sent as a monitor to Mosman Park Primary for six months. Then, in the middle of that year, I was sent to East Perth. It was a slum area and a bit of an eye-opener for me that provided the background to my sense that I had to fight for justice for children. I took the new Infants—not having been trained for Infants of course (I was trained for middle school). They were great fun and I applied myself with gusto. I played the piano and made up all sorts of lovely little games, like fairies and giants, with the music. I remember there was a child there who had nits in her hair. There were two sisters in that class and their mother came down in great fury and said they had nits in their hair. I didn’t know what a nit looked like! The mother was going to take these children away and send them to the convent. So I applied my best sales pitch and said, ‘We’ll
find out which child has nits and deal with the whole issue'. I buttered her up and explained it would be much better to leave her children at the school. So she went off assured and left the children in my class. Then I went to find Miss Johns – a rather small, severe-looking teacher, but very good-hearted. She came down and had a look and pointed out the little girl who probably had nits. I went down and had a look. All the kids had to put their heads on the desks and throw their hair out. Then I took two pencils and parted their hair. Finally, I saw what a nit was! The child who had the nits was old for her class. Her father was a miner in the country and her mother had died. This poor bloke was paying for a family to look after his daughter in Perth. She looked half-fed and she had nits in her hair. She was often dirty. Gee, I was mad at the injustice and informed the headmaster, who could contact the Child Welfare Department.

Then I was sent to Highgate Primary School. I had sixty children including two sets of twins and a couple of sets of brothers. The youngest child was eight and the oldest was thirteen – all in the one class! In those days the girls did sewing and the boys learnt manual skills. I took eighty boys for manual. When I hear people complaining about trying to teach kids in groups I think, 'They don't know what they are talking about'. I worked with groups all the time. Those kids loved school. They never wagged-it because they felt education was important. I had a whole lot of children from a children's institution (orphanage) in my class. Their condition, and what they told me, also had a great influence on my subsequent work. In this particular institution the mighty had their own way, so if you were a little girl of six and you had a pencil and a big girl didn't have a pencil, she took yours. Those children wore shoes that were too small for them. They were too scared not to wear them when they left the classroom. But I made them take them off and put them in the fireplace because they pinched their feet. People have no idea now of what institutions were like, then.

I was always interested in the individual child. After school they used to come and talk and tell me all sorts of things. But in the teaching situation I could not be as free as they seem to be now. Even so, I did a lot of drama, especially when I was teaching Scripture. I remember one of the oldest boys in the class – a ragged great lump of a boy. He had no shoes and just a short pair of cotton pants. He'd come out and bow and say, 'I am Jesus.' They all took it so seriously! But as teachers we were not assessed in terms of nurturing individual children. I remember one inspector who came out to evaluate my class. He had been a major in the First World War – great big fellow, red face, and a moustache. I had sixty kids and there was only one chair for the teacher in the room, which he sat upon while I stood throughout the whole morning! He distributed papers with twenty mental arithmetic questions. He instructed the children to put their pencils in the slot on their desks. Then they had to pick up their pencils and write their names on the top of the test sheets. Then they had to put their pencils down again. He told the children that when they had the answer they were to put their hands up. When he stamped his foot, they could pick up their pencils. When he clapped his hands, they were to write the answer. When he whistled,
they were to put their pencils down and put their hands up again. He did that twenty times! I admired those children. I would have been paralysed by all that performance! A lot of children were fairly dumb, you know. But they were bonzer kids and wished to learn. I had taught them mental arithmetic because I realised they would have to be able to deal with money and numbers. If they couldn't spell it didn't matter so much. The inspector collected the papers himself and marked them on-the-spot. He became so grumpy because he found a very high average mark for the class. He couldn't believe it! If I'd marked those papers, he would have accused me of altering them. When he'd finished he came to give me a teaching mark. I won't tell you what else he did! As he gave me the mark he said, 'I've never given anyone such a high, first mark. I'll be back next year to see if you are worth it'. I replied, 'If you don't think I'm worth it you shouldn't have given it to me.' Look, he could have fallen over! I've never forgotten it.

I might tell you, at that same school I played the piano and every time children moved across the hall in groups the piano had to be played and 'Miss' - that was me - was called and 'Miss' rushed out the door of her room and played Percy Grainger's 'Country Gardens'. I got fed up with 'Country Gardens' so I learnt another tune and I banged that out. The headmaster didn't like it. He only liked me thumping out 'Country Gardens'. So I had to go back to 'Country Gardens'. I mean, it's a scream isn't it? Isn't the world strange?

I was then sent to Geraldton Primary School at a day's notice. What had happened was that Broome was bombed. The Dutch seaplanes loaded with women and children from Indonesia were bombed in the bay and the Japanese planes were coming south towards Geraldton. Many people just hopped in their cars and went bush into the desert and ran out of petrol! The teachers were pulled out. The school was half empty! However, when the people gradually drifted back, the Education Department had to send some teachers up. They selected all the young ones. I sent a telegram to Grantown House, where the teachers used to board, and got on a train with one case, and hoped for the best. When I arrived there wasn't a bed anywhere in the town. The headmaster hadn't been able to find a bed because the Air Force was there so their wives had come up and filled every bed. (The Army was further out in the bush - the poor beggars - they were in rags.) I was just thinking that I'd have to go back to Perth when somebody in the old Geraldton Hotel offered to share her room if the hotel could fit another bed in. They were teeny little rooms. Ours had two beds, a chamber pot in the cupboard in the middle, one wooden chair, and a wardrobe. Anyway, it worked out! I had a beaut class of forty-two kids at that school.

During the War, the federal government had set-up the Commonwealth Employment Service because they wanted people to be placed in suitable jobs. In order to do that they decided to give the children who had turned fourteen that year a battery of tests to assess their capabilities. The two I remember particularly were the mechanical, and the speed and accuracy tests, the latter associated with a propensity for typing. In Western Australia the Education
Department ran the tests. To do so they called in all the teachers who had a minimum of two years’ training in psychology. I was the only one from a primary school. You see, I hadn’t told the Education Department I had a degree because I liked teaching the littlies. Teachers with a university degree normally taught in secondary schools. Anyway, when we arrived we had a short course of instruction, then we went out to the secondary schools to administer the tests. Having done that we scattered to the four winds. The tests were all marked by hand, if you please, and the results were coded onto cardboard about half the size of a quarto sheet. Imagine! Some months later, ‘Boom!’, we all came back again and went out to the schools with those little cards and conducted a fifteen-minute interview with each child to tell them what they were suited for. Simple! I thought this was silly, especially because I had to travel three hundred miles to get to Perth. So I rang the director of education and he said, ‘Bring everything and we’ll find something for you to do’. So I packed all my gear and came down to Perth.

I stayed in Perth and was employed to go out to primary schools to deal with problem children. There used to be a section in the Education Department that dealt with truants. It was staffed by men who chased-up truants and their parents. The girls didn’t seem to truant in those days! I suppose they were too frightened. But the Education Department suddenly heard about this ‘guidance’ idea, so I was sent out to assist families with children who were frequent truants. The problems were fascinating. I remember a little boy of six who wasn’t going to school and he’d also been lighting fires in the district. Basically, I could do what I liked. I made a whole job of it! I interviewed the mother – she’d left her husband because he was cruel to her and she was having fainting turns. I reckoned they were hysterically based – such was my psychological knowledge at that time! I went to see her doctor. He didn’t seem to know the difference between a psychologist and a psychiatrist, so he was glad to say, ‘You do what you think is necessary’. So I had great long talks with the mother. I also went to see the boy’s grandparents, who used to put him up when he wagged it from school. I told them what they should and shouldn’t do. I brought the boy down to the university in a tram because ‘Chooky’ had said I could use their rooms to test this kid. All the way to the university we had wonderful talks. We got real pally and so I was treated as a good friend. I went to his school and fixed everything there so the teachers knew what they had to do. He went back to school and stayed there – a great success! The mother settled down and didn’t have any more fainting turns! I enjoyed that work. I didn’t have an office so I used to go out on a lot of the jobs. I kept all my records at home. When you think of it, it’s amusing. I walked everywhere. I walked miles and miles because there was no transport provided – none at all.

In 1944 there were only two people in the Guidance Branch, as it was called. I was the first female in that section, which nobody thought about then, but, in retrospect, it does mean something! At that time a professor of psychology in Brisbane had told me that there were only sixty psychologists in Australia who’d
had more than two years of sequential study of psychology. We only knew that because, when war broke out, we had to register with the federal government. In 1945 a position came up as an educational psychologist in the South Australian Department of Education. I applied and they were very interested to have me because I was a teacher. But during the war you couldn’t move from job to job as you wished, particularly government jobs. They took so long that in the end nothing happened. Then, in 1946, the Welfare Department in South Australia advertised for a psychologist so I applied and in 1947 became their first full-time psychologist. That led me into welfare work.

In 1945 a branch of the British Psychological Society had been established in Australia. It was called the ‘Australian Oversea Branch’. It had ten members in South Australia. Only six of us were qualified psychologists. We thought we’d do some study at night. So three of us met and taught one another. They somehow got hold of two papers by Carl Rogers, who had written a book called The Problem Child. I hadn’t read it because we had no books during the war, particularly American books. The two papers were on ‘Client Centred Therapy’ and I thought, ‘Gee, that sounds useful’, because it involved listening to the client and trying to assist them to understand what was unconscious in what they were doing. The aim was to help them bring it to awareness and cope with it. I decided to try that with my kids.

The first one I tackled was a ten-year-old boy who had stolen some things from school and was committed to the Child Welfare Department. He could live at home, but he had to be supervised. I tested him and talked with him, and decided he wasn’t the sort of kid that would normally be involved in criminal activity. I found out that he had an elder brother, by many years, who was mentally deficient—he’d had meningitis as a child of three and hadn’t developed since. The younger brother had to share a bedroom with him and it was terrible for him. So he had pinched a couple of things from school. The father’s attitude was that his eldest son’s condition was God-given and, therefore, the family had to cope. The mother didn’t agree with that, so I hit on a strategy with her to enable me to work with the boy. He eventually became more independent, which was very rewarding. My strategies worked, in part, because the boy was intelligent and came from a stable family. After that, I worked with a girl who had been committed to the Child Welfare Department with a conduct disorder. That’s when I realised that Rogers’ book might not be helpful when working with children with conduct disorders! She’d been returned from a foster home because of her sexual behaviour. When she was put in the Children’s Institution it wasn’t long before she was doing what she shouldn’t. I tried to work with her but I was wasting my time!

In 1948 I went on a holiday to Queensland. It took five days by train from Sydney to go right up north of Cairns. On my return I stopped off in Sydney to buy some books. I saw a little book, Infants Without Families, by Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham. It was about the institution they had established for children who
were disturbed as a result of the bombing and separation from their families in wartime England. Anna Freud had trained the carers there to collect the data that formed the basis of this book. I thought, 'That's what I want to do. I'll go and study under Anna Freud.' The thing was to find out how! I wrote to the secretary of the British Psychological Society and he sent me the address of the Tavistock Clinic. So I wrote and received a brochure. It sounded fine! I was also sent Anna Freud's address. I got back a lovely letter from her in which she discussed a course in psychoanalytic child psychotherapy that she had started a year or two before. She told me they ran seminars at night and that students had cases to treat. They usually interviewed people before they accepted them but after further correspondence she said that she would accept me from Australia because she couldn't expect me to go there and back just for an interview. She told me what the costs were. Fortunately, I lived in the British Empire so I came in as the poor little lass from Down Under! I didn't pay for lectures, but I had to pay for my analysis, which was five times a week, so it cost five guineas a week, for ten months a year, for four years. I wrote back and said, 'Thank you very much, I'd love to come, but I can't afford it just yet.' I began saving every penny—a real miser.

After I had worked for three years in South Australia the Child Guidance Clinic opened in Western Australia. I applied and became the State's first psychologist at that clinic. It was located in an old hospital in Cambridge Street—a gorgeous, homely place for children. All these modern hospitals are so impersonal! It was originally built as a maternity hospital for the high-class women of West Perth. It was very luxurious and had lots of little rooms with doors opening onto verandas, a great big kitchen, and a tiled bathroom. I tell you— you could have lived there! I worked there for a year, lived at home, and saved like mad. At the end of the year I set off for England. I felt a bit awful leaving the clinic but there were plenty of other people, by this time, who were majoring in psychology.

In 1951 it took a month to get to England via the Suez Canal. I ended up living in London for six years. For the first twenty months I worked in St Albans, which was thirty miles out of London. I used to get up at the crack of dawn to catch a funny little train and then a bus. I don't know how I existed sometimes! I was fortunate in that the psychiatrist was one of the first to train in child psychiatry in England. I learnt a great deal from her humanitarian ways and her skills in assessing children. When I was there, autism, which had been named only in 1943, was hardly known, and I had the opportunity to examine a six year-old autistic child. That was very interesting. In 1952, with money from America, Anna Freud started a clinic in Hampstead, where we could have our own cases. However, I couldn't really progress unless I did less work and secured a job closer to London. I managed to get a job as a psychotherapist for six sessions in the London Borough of Hornsey, not too far from Hampstead. Have you ever experienced a society with set social classes? That was the era when psychiatrists had six weeks holiday a year, psychologists four weeks, and social workers just three weeks. I am not sure what the clerks had—probably two
weeks! When I went for the interview for that job the secretary came out and said to the applicants, 'The interviewing committee said would you mind taking off your hats?'. An English woman who was there to be interviewed for the same job said, 'How impertinent!'. That's when I thought, 'I'll take it off! I want that job!'. (When I was telling somebody about this later I said 'Oh gosh! I would have taken anything off!'). Then I realised what I'd said! I got the job and that same dame who had been so shocked at the impertinence of the committee told other people that a 'Damned colonial' had got the job! Getting the new job meant I could carry on with the course because I only worked six sessions. They were wonderful days. Miss Freud used to conduct Wednesday afternoon sessions when a case would be presented and she would comment. I have seldom heard such a speaker. She had such a magnificent command of English. She was one of those people who could start a sentence with a couple of phrases and clauses, give you the verb and then end with another couple of phrases and clauses — and you understood perfectly the meaning of what she had said! When she gave an address I used to go straight home to make notes because the custom was not to take any notes during the lecture, which was a tragedy really. Sometimes it would take me an hour to write-up the lecture because I had trained my memory so well! The qualification I eventually received was just an outline of the course with Miss Freud's signature at the bottom, but it's now a Master of Clinical Psychology of University College, London.

I remember the first case I presented during the course. It was about a poor family from Newcastle (they talked Geordie and I talked Australian!) They had never had a family like this before — they tended to have better class people. It was one of my criticisms, really. A lot of the people who were supervising in those days came from upper middle class families and they didn't know anything about people who didn't have things. I recall travelling on a trolley bus in Perth and hearing a lady talk about her little girl who was backwards at school. They found that she couldn't see properly but they'd have to pay forty pounds for glasses for which they were saving. I thought that was terrible. If it took six months to find the money for glasses that would mean a further six months schooling that she would miss. When I think of the people who kicked when the National Health Service started in England! They just don't know how the other half lives! My sense of justice, I think, must have come from my mother. Was it feminist? I don't think so. I think it was just plain justice. And I used to fight right up to the top for children who hadn't had a fair go.

In 1957, after six years in London, I came back to the Child Guidance Clinic in Perth. They paid my fare, so that was lucky! Originally, there was no career structure in psychology in Australia but I collaborated with a number of eminent psychologists in Western Australia who prepared a wonderful case based on the engineering profession. We established career levels for psychology that became used in all departments. As a consequence, we received a slightly higher salary. My particular contribution was to ensure that the criteria were global. If it hadn't been for me they might have been expressed only in terms of
the University of Western Australia, which was too exclusive. I didn’t fit that, see! I said, ‘You’ve got to include people who come from elsewhere. You can’t just register UWA people’.

My concern to formalise training and establish professional recognition extended to child-care. In those days, there was no properly run child-care for those parents who had to work. I heard a story about a woman who took in babies for the day while their mothers worked. She used to wrap them in a shawl and put them on the cement floor of her garage! There’d be two lines of these babies! That was in the late 1940s. It is unbelievable that there was no control over such things in those days. It was an immense change when training was required for working with young children. Before that, they just thought every woman knew how to look after a little child. A great step forward was made when the child-care course was started. That came about through the Child-care Committee of the Council of Social Services of Western Australia, which I was invited to join. The first thing we did was to run a one or two day conference on the development and needs of children. That alerted all involved to the needs of children. Then, later, a person from the Kindergarten College thought about the pre-school children and decided to set up a training course for all people caring for young children. This course was aimed at people with a Leaving Certificate standard of education. I was on the committee that helped set the curriculum. They had hundreds of applications! As a consequence, people began to realise the need for child-care centres. They were very necessary for working mothers. Now they are everywhere, of course.

In my opinion, the best place for a child is in a loving family. But the fact is that there are some children who have to leave their own homes. In the 1950s and 1960s, there were institutions for such children, but they were barren places and the people who ran them didn’t have any training. They don’t exist now but I still think some of those children might do better in a group home. An early teenager might be happier in that sort of circumstance than in a foster family.

Nowadays people have ‘mission statements’. I can’t stand the word! It generally means they can’t do what they should be doing! I worked at the clinic until I was seventy and all I wanted to do was establish an environment in which staff learned from one another. I didn’t need a mission statement for that! To learn the type of work in which I was involved it was important for us to work and learn together. In 1957, Professor Walker, of the University of Western Australia, rang to ask if I would teach what was then called the Postgraduate Diploma in Clinical Psychology – it later became the Masters. The Diploma in Clinical Psychology started at the beginning of February, whereas the university started in March and the request came through between Christmas and New Year! I had only a month to prepare. I was asked to take ‘Disorders in Children’. I worked day and night and got out all the seminars and everything for the first two terms. I had to develop the reading lists. I worked on the basis of sets of articles. A lot of reading materials weren’t available and I had to get photocopies of my own
collection of articles. For journals and suitable books Perth was a barren place at that time.

I remained at the university from 1958 to 1979 inclusive. It was very enjoyable. I was always a great believer in observation. I'd heard that the university had set-up an observation room with a glass wall and a listening system out to where students were sitting. I thought this would be marvellous! Not everything goes smoothly, though. I had to get the parents' permission and, at the last minute, a father was going to refuse, but he didn't. I had a wonderful interview with that child. But the equipment didn't work! The students were walking around smoking cigarettes and having cups of coffee. I thought, 'I've had this'. So I decided to do it in the flesh - no screens. The largest group I ever had was twelve students, so I packed them all in my room as in a grandstand - the big fellows had to sit at the back in big high chairs, and the short women had to sit at the front on little chairs. Then I would do an observation session with a child I had never seen before. All I knew was the child's age. I told the students, 'You can write whatever you like but if you drop anything or make a noise I'll cut your throat', or some such silly remark. I wouldn't dare say that now because there is so much cutting of throats going on! The kids and the students were wonderful. In one observation case nothing happened! I sat there quietly until the last five minutes when everything tumbled out of the child! It just shows that if you wait and wait and you're in tune with what's going on something happens: The child came to trust me. But it was a dreadful session for the students to sit through! It's about this quality of absorption in your client, which brings out a quality in the client. You lose your own importance in that, you see? There has to be a respect for a client whatever their age, or their mentality. Then the client must find within himself the knowledge of why he is as he is. After the observation session I would take the child back to the mother and thank her and have a little bit of a chat. Whilst this was happening the clerical staff knew they had to bring a tray loaded with tea and biscuits because the students would be just about dead sitting there.

One day I suddenly asked the students to give me one word that would describe the particular child under observation, as a person. They looked at me as if I should have been in the mental asylum! I wanted to teach them that we all are prejudiced. If you have the clinical acumen, what comes to your mind at that point becomes the governing principle that you use for assessing and writing about that child. And when it's adverse it's called prejudice. I have prejudices, no doubt. But I hope they are based on rationality. A couple of brave people made suggestions. Then I said, 'Well, how did you get to that?'. That's how I taught them observation - not only observation of what their eyes are supposed to be seeing but the kinaesthetic sense, the sense of smell, the proximity of the child to the psychologist. I didn't move much. Hardly ever! So the child could distance himself. The students have never forgotten these experiences. I learnt from them too. Without students you become fixed in your thinking.
That quality of relationship between students and lecturer is now changing with technology and access to the Internet. Information is information, but education is something more than that. With a fabulous teacher you learn more than is possible through a few facts. It's the same in the family. Children need time. I often tell the story of a little girl I know. She was sitting doing nothing and her mother suggested doing something. The child just looked at her mother and said, 'This is my dream time'. Again - there was this young fellow I knew. He was at boarding school and he came to stay when he was in his early teens. Whilst we were doing the washing up, he told me about a migrant worker who'd shot himself at Christmas. I washed up every pot and pan in the place! He was wiping these totally unaware that he was wiping the same things over and over! If I'd said, 'Tell me about it', it would have been artificial. If I had stopped washing-up it would have stopped our discussion. If I'd had a dishwasher the conversation wouldn't have happened.
The opening of Minbalup, the first school for special needs children in Western Australia, 11 April 1954.

The windows were frosted, the kitchen looked like the Black Hole of Calcutta and I thought, 'This wonderful new experiment! What have I let myself in for?'. While I was looking, one of the mothers came in... I'll never forget this woman standing there. She said, 'Oh, isn't it wonderful? A school for our children at last'. AUCE MYERS.
Alice Myers, born 1920, the youngest daughter of and Francis William Tracey Myers and Florence Annie (nee Haswell) was one of the first teachers in Western Australia to develop special curricula and teaching strategies for children with special needs. In 1982 she was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for her service to disabled children.

My parents were English migrants. My father wanted to come to a warm country. My mother wanted to come to Western Australia because women had the vote. The most important thing about them, though, was that they were pleased that their children were going to have opportunities they would not have had in England. All of my life I was told that I had to be grateful for the opportunities I was given. I've got an older brother and sister. I think I was lucky to be the youngest member of the family because during the Depression it was easier for the younger child to stay at school. I attended Leederville Primary School and from there went to Perth Modern School. I liked everything about school except needlework, drawing and any physical activity. I hated running.

I often laugh about the way we were treated when I was in what was the old Sixth Standard (now Year Seven). If we had spelling mistakes, the girls had to stay in and write their mistakes out twenty times. The boys were allowed to have two cuts for each mistake, then go out to play. I was pretty good at spelling so the rest of the girls asked me to take a deputation to the teacher to ask if they could have the same privilege of being caned and then go out to play! So I asked the teacher and he explained — rather startled — that he wasn't allowed to cane girls at the age of twelve; but he realised that he was being unfair, so he would withdraw the privilege of being caned from the boys and they would have to stay in and write their spelling mistakes out twenty times, as well. I remember the boys being very cross and threatening to thump us! It didn't say much for corporal punishment!
I remember, particularly, the teacher I had in Grade Seven, because that was the year we were expected to go for scholarships. When I took the papers home my mother wouldn’t sign them because she was used to the English system where getting a scholarship just gave you the privilege of attending high school although poor people couldn’t afford to keep their children there. Fortunately, this particular teacher was English and asked me if my mother would go down to see him. When she did, he explained to her that if I got a scholarship here it meant simply that I was going to get a good education. He also explained to her that if I really wanted to be a teacher (my mother was afraid that we couldn’t afford it) I would be able to go to Teachers’ College and be paid for going there. So I’ve always been extremely grateful to him.

I don’t know why I wanted to be a teacher but I always did. Long before I went to school I used to run a class at home with all the Christmas cards! I named them, put them into classes and gave them examinations. From the day I started school I announced that I was going to be a teacher. My parents were rather worried about this because they felt that I’d set my heart on it and that there would be no opportunity for me to do this. They had very little money and they didn’t want me to be disappointed when I couldn’t do it. That’s why they were very relieved when they found out that I could become a teacher and dinned it into me that I was very lucky to have that opportunity! I think I was too!

When I left school I said I wanted to be a monitor. I had to go for an interview, but I also had a Hackett Bursary to go to university. My original intention was to do my degree because I was going to teach languages in a high school. So, I said I didn’t want the monitorship until the following year. I studied for one year full-time at university. The Hackett Bursaries were for students who would not otherwise have been able to afford to go to the university and needed a living allowance. You had to put in an application to say what the financial circumstances of the family were. Well, my father had been unemployed since I started high school and was still unemployed when I went to university, so there was no difficulty about that.

The Hackett Bursary, I think, was fifty-two pounds per year, which was a pound a week and quite a comfortable living in those days. It also paid the fees for the university exams. If you sat for the exams you paid ten shillings a subject, but if you had a Hackett Bursary exam fees were paid for you, too. But it was going to be four years before I contributed anything to the family and I really felt that my parents had done enough. So I decided that I would monitor, then go to College and do my degree part-time. So I went in to the Education Department and said that I would like to have a monitorship, and I was appointed as a monitor in 1939.

At the beginning of 1939 we weren’t thinking of war. I can remember, in my last year at school, Mr Abelard, our French master, said how sorry he felt for us and that he was glad that he was his age and not ours because there was going to be a war and we had a terrible future ahead of us. I can remember sitting there and thinking, ‘Well, what’s he going on about? The world’s our oyster! We don’t
have to worry about this'. We certainly weren't thinking about war, although I was studying German. I mean, the literature that came out was euphoric about Hitler, the beautiful magazines, Strength Through Joy, and what wonderful things he was doing for Germany. But we weren't really looking for war clouds. It wasn't until quite late in 1939 we really began to think about that.

In 1940 I went to Claremont Teachers' College. It was the only one available. While I was monitoring, I did the university units that I was going to require for College; and while I was actually in College I went on with the foreign languages that I was going to teach when I left. I was at Claremont at the time when the College administration was divided between Professor Cameron and Mr Milligan – rather an awkward situation. Professor Cameron provided the university component. He believed that young teachers should be educated with other young people, and that we should spend part of our time at the university. Mr Milligan was one of the 'old school' who'd come up through the ranks. He was a very strong Unionist and a wonderful supporter of teachers. He probably believed that the Education Department was all right until the university started 'mucking around' with it. I heard that view expressed later on! But the two men didn't exactly see eye-to-eye and you always worked out which one you were going to ask to do something, because if Mr Milligan said, 'Yes', Professor Cameron would say, 'No', and vice versa.

They had to teach us how to teach everything while we were there because once we had left College we were on our own. There was no in-service after that. To a certain extent I felt that College was like going back to school. Having been free at university to come or go, to have a very close packed College program was rather like being back at school. I had a credit in, of all things, needlework, which is hilarious! I must have done an awfully good written paper because everything else I did in needlework I had to do twice over! I hated art as well. I had dropped it in high school as soon as I was allowed to, and I don't know who was more relieved, me or the art teacher! Mr Campbell, my art lecturer, once stood there while I was trying to do something and said to me, 'Your ideas are good but your drawing is bloody awful'. That just about summed it up. But he did teach me how to disguise the fact that I couldn't draw and he did, with his introduction of colour and pattern work, teach me that there was something that children could enjoy even if they couldn't draw.

Our last student pay was on the 30 November. From the first of January we were paid as monitors until we got an appointment, but that pay didn't arrive until the middle of January. So from the 30 November until the middle of January we were on our own. We were not supposed to take on other jobs because we were considered employees of the Department and weren't allowed to have two jobs. I was paid as the head of a one-teacher school. I think it was one hundred and eighty-seven pounds per year. Being female I only got four-fifths of a man's salary. I think it was just over six pounds a fortnight. I can't remember exactly because I was teaching in a very small country town. I used to have to bank my cheque in a savings bank and they would let me have as much money as they
had, and they never had six pounds in the savings bank! I would bank my cheque and perhaps I'd be able to get two pounds or three pounds, which would enable me to pay my board, but the rest of it had to stay in the bank.

My first appointment was at North Kulikup, east of Boyup Brook. It was a one-teacher school. I was extremely fortunate that I only had six children and none of them was a beginner so I didn't have to remember what I knew about the teaching of reading. I was also very fortunate that two of them were in what would now be Year Two; two were in Year Four and two were in Year Seven. It was too good to last, of course. After six months I had to close the school because, in those days, you were supposed to have an average attendance of eight. That meant you needed at least ten children. So I was transferred. When I was asked where I would like to be transferred to, I said, 'Metropolitan area (because I really wanted to resume my university work) and failing that, I'd like to stay in the South-West'. Instead, I was sent over six hundred miles to a school in the goldfields at Spargoville, which was between Coolgardie and Widgiemooltha. When we were at College we used to say, 'I suppose I'll end up in Widgiemooltha'. Compared to Spargoville, Widgiemooltha was town!

My mother was not very happy about my going to the goldfields. She'd heard so many stories about what drinkers they were up there that she was a little concerned. When she came to see me off on the train there was a lady getting aboard who'd obviously had a few too many, and my mother said, 'Oh don't — that's the kind of thing that worries me'. So to allay her fears I said, 'Well, if it's going to worry you, I'll tell you I won't have a drink while I'm up there'. She said, 'It would make me feel happier'. So I got on the train and chugged off to Coolgardie. The next morning when we arrived, the lady whom I'd noticed the day before came up to me and said, 'Are you the new school teacher for Spargoville?'. I said, 'Yes, do you live there?'. She said, 'Yes, you're going to board with me'. This was a bit of a stunner! She said, 'We don't have a car. We'll have to ring the mine to find out who is coming in'. When she came back she said, 'Well, someone will be coming in but not for a while, but it won't matter because my husband's got lunch ready'. I said, 'Oh yes?'. She said, 'Yes, he's got fifteen bottles of beer in the fridge'. I said, 'I don't drink'. Well, she looked as if I'd said, 'Well, I'm a Mohammedan. Do you mind if I get out my praying mat?'. She said, 'What did you say?'. I said, 'I don't drink'. That was the end of the conversation for quite some time. But, afterwards, she got quite used to the fact that I didn't drink. I usually took my own bottle of lemonade with me, so that I could join in any festivities that were going on. Actually, the day I arrived her house became unavailable. It was very difficult to find a place that had a spare room. The man and his wife had a spare room because they were living in the underground manager's house, but they themselves had to move because there was a new underground manager who was married and who wanted the house. They had to move to the storeman's house, which didn't have a spare room. The mine manager asked if I would put up with temporary inconvenience while they built me a room. This didn't take very long because all the houses were whitewashed hessian and it was only a case of getting a few bits of timber and some
bags and they had made me a very nice room in which I lived. It sounds as if it was a hell-raising town. It wasn't. This was a time when petrol was rationed and people got, I think, four gallons a month for pleasure, which didn't last long. When my mother died, the girl who took the phone message in the store-cum-post office, just rang the mine and said, 'I think Miss Myers is going to want a lift in to Coolgardie'. Every man on the mine, who had a car, came round to offer to drive me in, which would have used all their petrol.

I asked for a transfer before the end of the year because I said my landlady was going to have a baby and would not be able to board me. I would be able to get meals at the mine boarding house and a room was available, but the only place for me to get a bath was at the mine change-rooms and, although I had no objections to eating with sixty miners, I refused flatly to bath with them! I received a transfer to Gwalia. At least Gwalia was on the railway-line. Half way through the Christmas holidays I got a notification that I was not going to Gwalia but to Southern Cross instead.

Southern Cross was quiet until Singapore fell to the Japanese. People got frightened and left Perth. Southern Cross was the first town past the blackout restrictions. It also had lots of empty houses so people got off the train at Southern Cross. I remember one time the principal and I went home with eighty-four children at the school, and went back the next morning to find one hundred and twenty! We had to get extra staff. There were also high school children - a couple doing French and another pair doing typing. I had my days planned out. Monday and Wednesday after school I used to take the two who had been doing French. Tuesday and Thursday I took the two who had been doing typing. Friday afternoon we ran the local Girl Guide Company, because the other teacher's aunt was the guide commissioner for the district, and she made us! Monday night we used to go to first aid; Tuesday I took the boys in the town who were in the Air Force Cadets. Thursday night was home nursing and Wednesday we went to the movies if they were on.

I got appendicitis at the end of my second year and in those days they made you stay off work for quite some time. By the time they'd sent another teacher up there to last out for six months, they probably thought it was time I had a move. So I moved down to Tammin. I was coming back to Perth in one-hundred mile jumps! I was in Tammin when the war finished. After that I returned to Perth to teach at Kenwick, which was still too far from the university for me to continue with my studies. The following year I went to Leederville School and was able to resume my degree studies. At this stage I decided I did not want to teach languages in high school because I didn't like adolescents. I liked younger children. So I switched to an education degree.

In 1948 the Education Department became involved with the education of children with handicaps. Before, they'd had nothing to do with the education of children who were deaf, blind or handicapped in any way. It was the director of education, Mr Murray Little, who said, 'Look, these are children. They're children first and we must start giving them what children need and that's a school'. So
they began to develop work for children with handicaps. I got interested in the younger children who were having problems because I had a lot of children who weren't making the grade for one reason or another. I was asked if I would like to go into that and I said, 'Yes'. Of course, at that time, anyone who volunteered for work in special education was rather regarded as a bit of a crank! But that didn't worry me. So I went to East Victoria Park to take a special class in 1952, and that's where my small-schools' experience came in. It was very useful to me because I had children from about eight to about thirteen or fourteen years who were all working at different levels.

At the end of 1952 we had an in-service course. The advisory teacher asked me if I would be willing to talk about my problems, because she knew that I wasn't afraid to say that I had problems. She said, 'You're new to it and the problems are still fresh in your mind and, what I really want to do is get people talking so that they'll share with each other how they solved their problems'. So I said, 'Yes'. This did really start everyone talking. I said at the end of the in-service course, 'I think a lot of the trouble is that we haven't got the right kind of curriculum. What we're doing is starting off with Year One, and when the children get through that we go on to Year Two, and some of them are going to leave school without doing some of the important things. Instead of wasting their time on long division, we should be making sure that they can handle money at least up to the basic wage, because that's what they're going to work with'.

I had a lot to say about the curriculum and the kind of reading material we were using, with the result that in 1953 the head of the Education Department's Guidance Branch, Mr McCall, said to me, 'Well, you know, you've complained about the curriculum: Go and write one'. So that's what I did. For the last half of 1953 I visited all the teachers of special classes, and we all worked together to say, 'We think this is important; that's important; we can leave this out; I don't think that's any use'. We developed a curriculum that at least people could get started with.

At the end of that year I thought I was going back to take a special class, but they were just opening the first day-school for children with more severe handicaps. Many of these children had not been to school at all. If they had been to school, they had done very little formal work. I wasn't sure I wanted to do it because, at the time, the Education Department simply did not have the money to build new buildings. The parent group, the Slow Learning Children's Group, knew that they could not attract teachers who were going to be paid out of collection tins, so they worked out a very good compromise. The parent group said it could raise the money for a specific purpose but couldn't meet continuing costs. So the Education Department said, 'You provide the buildings and the equipment and we will provide the teachers and the transport'.

Now, they'd been doing some extremely good work in the Nathaniel Harper Home, but that was a hospital and if the children were sick or had any of their funny little turns, there was a full nursing staff available to look after them. This
was going to be a day-school where the teaching staff was going to be responsible for everything, and I wasn't sure that this was a teacher's job. I felt that teaching in school was one thing, but teaching these children was something entirely different.

These children needed a lot more supervision because some of them had never had any contact with other children. Anyway, the parent group managed to buy an old church in Victoria Park, and I was asked if I would consider taking charge of it. I said, 'No'. I was reluctant. Mr McCall said, 'Well, you know all the teachers. You can tell me which ones are suitable'. He added, 'It's got to be someone on the permanent staff'. I said, 'Well, that cuts out everybody but three of us'. Nearly all the teachers in special education were married women who were on supply. He said, 'I want someone with access to the university because most of the information that's been written about these children is tucked away in journals. There are no textbooks to tell you what to do'. I said, 'Well, that reduces us to two! All right, I'll do it; but to me it just seems that you are asking me to do things that they should have learned at home'. I was still a little reluctant but I was taken down to see the building that they'd bought. The windows were frosted, the kitchen looked like the Black Hole of Calcutta and I thought, 'This wonderful new experiment! What have I let myself in for?'. While I was looking, one of the mothers came in. They had raised the money by selling cups of tea, by running chocolate wheels, and all the things that charitable groups do. I'll never forget this woman standing there. She said, 'Oh, isn't it wonderful? A school for our children at last'. I thought, here's this woman being so grateful for something that everybody else demands as a right. So I thought, 'That's it! Now I've got to do it!'. So I bought an apron and started scrubbing down the sink.

I was a little bit worried about having to work with a parent group hanging round my neck because I'd worked with Parents and Citizen's groups before and if I wanted to spend threepence they wanted to know why. As it turned out, that was the least of my worries. All those parents wanted was something to be done for their children and we worked cooperatively. I'd look at a lot of the things the children were doing and say, 'I wonder how he learned to do that?'. I'd ring up the mother and say, 'How did you teach him to do that?'. When she told me, then I would do it. We learnt from each other all the time. For example, when we were teaching what we call 'grooming skills', such as brushing hair, the teacher would brush her hair and give the child a brush, and he would brush the teacher's hair. If the teacher brushed the child's hair and gave him the brush he would brush her hair, and we didn't seem to be able to overcome this impasse. So we looked around and found a child who could brush his own hair, rang the mother and said, ‘How did you teach him to brush his hair?’ Mother said, ‘Quite by accident. I was standing in front of the mirror one day and he was standing in front of me and I brushed my hair and he looked in the mirror and brushed his hair. So, from then on, whenever I wanted to teach him anything like that I used a mirror. That was how I taught him to brush his hair, clean his teeth and wash his face’. So I said, ‘That’s a good idea’. I rang the secretary of the Slow Learning
Children's Group (remember, the parents were providing the equipment) and said, 'Please, can I have a mirror?'. That afternoon a mirror firm rang me up and said, 'What sort of a mirror do you want?'. I said, 'I don't really know'. 'Well', he said, 'I'd better come out and tell you what we've got'. So out he came. Did I want a mirror on a swing? Did I want a mirror on a swivel? Did I want a mirror that was nailed to the wall? We worked out what we wanted and decided we would have a mirror on a door so that we could shut it away and it wouldn't get pushed over. The mirror was in position the next day. If the Education Department had been paying for that mirror, I would have had to ask permission to get it. If it had been reluctantly granted, I would have had to get three quotes from somewhere, and then choose the cheapest quote, and six months later I might have had my mirror. So my early fears about working with a parent group hanging round my neck were entirely unjustified. Whatever I needed to help those children, I got. That was the kind of thing we did. We asked the parents.

I'd like to stress what was happening at that time and why some of the things we did were so necessary. Many of those parents had been told, when their children were born, to put them in an institution and forget they ever had them. I think it was wonderful that most of them hadn't. But there was no help available to parents at all. Some of the children had had very limited contact with other children. They were too big to play with little children and they weren't able to understand the complexities of the games that their own age group played. Some parents had kept the children at home so that they didn't spoil things for their siblings. In those days a lot of people felt that if one member of the family was handicapped, perhaps the others were slightly suspect, and they didn't want their children to get mixed up with anyone who was 'a bit funny'. Some parents had coped quite well. Others had just done what they could without any help whatsoever. I don't want to give the impression that the Education Department started off being the only people to do things. There was a very courageous group of parents who had tried to get something done for their children who had attended school and had very unhappy experiences there. Some children had attended school and had been allowed to just sit there. Eventually, Dr Elwyn Moray came to the University of Western Australia. She encouraged the parents to form a group and to get their children together. Then the parents discovered that their children learned from each other and that the parents supported each other. Dr Moray had made the facilities at the university kindergarten available to the group. That was the beginnings of the special education movement. The parents decided that they were going to push ahead because they knew they couldn't develop any more facilities of their own without government help. They just didn't have the money. They approached the Education Department and said, 'Please help'.

When some of the children came to school they couldn't do the things that ordinary children did. Their parents had done it for them. We knew that they were probably going to end-up living in some kind of supervised living, and our objective was to say, 'Well, anything that they can do for themselves is going to mean less staff and therefore release money for other developmental activities'.
So we started off trying to teach the children what we called 'daily living skills', such as how to brush hair and clean teeth, how to put clothes on, and generally how to look after themselves. We tried to teach them a social vocabulary — words that would keep them out of danger. If we were going to teach them ten words, instead of teaching them the ten words in a reading book like, 'Come and see the little dog', we taught them 'danger, ladies, gents, poison, keep out' — words that would protect them. We were also trying to develop all of their physical skills so that they could look after themselves and not just sit at home and be good, as many of them had been encouraged to do. We wanted them to play games with each other. As we developed, we taught them to cook, to look after themselves and to have feelings of self-esteem. It wasn't called that in those days. We just called it 'social skills'.

The younger children followed a kindergarten program. We used a lot of music. Some of our little people sang before they talked. I'll never forget one little girl who had a vocabulary of two words when she came to us. They were very important words, 'no' and 'wee-wee', which saved us a lot of bother! But that's all she could say. She was in the kindergarten group. One day, when I was round there, the kindergarten teacher said to me, 'Look at her, but don't let her see you're looking'. I looked out of the corner of my eye and I could see her mouthing the words to a song. I said, 'She's mouthing them'; but as soon as we looked at her she stopped. At half past six one Saturday morning, my telephone at home rang and a very excited voice on the other end said, 'Miss Myers, will you listen?', and I could hear a childish treble in the background singing, 'I see the moon, the moon sees me', and it was this little girl who was singing the song. They were the first words her parents had heard her say. From then on she sang everything and she talked and we were so highly delighted.

We used music quite a lot because the children responded to musical signals often before they responded to verbal ones. The rhythm somehow seemed to give them a sense of importance. Music was very useful; so was art. Sometimes, that was the only development we could see. They would start off drawing a little tiny figure in the corner of a huge sheet of paper. Gradually that figure would move out into the middle of the paper and be enlarged, and we knew that the child was expanding. It was sometimes our only measure of their development. We would have children who drew the same thing over and over again, but we never tried to stop them. We'd sometimes say, 'Would you like to draw something else?'. No, they didn't want to.

It was very odd the way they concentrated on detail. We tried to encourage them to look at pictures and talk about the pictures, such as the cartoons in the Daily News — remember Rigby and the little urchin? They always searched for the little urchin to tell me what he was doing. What was happening in the comics appealed to them. They'd very often ignore the main character and concentrate on a dog or a beetle or something that was in there. It didn't matter because they'd talk to us about what was happening there. I was quite astounded at how much they concentrated on detail. One of the boys said to me one day, 'You've
got a new dress'. Now, I didn't have a new dress, it was a dress that I'd worn over and over again. I said, 'No, it's not new'. 'Yes it is', he said, and he touched a button. It was a button at the front of the dress. I'd lost one button and, of course, you can never match it up so I had bought new buttons and put them on the dress. He hadn't noticed the background of the dress. He'd only noticed the buttons, but he recognised that they were new so to him it was an entirely new garment. That was an example of how much they sometimes concentrated on a very small detail, and we had to encourage them to look at the larger picture.

All of the books that I had read about children working at this level had said that these children didn't learn to read. So I'd given away all my reading material. I had to go and get it back because some of them were obviously ready to learn to read. Now, I didn't know how far they were going to go. Sometimes they just picked out words, but they got as much fun at doing that as I did at reading a whole book. One boy used to bring the newspaper and pick out all the words he knew. As he had been a very fidgety child before then, it was really rather a blessing that he was quite prepared to spend hours and hours picking out 'but', 'to', 'with', 'by', 'Sunday' and 'Monday'. It gave me a little bit of peace to get on with something with somebody else.

One of our cardinal aims in teaching was to teach the children to use public transport. We had quite a program because we knew that as they got older, if there was a sheltered workshop, they would be able to get there themselves and go every day. If they had to be picked up by bus, they might only be able to go for two days a week. So, using public transport was a very important feature of our program, though it gave us some hair-raising experiences. We taught them not to get off the bus at the wrong stop. Unfortunately, one day, the bus that was bringing one of our boys to school, broke down. He didn't arrive at school and his mother had always rung if he wasn't coming. So, when he didn't arrive I rang her and she said, 'Oh no! He set off this morning'. I said, 'Well, don't worry. I'll check back and find out where he might be'. I thought, 'He catches the bus by the London Court newsagency and the lady in the newsagents in the kiosk there, always said, "Hello" to him'. I was just checking through the phone book, to find out where that was so that I could ring her, when a tramway man appeared at the door. He said, 'Have you lost a boy? He's down at the depot'. Luckily the car barn wasn't far away. So he drove me back and explained that the bus had broken down, so everybody had to get off, but in no way was the boy going to get out of the bus. It wasn't his stop! Fortunately, one of the drivers knew where he went to school and came and got me.

We learned as we went along. We had games, of course, physical skills, that were generally organised in terms of the child. How could we help him to do it better and will it lead into another activity that's either going to help him, give him an interest, or be useful in some way, even if it's just something that he can enjoy? We were hoping that we'd give them each a skill, an interest, that they could use outside, and one that they could use inside. In this way they could amuse themselves by playing cards, looking at pictures, drawing, painting,
making things, or by going outside to have a game with somebody else or enjoy watching a game. A lot of what we did then doesn't have to be done these days because now, from birth, help is available to parents. This little Slow Learning Children's Group that started with an honorary doctor, who tried to help the parents, developed into the Irrabeena Centre, run by the Mental Health Association, with occupational therapists, speech therapists, and physiotherapists.

It was a most exciting time to be working with all this development going on, and I've never regretted the time that I spent in that school. In some ways we were very lucky. Up until that time, the Education Department had made no provision for children with any form of disability, though in some areas (notably the deaf and the blind) facilities were already established. So, there was quite a bit of working out what to do to integrate the existing schools and staff into an Education Department set-up. We started off from scratch but we could learn by some of the mistakes that had been made, or some of the difficulties that had been encountered.

Cooperation with the Education Department was sustained through their liaison officer, who sat on the Slow Learning Children's Group Committee. This liaison officer didn't have a vote but knew what the group was planning. If an idea was suggested the liaison officer could say, 'Look, you wouldn't have any hope of getting that because it would be far too expensive and there just wouldn't be the money available. Your second plan is possibly feasible. There might have to be a little bit of alteration. Your third plan you would certainly get. So, if I were you, I would suggest: Go to the Education Department and ask for what you want for the second plan, and if it isn't available fall back on your third one'. Because they always went with a reasonable request that had some chance of succeeding, in most cases they got what they wanted and what they needed. It was a wonderful time of cooperation. I was that liaison officer for quite some time after I left the school.

We did have marvellous feedback from parents. We always knew what was happening. I will never forget the first mother who asked if her child could have his birthday party at school because all his friends were at the school. She loved cooking. I said, 'Well, you know, you will have to provide for everybody'. I think at that time we had thirty-six children in the school. She brought down five birthday cakes so that everybody had a chance to blow out candles, and we had a lovely birthday party.

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she'd listened to what they had to say. Because she was now more active she
could go out with them and enjoy things. She noticed things more because she
was being taught how to look at things. 'I had been so busy' (this is the mother
talking) 'worrying about people looking at her that I had never stopped to say
"Paddy look at the dog" or "Paddy look at the bird in the tree". All I was worried
about was what other people were thinking of her. Now Paddy notices things
and tells me about them'.

After being at the special school, I moved into the head office as an advisory
teacher. In those days there was no special training for any kind of work with
physical or mental handicaps, and teachers were more or less trained on the job.
Advisory teachers visited schools and classes to see what they could do to help.
It's all changed now. There are specialised training courses available at all
levels, and the mood now is not to have special facilities but to have children
integrated into ordinary schools as far as possible. There is now a variety of
facilities available. How they're working out I really don't know because I retired
before the first graduates from the special education courses went into classes.
I've got no standard of comparison to say whether training them in that way is
better or worse than what we used to do. I do know that there's a lot more being
done now. When we started, what we did was prove that these children could
do things. They could do more than had been expected of them. There were
possibilities of extending their educational experience. I've never regretted
being in special education. If I had my time again I would do it over again. I was
awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 1982 for my service to disabled
children, but I feel that I was only able to do things because of the support of a
wonderful bunch of teachers who were working things out with me.
NENNIE HARKEN

talks to
Dale Twycross

Nennie Harken was born in the wheat-belt town of Narrogin, Western Australia, in 1922. She was a career teacher who was best known as a Unionist and an advocate of equal pay for women. In 1980 she was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia for services to education. The State School Teachers’ Union of Western Australia has recently acknowledged her achievements by naming its executive meeting room in her honour.

I was a foundation pupil at a convent in Katanning in 1926. The Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions arrived to open the convent school there, and, even though I was only four, they were anxious to have as many pupils as possible. I also spent some of my primary school years in Kalgoorlie and, eventually, did my Junior Examination in Narrogin. The convents at Narrogin and Katanning were smaller schools than most people are accustomed to these days. They were coeducational even though, at that stage, Catholic schools in the metropolitan area were single-sex. There were three classrooms so that the school was divided into Infants, middle and upper school. In those country convents the Sisters also dealt with the secondary section through to the Junior Examination, so there was mixed primary and secondary education. I did my Leaving at Sacred Heart High School, Highgate, where the same order of nuns was teaching. I always enjoyed school and wanted to go through to complete the Leaving Examination. In those days, most girls who went through to the full secondary level of education, seemed to have the option of either nursing or teaching and I didn’t ever consider nursing – I just automatically took it for granted that I would continue on and teach.

I did my Leaving Certificate in 1939 and that, of course, was the year that the Second World War broke out. That was followed by a year spent as a monitor in the State education system. I monitored at Denmark in the Albany area. When I
received my appointment to Denmark, and I set out to go from Perth to take up the appointment. It was really my first foray into the great wide world on my own. The train went to Albany and I had to spend the night there and catch a connecting train to Denmark the following morning. Although it was in February, it was an overcast, drizzly morning and as the train went slowly along, as country trains in those days very often did, and the drizzle came down and the trees dripped, my spirits seemed to sink. I knew that the station in Denmark was a mile or so from the town and I wasn't sure what was going to happen when I reached the actual station — would there be a taxi or some sort of transport that would take me into the town? As the train pulled in I wasn't in a very cheerful frame of mind. Then, when I stepped onto the platform, there was a lady with a welcoming smile ready to greet me. She was Mrs Pirrett, the wife of the headmaster. From then on, the sun shone and life was much more cheerful.

Monitoring involved different things for different people. In the city, monitors who were appointed to schools weren't usually given classroom responsibilities. It has been said that some were glorified office boys or office girls. They certainly did do some observation of teaching in classrooms; and they would also give lessons under supervision from the classroom teachers, but the amount of actual involvement with teaching varied from school to school. Whereas, when I arrived in Denmark, it was to find that Mr Pirrett and one other teacher were handling numbers in excess of what was considered reasonable and the headmaster was pleased to have me involved as much as possible. I taught in the same room as he did, of course, he kept a weather eye upon me. Nevertheless, for all intents and purposes I was responsible for that class and so my experience as a monitor differed very much from that of others who were in much bigger schools.

I emphasise that, even though I was regarded as being responsible, Mr Pirrett really was behind the scenes, keeping an eye on things. Certainly, I had a very good year's experience in preparation for what was to come. I like to tell the tale about the time I was horrified at the results of an arithmetic test I had given the children. After I had marked it and noted all the errors, I took the pile of books and put them before Mr Pirrett and said, 'Just look at this', expecting him to say, 'I'll speak to the children and make sure they do better in future'. Instead of which he looked at me and said, 'Well, what did you do wrong?'. That was a lesson I remember for the rest of my teaching career.

The monitoring year had its advantages. Lots of people say it had its disadvantages too in as much as it meant that untrained people were given responsibilities that weren't appropriate for their abilities; but, as far as advantages went, it did make people feel more at ease with children. It helped people decide even before they went to College whether they had made the right decision or not and that could be an advantage. It was better to know before you undertook a twelve-month teacher training course, with a bond, that you weren't really cut out for teaching, than to do all the training and find out later when in
the classroom. There was lots of debate about the advantages or otherwise of the monitoring year. No doubt it did help the authorities have extra hands at no great cost.

After monitoring, I went to Claremont. No one lived at College in our day. There were various boarding houses nearby where landladies were kind enough to look after students. Three other students and I commenced the year living with Mrs Thickbroome in Victoria Avenue, but we came back after the second term holidays, to find that we needed to look for new accommodation because it had been taken by nurses from Lucknow Hospital, which was a military hospital. With the war in progress anything for the military took precedence over other people, even people as important as Claremont Teachers' College students! The four of us set off determined that we were going to find somewhere where the four of us could stay together. But, after walking from one prospective boarding house to another, we finally came to the conclusion that it was not going to be possible to find someone ready and able to take four students, so we went our various ways. Doreen, who had been at school with me, and I found a very small flat where we looked after ourselves for the final term of the year. It was a shock to my mother's system. She was somewhat horrified to think I was not going to have somebody to make sure I had three good meals a day, but probably other young people were doing the same thing without it being very unusual for them. We managed. Doreen, who was my friend, had parents who lived on a farm, and I think eggs featured largely in our diet – we didn't go hungry. The four of us who had boarded together became close friends. For several years after College we made sure that whenever any one of us was going to a new appointment the other three all sent a letter to greet the person upon arrival in her new school. That was something we all cherished. It continued for several years. Doreen and I keep in contact at least on an annual basis.

I wasn't involved in College social life to any great extent. There was an occasional social function but I felt out of it as I hadn't had involvement with the other students prior to that year. I think that some of the others who had gone to State high schools did know each other to some extent. Doreen and I and some of the lads, with whom I had gone to school in the country, used to form dancing groups that went to the Embassy Ballroom. One of the highlights of the Perth scene at that stage was the weekly dance at the Embassy; but that wasn't involved with College people. I do remember that it was a very exciting experience when I ate my first hamburger! Whether hamburgers had just been introduced to the population in general or whether they had just entered my experience, I'm not even sure. I remember that it showed I was part of the big city scene – when I ate hamburgers out on park benches!

In those days student teachers who went out into primary schools were expected to cover the whole range of subjects in the classroom. There was no choice as to which subjects one would or would not do. The College aimed to equip people as well as possible to cover the whole range of subjects in the school. I think our timetables were more concentrated, than might be the case these days. We
certainly didn’t seem to have time during the day when we weren’t at lectures. As well as covering all the subjects that were meant to be taught in the schools, we also did two university subjects that were compulsory in the College course. We did education and English at the University of Western Australia.

Professor Cameron, who taught education at the university, was also principal of the Teachers’ College and he was a very exciting person to have on the staff. We didn’t see a great deal of him, but when he did come down to College he did his best to know us all and to ensure that we were aware of his attitudes. I can remember he used to say that perhaps we shouldn’t spend so much time trying to force young children to learn as much as they were expected to learn. Perhaps we should wait until they were a little older and then give them as wide an experience as possible. He suggested that the time would come when, instead of talking to them about mountains or a huge river, the teacher would take them in an aeroplane and show them. Perhaps those views have been put into practice more and more as the years have gone by. He’d had experience in other countries so his ideas were perhaps more outward-looking than would otherwise have been the case.

Practice teaching was considered to be quite important. We were appointed to a school for a period of weeks and we would go to that school for one day each week. So, on an ongoing basis, we would have teaching practice being done side-by-side with the rest of the course. At least once each term we had ‘long prac.’, which meant either a whole week in a school, or towards the end of the year, a fortnight at a school. I remember that I spent one period at the Nedlands Primary School and another at Subiaco Primary. You would be attached to a class and would cover as many subjects as the teacher thought appropriate at the time. You would fit in with the class teacher’s program and be part of the classroom family for that period of time. The class teachers wrote their assessment of you, so too did the College lecturers, who would visit from time-to-time. Out of all of that a final mark would be given. I spent one period with Miss Dorothy Tangney in Claremont Central School, which had post-primary classes as well as primary classes. Miss Dorothy Tangney later became Senator Dorothy Tangney and was later honoured by the Queen and became Dame Dorothy Tangney. It was interesting to have known her whilst she was still in the classroom and to have followed her career with interest during her years in the Senate.

In our College year there were about a hundred women and thirty men, if I remember correctly. We finished our course at the end of 1941 and Singapore fell in early 1942. We were very surprised to realise that several of the men in College with us were captured in Singapore very shortly after leaving Teachers’ College. Because many young men enlisted in the services, young women were sent to some of the more isolated schools. This would not have happened if the men had been available to go there. It was very difficult for a young woman teacher to join any of the auxiliary arms of the forces because teachers were needed badly. Even though the authorities were willing to let the men go, it was
decided that it was necessary for as many women as possible to stay in schools. And, of course, during the War, a great many retired women came back into the classrooms to ensure that the children were still able to have a teacher in front of them.

My first appointment was to a little mining settlement called Grant's Patch, which is sixteen miles (as it was in those days) off the rail from Broad Arrow, which is twenty-four miles from Kalgoorlie. I understand that two men had been appointed prior to my receiving the appointment, but each of them was called up into the Army before he had taken up the appointment. So finally, I was appointed. I regarded it as something of an adventure. There were few single men there because of the war, but it was all very pleasant and friendly and the mine authorities were grateful to have a teacher so they did whatever they could to ensure my comfort and well-being. The parents were also grateful to have a teacher, so I quite enjoyed being there and am grateful for the friendship that was offered to me. There wasn't a great deal of sport. We played tennis and, of course, dancing was an important part of social life. Trips into Kalgoorlie at weekends, where you could go to the pictures, were also part of the program. Altogether, it really was quite pleasant.

To start off with I boarded with a couple in the house that had officially been built to accommodate the teachers. It was made of white-washed hessian and had a dirt floor. When, in later years, I was involved in Union affairs and the question of housing for country teachers became vexed, I could at least say that anything they were enduring I had endured before them! In those small mining towns that was the sort of housing most people lived in because, when the mine closed, it wasn't a great problem to either leave the house or to dismantle it and transport it somewhere else. I spent two years at Grant's Patch. Towards the end of the first year I shifted from my original boarding place to live with an elderly couple with whom I'd become very friendly, and, indeed, who had been very good to me. Facilities in the houses were fairly limited. Some houses had electricity and others didn't and although the house I was in with Mr and Mrs Davies did have electric light, fires had to be lit to warm water for whatever purpose. I can remember that ironing used to be done with flat irons, heated on the stove. It was all fairly basic, but very enjoyable nevertheless. I didn't do any cooking. On the whole, I did my own washing and ironing. I used to go out with Mr Davies and collect the wood for the fires. I remember, before the Christmas period, coming home from school one day when the temperature was well and truly over the old century, thinking I was going to have to press all my frocks ready to leave for the holidays, when I found that Mrs Davies had already done them all! That really showed just how good she was to me.

Mr Davies was a prospector, which meant he earned his living by fossicking around and finding what gold he could in his small mines. From time to time, such prospectors would take all the ore they had dug out of the ground to the battery to be treated and all the gold taken out of the ore would be made into a
bar, which would be sold. I can remember that, on one occasion, the bar of gold was in the house for two or three days. Although there wasn't as much need for people to be security conscious in those days, as there is now, I can remember we all felt very important with regard to making sure the gold was safeguarded. If anyone was going out, the question of who was going to be home was ascertained. At no stage was the house left deserted with this precious bar of gold there. That made it seem exciting.

The proceeds of the mine were taken to Kalgoorlie every fortnight. There was a crushing machine attached to the mining operations and a bar of gold was produced each fortnight. When I was going away on holidays I would be taken in the mine car because I didn't have my own transport. I understand that the police in Kalgoorlie would have to be notified when the gold was leaving the mine and, of course, if it hadn't arrived in Kalgoorlie at the expected time, no doubt a search by the police would have been made. So you see it really was rather like the Wild West.

The classroom at Grant's Patch was not a Departmental building, but a building that had been erected by the mine. I sometimes used to think it was a company town before company towns such as Newman and Tom Price began to be talked about. The company at Grant's Patch had built this small building. It had just the one room with a pot-belly stove in the middle of it. There was nothing very spectacular about it. When it rained, which it didn't do all that often, I can remember we had to invent makeshift means of getting across to the school without sinking to our knees in the mud which used to become very thick. The playground facilities weren't anything to be very proud of. There was only one teacher, which was not unusual at that time, for some seven hundred small, one-teacher schools were scattered through the country. I think twenty children would have been the most that I had. I was interested to note a recent comment about a small country school with twenty-five children, where there was a principal and an assistant teacher and a teacher-aide, and I looked back fifty years to the time when, for a school of twenty-five children, there would have been one teacher and that would have been that. So certainly, as far as teacher-pupil ratios are concerned, there has been considerable improvement through the years.

I don't remember if every single grade was covered at Grant's Patch, but if it wasn't it was because there was no child in that grade. In these small schools the primary grades were expected to be taught by the teacher, and, if there were any post-primary children, some assistance through the correspondence school was available to the teacher. I think at one stage I remarked—we're all a bunch of kids, I just happened to be the biggest. The older children were very willing to help with the younger ones. I sometimes wonder if, perhaps, I shouldn't have given them half my salary! However, we survived. You were there and you were on your own. I think the superintendent came twice during the year. I just took it for granted: you were there, and that you did the best you could. The chief purpose of superintendents was to evaluate, but they were ready to give helpful
advice also. They were nice people but I don’t think my knees stopped shaking for the full day that the first one was there, but that was all part and parcel of the experience.

I did have some contact with teachers in Kalgoorlie when I went in for further exams. Once you came out with your teacher’s qualification you then started working for the next certificate that would take you further in your academic achievements. It was a step from our College certificate to the next certificate and then on to the Higher Certificate. When we weren’t in the examination room in Kalgoorlie we were expected to be in a school. I remember spending some time at a school where the principal was Mr Ronald Moore, who later became president of the Union. I can remember how helpful he was for the short time I was there, giving me hints and advice on aspects that I had asked questions about.

I taught in one-teacher schools for the first five years: I was at Grant’s Patch for two years and Augusta for three. Then I went to Coolgardie where there was a principal and two other teachers. I was there for two years before I came to the metropolitan area. In 1955 I became first-mistress at Gosnells Primary School.

I don’t know how it is today, but in those days, as first-mistress in a primary school, you taught a class full-time and you were also responsible for whatever the principal asked you to do. The female deputy had overall responsibility for the discipline and tone of the school as far as the girls were concerned — in organising sport for the girls and overseeing needlework, which was an important subject. In addition, I had to assist the principal in the smooth running of the school as a whole. There was some discussion as to whether the two deputies’ positions were equally important. I was always grateful to Mr Mangini, who was the principal of Gosnells at that stage, when he said that as far as he was concerned the role of the principal-mistress was of even greater importance because the male deputy couldn’t do anything more than Mr Mangini himself could do, but there were certain things in which he really needed the assistance of the principal-mistress. I can’t say that I wasn’t able to participate on an equal basis. At each of the schools where I was first-mistress, or principal-mistress, as it became known (then deputy principal), we did work as a team and I was satisfied with the involvement I was able to have. I know there were some people who felt that the female deputy was not given equal standing with regard to the running of the school, but I personally couldn’t say that was so. There was a time, of course, when because of Departmental regulations the female deputy was not able to become acting head. I was in positions at times when the head was away and the deputy was made acting head and then he became ill and it was the acting deputy who became acting head and not the female deputy — but times changed through the years. Yes, it was a sign that there was not really equal treatment when it was obvious that the women deputies had the experience and capacity to become acting principals, but it was not possible.

Over the years there’s been a change in the role of teachers. In those times the teachers were regarded as having the right to discipline children. Parents, in the
vast majority of cases, were only too ready to support the teacher in efforts that were necessary to discipline children. I think that this has changed somewhat in that teachers’ authority has been more and more challenged by the community as a whole, rather than the teacher being given the support that’s necessary for sound discipline.

I joined the Union in 1940 when I was a class monitor. My first communication from the Department was that I had been appointed to a position as monitor. ‘You will please have a medical examination and join the Teachers’ Union’. I didn’t have any great involvement in the Union until I came into the metropolitan area in 1949. Then I was on the staff of Highgate Primary School and a Mr Keith Mitchell, who was the deputy head at that stage, used to urge us to attend Union meetings, pointing out that if we weren’t there then we couldn’t complain about decisions with which we didn’t agree. I always have taken the view that it is important to be involved in matters that affect one in any particular way. This is a general philosophy of mine. For this reason, I think that everyone should take an interest in the government of the country. It comes down from that level to all levels – if it’s an area that affects you, then it’s important to be involved, to know what the issues are and to be ready to express your opinion about them and, if possible, to influence them in a way you think they should be influenced. So I attended Union meetings, and no doubt expressed my opinion when there was something I wanted to say. Then in 1957 I was approached by Mr Ron Evans, who was on the executive and later president. He said there was a by-election to be held for a vacancy and asked if I would accept nomination. I was quite surprised, because I hadn’t at that stage any thoughts that I should aspire to be a member of the executive. There was a great gap between branch meetings, which were open to everyone, and the executive, where people had to be elected to be a member. It really had never occurred to me that the time had come for me to consider standing for election to the executive. It made no difference that I was a woman, it was just that I considered the executive a fairly exalted place and I hadn’t decided that I had anything particular to offer. But I didn’t refuse when I was asked if I would accept nomination. Fortunately, I was elected to that vacancy in March, 1957. I had to stand again at the Annual Conference in August of that year, of course, because executive members were elected on an annual basis at the yearly conference and even if you had only been on for a few months, due to a by-election, you still had to stand again when conference came round. I did and I was re-elected and continued to be re-elected for the next twenty-five years.

When I first joined there were three other women on the executive, but I felt that once I became a member of the executive I was as much a part of it as anyone else. Mr Sampson, the president, certainly went out of his way to ensure I felt comfortable and he gave me any encouragement I might have needed to express an opinion. Members of the executive come and go, of course, and there were several years when I was the only woman on the executive and, apart from the fact that I usually made the tea for supper, I was certainly given equal treatment. In some aspects, such as representation at Australian Teachers’ Federation
conferences, perhaps I was given more than equal treatment because each State was entitled to six delegates and it had become almost infra dig for any delegation not to have at least one woman on it. It meant I went to Australian Teachers' Federation conferences more often than I otherwise would have, if I hadn't been the only woman on the executive. I would hope that women did feel that they could approach me if there was anything I could be helpful about, although I certainly wouldn't want it thought that I joined the executive for women's rights. As I've said, I accepted nomination when I was invited to nominate, but my philosophy was 'justice wherever it may lie'. While I was very happy to be working to correct injustices that applied to women, I certainly was anxious to work for teachers across the board and to correct whatever injustices there might have been for men or for women.

In 1958 it was very unusual for women to be paid the same salary as men in most occupations. There were a few outstanding exceptions, where women were paid the same as men, but as a general rule, women were not paid an equal salary. This had an historical background. When the basic wage was introduced, many years previously, it was a male basic wage struck on the assumption that the man had a wife and children to support. Very few women worked after marriage in those days, and so the women's rate was to be paid to someone who had only herself to keep. Therefore, there was a difference. Through the years moves had been made to change this and the situation had been reached where a teacher's salary had two components: one the basic wage component and the other, a margin for skill. Success was finally achieved in having women paid the full marginal rate, but the basic wage element, which was based on the responsibilities of a man, was still different.

This question of equal pay for work of equal value between the sexes had become a vital matter of discussion during the 1950s. Progress had been made in other States, particularly New South Wales. The Civil Service Association sent one of its members, a young librarian, Miss Leila Roberts (now Mrs Hoffman) to New South Wales to a conference on equal pay. When Leila came back she submitted a report to the executive of the Civil Service Association, which then called a public meeting inviting organisations with women members to send representatives to discuss the question. At that meeting it was agreed that a State-wide council to fight for equal pay should be formed. Mr Sampson represented the Teachers' Union at that meeting and, when he came back to the next executive meeting with the report and the recommendation that such a council should be formed, I, as one of the few women on the executive, was asked my opinion as to whether the Union should be affiliated with such a council. The answer, of course, was, 'Yes, it should'. Then the next question was, 'Who should be the Union representative?'. I was prepared to take that responsibility if I was requested to do so and so I became the Union representative. I continued as Union representative on that committee, which later became known as the Western Australian Council for Equal Pay and Opportunity, until about 1973.
We had some interesting and exciting times one way and another, including discussions on television and annual dinners, and addressing organisations on the matter. But then it was realised that without equal opportunity, equal pay would never be fully effective, so equal opportunity went hand-in-hand with equal pay. Miss Roberts became the first chairman and, later, I became chairman and remained so for several terms during the life of the organisation. Being chairman meant being the chief spokesman for the organisation. Television was fairly new in the State at that time and so a discussion or debate on a topic was quite an interesting part of TV programs. Certainly the discussions on TV, with people who had differing views regarding the equal pay question, were quite a stimulating experience. Some people would say, 'Was it an ordeal?'. My reaction was that if you’re thrown into deep water you have to either sink or swim. So, if suddenly you find yourself in a situation that you’re not really used to, you can only put your best foot forward, and take it from there. Having the question of equal pay debated on television was a worthwhile way of having the arguments put before the public.

The Council represented a wide cross-section of the organisations in the State that had women's interests at heart. There were: the Civil Service Association, which was responsible for starting it; the Teachers' Union; the Nurses' Federation; the University Women; the Waterside Workers' Federation, Women's Committee; the Liberal Party and National Country Party women's branches; Union of Australian Women; and Soroptomists. I doubt that there was any organisation that was involved in women's rights that wasn't represented on that committee and, as you can see, there was a wide range of political affiliations. The committee worked harmoniously because we concentrated on our aim, on which we were all agreed, and we were not side-tracked into areas where there were differences of opinion. Other people who were involved at that time have also commented to me that the strength of the committee was its ability to mould the wide range of opinion on so many matters into a united force to pursue the goals which we all had in common. We were really proud of the achievements of the Council through the years. When finally, in 1967, the announcement came that the State government had agreed to implement equal pay for its employees by a series of steps, we felt very proud indeed because in other States, where it had been introduced, it had been by a Labor government. We were the first State where a Liberal-Country Party coalition government had been convinced that it should take the step. It gave us great satisfaction.

There were a number of memorable women on the Council. The person that first springs to mind is Edwina Ross, who was on the executive of the Civil Service Association. She had spent many years as a country, school dentist. She used to go from school to school in the country attending to the children's teeth and so had played her part in education to that extent. She was the moving force in the Civil Service Association, but Leila Roberts, who went to the conference in NSW in 1958, was also an interesting person with whom to work. So too were Miss Jean Randall, who had been a French lecturer for many years, Miss Roslyn Denny, who was matron of King Edward Hospital, and Miss Claire Casey, who
later became the first woman principal of a high school in the Education Department.

It was quite a challenge to find I was acting president of the Union at the time we had to implement rolling strikes – there had not been any such action for fifty years or more. Once again it was a case of being thrown in at the deep end, and having to sink or swim. I certainly was quite prepared to become acting president in Mr Bennett’s absence. The Union is not a one-man band. It is a team of people working together, so there really was no reason for Mr Bennett to feel that he shouldn’t take his leave as planned. It was just a case of doing whatever the president of the Union should be doing at that stage. We discussed the matter with the minister and with the premier, from time-to-time. The premier was Sir Charles Court. There was great media interest in the strike, of course. There were television appearances as well as discussions on radio.

Not all teachers were happy with the situation and we had to address meetings of teachers in schools and sometimes in larger areas in an endeavour to encourage their support for the Union decision, because that is what unionism is all about. I’m not a person who is in favour of strikes myself, but once a decision has been made then, if the Union members don’t support that position, that will weaken the overall effectiveness of the Union. We went to several country areas. I remember flying into the Goldfields to address meetings there and travelling by road to several other country areas. Relationships with people of the Education Department needed to be handled diplomatically. There was concern that there’d be bitterness left behind after the strike. I tried to put the point of view that, when differences like this emerged, it was incumbent on representatives of either side to do the best they could to further their point of view. This shouldn’t result in bitterness being felt after the crisis was resolved. I certainly did my best to put that point of view, and I can say that the people from the Department treated me very fairly – in the same spirit – so I hope that there wasn’t a legacy of bitterness following the period of unrest. I also remember one night being invited to go to the Trades and Labor Council, with which the Union was not affiliated at that stage, to put the Union’s point of view. I remember that Trevor Lloyd, the secretary of the Union, was a great support to me, and accompanied me on that occasion. I look back with interest to the fact that I had to put the Union’s point of view to the Trades and Labor Council to urge members to support our stand, which was resisting the deterioration of hard-won working conditions.

I wouldn’t have been able to do it without the cooperation of the teachers on the staff at Carlisle Primary School, where I was first-mistress. I think that Union members owe a great deal of gratitude to the staffs of schools that have executive members because there are demands of time made on executive members. This means that they do need cooperation and support from colleagues. I was particularly lucky in the days of the equal pay campaign. From time-to-time the principal of the school needed to vacate his office for TV crews to set themselves up to interview me. Without his cooperation in areas such as
that, it would have been quite difficult. I can’t remember any occasion when I didn’t receive support and cooperation from all members of the staff. One person in particular will have my undying gratitude. That is Mr Jim Downes, who was my fellow deputy at Carlisle for sixteen years. For many of those years we shared the teaching load and it meant I wasn’t always able to teach my part of the curriculum at the time I was scheduled to do so. I did succeed in doing the full teaching load but the timetable had to be changed quite often. Without someone doing that willingly and cheerfully, then life would have been very difficult indeed. Jim would come to school in the morning not being very sure when he would be in the classroom and when he wouldn’t, but never once was there any complaint or any lack of wholehearted cooperation. He used to say that if that meant he didn’t have to go to Union meetings, he would be quite happy for that to be his contribution towards the welfare of the Union. It was interesting, too, to see the children’s reactions. If I’d been on TV the night before, when I arrived at school in the morning, you could tell by their attitude who had seen the program. They got quite a thrill if they’d seen Miss Harken on television! Really, it was a pleasant feeling to know that so many people were interested in what I was doing.

I was at Carlisle for sixteen years so, really, I became well known as far as the school community went. When the rolling strikes came I’m not sure whether all of them approved of me, but certainly no one openly told me of their dissatisfaction. I think, by that stage, they were aware of my approach to life and the school and knew that I did have the welfare of the children and the schools at heart. They would have understood that this was part and parcel of it all. I don’t know about now, but there was a time when the population as a whole realised the importance of unions and the fact that if a strike were called then it was important for union members to support it. I remember Erica Lawton, who at one stage was on the executive when I was there, saying that in the 1920s when there was the real strike, of some lengthy period, her grandmother was a young teacher, teaching at a country school. She arrived back at school after holidays at the time of the strike and the farmers said, ‘You can’t stay here’, and sent her home again, because it was the attitude that you didn’t break a strike. If your union was on strike you supported it. Nowadays things have changed somewhat.

It really was a wonderful opportunity. I look back and think just how many worthwhile experiences I had by being on the executive of the Union, because that led to other involvements and made the twenty-five years I was there very fruitful, enjoyable and stimulating. The more interesting and experienced the people you are involved with are, the more experience you have on which to draw for your own development. There were a great many highlights throughout those twenty-five years, but certainly I was very honoured indeed when I contested the election for the Teachers’ Tribunal in 1979 and was elected as the representative of the teachers on that very important body. It had overall responsibility for the salaries of teachers, for their district allowances, for their promotional appeals, and for disciplinary matters. To be the person trusted by
Union members to represent them on such a body certainly made me feel very honoured and humble. I treasure the fact that I was able to serve the teachers in that position for a three-year term. At the end of that first, three-year term I decided against contesting another election. I was old enough to retire if I so decided and that's the decision I finally did make. During the next three years the Tribunal was incorporated into the Industrial Commission so perhaps I'm pleased that I did retire because I don't think I would have liked to have been there at the time of the change.

Other highlights for me included involvement in the equal pay campaign, and attendance at many of the Australian Teachers' Federation conferences. I did go as part of the Australian delegation to Japan in 1979 for an Asian Regional Conference of the World Confederation of Organisations of the Teaching Profession, to which our Union – through the Australian Teachers' Federation – was affiliated. It was an interesting experience to be there for a week's conference with representatives of all the Asian countries attached to that world organisation. I remarked to the other members of the delegation that we, together with the New Zealand representatives, were a very small ethnic minority because the vast majority of representatives attending were Asians. I also represented the Union as a member of the Western Australian Teacher Education Authority during the time that it was involved with the teachers' colleges.

I was very honoured in 1980 when I was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia, 'For services to education'. I felt very humble indeed to receive the honour when, as far as I'm concerned, there are a great number of people who have done much more for education than I had. Nevertheless, I treasure the fact that I was given that award and I'm now involved in the Order of Australia Association. I find that to be an ongoing pleasure. Also, the Teachers' Union honoured me in August 1982 at the Annual Conference when I was made a life member of the Union. That, I tell people, is the next best thing to canonisation! It's an honour of which I am very proud, especially as, at that time, there had only been one other woman in the history of the Union who had been honoured by being made a life member. That was Ann Coffey who was made a life member in 1937. I was interested to hear Mrs Pirrett say at my retirement, 'Just imagine that shy little girl I met from the train in Denmark achieving what she has achieved through the years'.
Dorothy Hewett: correspondence lessons at her packing-box desk on the verandah of the family farm ‘Lambton Downs’, Wickepin, Western Australia (Photo: René Hewett).

‘Correspondence classes suited the sort of child I was. There was a high emphasis on the art side of education, on things like creative writing and illustrating your own writing, and nature study, going into the field and drawing the birds and trees and animals’. DOROTHY HEWETT