Edith Cowan University

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Internationally famous novelist, poet and playwright, Dorothy Coade Hewett, was born on 21 May 1923, the daughter of Doris Irene (nee Coade) and Arthur Thomas Hewett. With her sister, Lesley, she lived for twelve years on the family farm near Wickepin, Western Australia, before moving to Perth. She has been writer-in-residence at eight Australian universities and was awarded eight fellowships by the Literature Board of the Australia Council and now has a lifetime Emeritus Fellowship. She had an Honorary Doctor of Letters conferred by the University of Western Australia and is a Member in the Order of Australia. She was expelled from Claremont Teachers' College.

I had correspondence classes until I was about twelve years of age and then we moved to South Perth. I went to the South Perth Primary School until the end of that year. 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. This was also probably reflected in my mother who wasn't any good at maths (my father was), so she probably leant more towards teaching us in that direction. So, when I finally went to school, my grounding in anything to do with mathematics was absolutely hopeless.

I did have two brief periods in country schools - a few days or weeks. Once, in Albany, I went to the Infant school, because we used to go there for holidays; and then I went to live in Corrigin for three months when I was about eleven and I went to the Corrigin Primary School. I was terrified because I was ahead in all things like English and history and geography but hopelessly behind in arithmetic. I was put down a class, because of that, and it was a terrible slur. It was one of those country schools where you had all of the classes in one room, and because I'd been so used to being in the quiet, just working on my own
virtually, on a farm verandah or just in a room, I found it impossible to concentrate. Also, I didn’t understand any of the games, because I’d never had much contact with kids, certainly not in any formal way. I used to run the wrong way and score goals for the opposing team, and get myself into shocking trouble. I could run quite well because I was quite strong and healthy, having been brought up on a farm, but I didn’t know any of the rules.

We had this teacher who must have had a rather hard time teaching all these kids in different classes. He had a war wound. I think it used to drive him mad. Anyway, he was very lame. We used to call him ‘Old Hoppy-Go-Kick’. He used to line all the kids up on the verandah when they made spelling or arithmetic mistakes, and we all had to file past, and then he would hit us for every mistake as we went past. He usually used to hit the girls – I suppose the boys too – on their bare legs, so that there were all these weals on their legs all the time. My mother was horrified by this so she went up to the school and said I wasn’t allowed to be hit. That was worse, because I used to have to file past, and I was this sort of sacrosanct figure who was never touched, so all the kids hated me, of course!

At South Perth Primary School there was a scholarship class. I wasn’t in it because I wasn’t good at arithmetic. I went into a class with a teacher called Mr Lewis, and I used to have this weird sort of life, academically anyway, because when I was writing or doing history, spelling, geography or English, I would go to the top of the class. When it got to maths I’d go down to the bottom – so I had this zigzag life. When there was a test in one thing I’d go up to the top and when there was a test in the other I’d go down to the bottom. I lived in the middle in a sort of limbo world. Mr Lewis, actually, was incredibly nice to me – I’m not quite sure why – whether he liked little girls or whether he liked what I did in the class. I think I was regarded a bit as a teacher’s pet.

When I went to high school at Perth College, we had all women teachers and, of course, it was an all-girls school. At first I hated it. I really hated going to school until I got to sub-Leaving, when I would have been sixteen. And then it all changed because then we were allowed to drop maths. Maths just made my life a misery, there is no doubt about it. It did make my life a complete misery. I could never do it. I couldn’t do algebra; I couldn’t do geometry; I couldn’t do any of it. I was hopeless at it. As soon as I was allowed to drop it I was very happy at school; and also by that time I had worked out a persona, which enabled me to cope with school. I was incredibly shy – absolutely, appallingly shy. When I first went to Perth College they used to call me ‘Hermit Hewett’ because I used to go around with a book of poetry, or a novel (it was usually poetry) and hide in this book at lunch time and recess time. It is true I liked reading these books, but I really did it because that was my protection. It wasn’t until I was about sixteen – and I don’t quite know how I came to know this – that I realised that I could make some sort of capital out of being a bit of an odd ball, and so I deliberately played on this. I was, sort of, the class eccentric, I guess. As soon as I worked
out this role for myself I was perfectly happy at school and I made lots of friends, and in an odd sort of way, from this vantage point, I began to fit in.

I failed French. I'd had very poor grounding in French, because by the time I got to Perth College all those girls there had been doing French since their junior school. I had done one year, and our French teacher in the middle of the year had become ill and left, so it really meant six months. I was miles behind. Then I was unlucky enough to get a very bad French teacher, at Perth College, who was absolutely hopeless. Not only was she hopeless at teaching French, but she was also hopeless at keeping order, and the girls in the class were very cruel. I am sure I joined in too, feeling somewhat ashamed. They used to harass this poor woman and send her out in floods of tears. So our French classes were mayhem, and my knowledge of French was pathetic.

The situation at Perth College, then, was that you had lay teachers and you also had the Sisters of the Anglican Order. The Sisters of the Anglican Order didn't do much teaching. I think some of them did teach in the Infants' school, but not in the higher classes. They taught us divinity. Otherwise, we were taught entirely by lay mistresses. A teacher that really stands out in my mind is the headmistress of the school who, when I look back, was a most extraordinary woman. The story was (whether this was true or not, who knows? All sorts of stories went around the school), that she was an MA from Oxford, and she may well have been so. Her name was Mrs Russell-Smith. She was the most fantastic teacher. She taught me English, history and geology. I was never much good at geology but she was a very good teacher. She was a good teacher because she taught those subjects extremely well and was very involved in them and, therefore, she was able to make us feel enthusiastic about what she was teaching. Also, she attempted to give us some sort of wider view of the world because, don't forget, in those days Western Australia was tremendously cut off from the rest of the world. I know it still is, a bit, but in those days it was like another country, and what was happening in the rest of Australia, let alone in the rest of the world, was somewhat of a mystery to us. When the war broke out, when I was sixteen, it was she who made us aware of what it was all about and what was happening.

She had a house in Guildford where she lived with her unmarried son (she was a widow) and she used to invite us there. The group of girls, of which I was one in those 6B-6A classes in the last two years at school, were a pretty unusual bunch when I think back, because there was quite a lot of talent amongst them. There was one, Stephanie James, who became a professional pianist. We used to go there and we'd have afternoon tea and there'd be discussions about various things and just a sort of social afternoon, and then Stephanie James would play the piano. I think it introduced us to a world of culture, I suppose is the word — that we wouldn't have come across anywhere else. We used to look forward to this. It wasn't something that we felt we had to do, we really loved going there.
At Perth College, itself, there were gradations. There were the girls in what was called the homecraft class who stayed on at school but were considered to be fairly dumb. They learned all the things that would be necessary for them to run a house (it was very sexist, really) and look after children. They cooked and they sewed and they bathed celluloid dolls for babies. It is ludicrous when you think about it! They made potato patterns on pieces of material for curtains and all that stuff. We looked down on them because we were the professional class. Then there was another class, which was the commercial class. When I first went to Perth College my mother, who had learnt shorthand and typing and seemed to have some idea that I was going to do this, got me into this class, and I was hopeless because it was book-keeping. Imagine me doing book-keeping! It was ludicrous. I hated it, anyway, so very soon I was taken out of that class and put in the professional class.

I really think that the atmosphere can become very hothouse in an all-girls school, and that you don't learn social interaction with the opposite sex. It tends to make men, or boys, seem like some sort of mysterious creatures, particularly if you don't have any brothers, as we didn't. You see, my sister went to Modern School and her attitude, I think, was quite different to mine. I always regarded boys (as I think many girls do in those sorts of schools) as sort of unobtainable, strange, mysterious objects and therefore very fascinating. I don't think this was a particularly healthy way to regard them. It tended to mythologise them a bit.

My family were very good about the whole question of girls, which was not usual in that time at all. My mother was very ambitious for us. She left school herself at fourteen. She always said that we'd go to university. My father was very ambitious for us because he'd always wanted to be a doctor and had to leave school early because he came from a family of twelve children. There was no money to do what he wanted to do. He was very clever, my father, much cleverer than my mother was, although she wasn't stupid. He was really, I think, quite brilliant. He never had a chance to use this, and he wanted his daughters to achieve what he'd never achieved. There was quite a lot of family pressure to succeed, and a lot of support to do so. There was never any question that we would not go to university. What we wanted, as far as books and whatever, would always be available for us. I remember I wanted to leave school after the Junior examination. Then, I would have been fifteen. He talked me out of it. Of course he was right, I shouldn't have left.

Although a great many of the girls in that class didn't go on to university, when I think back, a lot of them did, certainly a lot for that time. I've got a picture of the intake of first-years in all faculties into the university in 1939, and the number of girls compared to boys is quite striking. I think there is one row in the front and a couple of girls scattered into the second row, and there is about, I think, fourteen rows all together. What first catches your eye is how very few of us there are anyway, male or female, and the second thing that catches your eye is the small proportion of women amongst those first-year students.
The university was, you know, probably the first place I ever discovered, where there appeared to be, on the surface anyway, a lot of freedom for young women, and at least a pretence of equality. Although it was said in the background: 'What is the use of them going on? They'll only get married'. That sort of thing was very common in the community. I'm sure it was reflected in the university but I never ever had that said to me in the Arts Faculty — never. Rather the reverse, in fact. Men and women weren't treated differently scholastically, but we were treated differently in that we were not supposed to wear trousers to any tutorials, and some people were more strict about this than others. The French mistress wouldn't allow you to go into her tutorial (it is interesting, because she was a woman) if you wore trousers. Whereas in the English faculty I often wore trousers into my tutes and nobody ever said a word. So did other girls.

You had to do a language then, to get into the Arts Faculty and I, of course, had failed French in the Leaving examination, but I did a translation test, which you could do, that is, from French into English. I passed that, because I was always OK at that because I was so good at English, I could compensate. I'd got the gold medal for English, anyway, in the State, so that was an added impetus for them to let me in, I suppose, but when I had to do French at university standard, I was hopeless. I went and had some extra coaching but I never could catch up. So I kept failing, in French. I'd get things like forty-eight or forty-nine and these sorts of hopeless marks. In the end they tossed me out on the basis of this.

I went to Kindergarten College. Oh, I hated it! It was awful. In anything that was scholastic, it was streets below the university. They used to send us out on practice and I used to like that, but actual life within the College I really disliked a lot. It felt prudish. I was much older than the others, of course. I would have been twenty, I suppose. They would have been seventeen or something like that. I felt myself quite a sophisticated young woman whereas they were very innocent. It seemed to attract a very unsophisticated girl. I felt quite strange, like a fish out of water, in that sort of environment. It was run by two women who were what would then have been called spinster blue-stockings, I suppose. There was a very moralistic sort of tone to the whole place. An odd sort of moralistic tone. I left to get married (I wanted to get out of it anyway). I went and said to them, 'Oh, well, I won't be coming back because I'm getting married'. They looked at me with absolute horror. The whole attitude was so filled with horror when I said I was getting married that it makes me think that something else was going on under the surface, but it never occurred to me at the time.

In my case I never wanted to teach. I always regarded teaching with the greatest contempt, when I was young. I used to look at the Teachers' Training College students and be terribly sorry for them, because my idea was I was going to be a famous writer and a famous actress, and teaching was regarded by me as something that you had to do if you had to make a living. But what happened was, I came back to Western Australia in 1958 with three children to keep, and I saw this ad. in the West Australian, saying 'Teacher trainees wanted. One or...
two years university'. I'd had sort of one and a half years at uni. so I went and saw them. Of course by this time I was in my mid-thirties. I looked really young and they thought I was about twenty-eight. When I told them how old I was they were quite astonished. I kept it from them that I'd ever been married, because what had happened was, I had been married and been divorced for adultery (you had to be divorced for guilt in those days) and I'd lived with this man for nine years and had these three illegitimate children, so my marital status was very peculiar from their point of view. On various people's advice (and I think my own, too) I thought, well, it is no business of theirs; I'll just go and apply for this. They snapped me up. They were delighted to get me. So I went back to university, finishing my degree and, I thought to myself, at the end of it I'll have a job where it is possible for me to keep these three kids and, also, the hours will be better than any other sort of job. I'd done a lot of jobs in the interim. I'd been an advertising copy-writer in Sydney; I'd worked in a spinning mill; I'd worked for a while as a nurse's aide; I'd worked for a while in the Beutron button factory—all those sorts of things. They didn't fit in at all, with children. I thought, this would be better because of the hours of work. That was how it came about that I actually went to Claremont Teachers' College. Also, we were paid to be there and I had to have some money. I was enrolled at the College for a year and under its auspices I went back to the university but because of the long gap they would only allow me three first-year subjects. I lost second-year English and second-year psychology but I accepted that. I did very well the second time around, and enjoyed it immensely—much more than I ever had when I was younger. I didn't have much contact with the College because most of the time I was at university. I went out on a couple of practice teachings. I used to go in for a sort of in-course at the College every now and then with everybody else who was at university, but the main emphasis really was on the university. I used to have to go and see this guy occasionally. He was sort of in charge of me; and he was very supportive and very nice, actually. I can remember doing lectures on teaching practice, which seemed to me to be fairly dull and very schematic. I can remember having a most hilarious lecture on sex in which women and men were divided, because they couldn't hear the same information, apparently. Of course, by this time, I was thirty-six and had three kids. I mean, it all seemed ludicrous to me. It was given by a woman doctor who was anything but explicit. I mean, everything was sort of veiled and implicit. Sex education wasn't taught in schools in those days so this was for our own erudition to help the student teachers to deal with sexual problems because, don't forget, trainee teachers weren't allowed to get married and, therefore, the inference was that there would be some sexual problems, I presume. The idea of sex outside marriage was frowned upon, so what were they supposed to do? The whole lecture was based upon how to control yourself. This was what it was all about. As I'd never been great on control of myself I found this hilarious. There is not much else I remember, except these talks on teaching practice. And I can remember, yes, I can remember being given an intelligence test and doing quite badly in it.
I went on teaching practice to South Perth Primary School, which was, funnily enough, the school that I had gone to for those six months. On prac, I taught Sixth Grade. Much to my astonishment I found that I really enjoyed teaching these kids and was good at it. I think I did two lots of primary teaching, and both times, oddly enough, I was sent to South Perth. One would have thought they might have switched it around. I never taught in any secondary school. I liked the interaction with the kids, and I found out that I was quite good at making lessons interesting. I remember I had them doing drama which they had never done. I got a book and dramatised it for them and we played all the parts. They loved all that. I found I was good at teaching them poetry, which they all hated. They didn’t hate it afterwards. A Yugoslav teacher, who was a martinet, had been teaching these kids, and I was sort of attached to him, because you always were attached to another teacher. I found him a bit hard to put up with. He had to go away and he must have thought that I could handle the class all right, because he left the class in my charge for a couple of weeks. I had a marvellous time, because I was on my own. I can remember the first time I came into that class when he wasn’t there. The children all stood up and recited 'Where the Pelican Builds its Nest' in this awful sort of group monotone. I said, 'Stop! Stop! Stop! It is terrible! Terrible! I can’t stand it!’. And they all looked at me in horror and amazement. I said, 'Never do that again’. And I remember one kid at the back, who obviously hated poetry, said, 'Does that mean, Miss, that we never have to do any poetry again?’ I said, ‘No, it doesn’t mean that. It means you’ve got to do it in a different way’. That’s about all I can remember about College and practice teaching, really, because they were fairly brief experiences because I was thrown out of College.

What happened was that by this time I had published a novel which I’d written in Sydney, called Bobbin’ Up. At the back of this novel on the fly leaf it said I had three children. Someone at the College found out that I’d written this novel, and asked me to come and speak about it. Whether this person knew that I was a student or not I don’t know. Gradually it must have filtered through to the higher-up people in the College, that the woman who had written this novel was the same woman who was a student. So one day I was called in for an interview with the head of the College and it was a very unpleasant interview. I fronted up to this person who was very bullying and dreadfully sexist and an appalling man altogether. He said that it had come to his notice that I was a married woman (because they didn’t have married women, of course). Not only had I been a married woman, but I was a divorced woman and this was absolutely verboten. I knew they had widows at the College so I said, ‘Well, what is the difference between a widow and a divorced woman?’. He said, ‘There’s no need to tell a woman like you the difference between a widow and a divorcee. Who was the guilty party?’. I laughed, and this infuriated him. He got very unpleasant and told me that I would have to pay back all the money, which they had invested in me for that year. I was summarily dismissed as a person not suitable for teaching young people, because my moral standing in the community was so low. I went away and got in touch with a lawyer, who told me that I had every right to call
myself legally single, a *femme seule*. The lawyer also said that the College would not be able to get the money back from me, so I wrote them a letter informing them that I understood that, legally, I was absolutely within my rights to have gone to the College under my own description of myself. I never heard another word, but they wouldn't take me back. I thought at the time about challenging it, taking them to court, but I didn't have any money; and, secondly, I thought that this would be very embarrassing for my three young sons. So, they had me over a barrel, really.

I wasn't absolutely heart-broken at leaving the College, but I was very angry at the time. It was like the Barretts of Wimpole Street. The fact that I couldn't do much about it made me even angrier. Also, I was worried about what would happen to my plans of being self-sufficient and actually going out as a secondary-school teacher. I'd discovered in the interim that I enjoyed teaching, which was another thing.

Sexist and puritan attitudes like this bounced back at me later. My daughter, Katy, was born in 1960. She was clever at school and she got the prize at the end of the school year for the best student, but it was given to the boy who was second to her because it couldn't be given to a girl. She would have been twelve, so it would have been about 1972. I remember how angry she was at the time, and how angry I was. I said something about it, but nobody gave a stuff, actually. There was also another situation where Merv and I got a message to go to the school to discuss the behaviour of our daughter. Kate had told me what had happened. There had been a group of girls and boys, who would have then been twelve, who had been caught kissing in the school sports shed. They were all made to stand for hours on a sort of detention in the corridor as a punishment. When we went in, there was the headmaster and the mistress who was in charge of the girls. They started talking in these very ambiguous terms about unpleasant sexual behaviour and all this stuff. I got sick of it, and I said, 'You mean that these kids were having sexual intercourse?'. There was a terrible gasp, that this word could actually be spoken. They said, 'Oh, no, no, no, nothing like that'. So I said, 'Well, what were they doing?'. Of course, it came out that they were kissing. I said to this mistress, 'Miss (whatever her name was), weren't you ever kissed when you were twelve?'. She said, 'No'. And I said, 'Oh, poor you!'. She gave me a terrible glare. We were, I think, considered extremely uncooperative in our attitude. And I had a feeling (and I think it was true) that the girls were being punished more than the boys at this time. That there was a general sort of pall of — what? dislike, puritanism aimed particularly at the girls, although aimed to a certain extent at them all.

After I was kicked out of Claremont, I went and saw Professor Alan Edwards at the university, who was head of the English Department then, and told him the story. He was fairly supportive, actually, on that occasion. I eventually decided what I would do because in the interim I would have broken the bond that I'd made, anyway, because Merv and I had got married in Sydney in 1960 during the vacation. This was absolutely against the rules, so there was no possibility that
I would go back. Merv and I talked about it and we decided that as I had gone so far in my university course, that I would go on and finish it, with the idea, perhaps, (although this was fairly nebulous) that I might become a university teacher, which indeed is what I did become.

When I went back to university and finished my degree, it happened to coincide with a time in my life when I was losing my commitment to the Communist Party. Therefore, during the time that I was doing that course, I actually left the Communist Party in 1968. I suppose I was looking for something to replace that commitment, and although I always had writing, which was my first commitment, I was looking for something else, and I think education probably provided it. I did have some marvellous teachers at university at that time. I don't think you could have found better teachers anywhere. The English Department at that university (apart from having no commitment whatsoever to Australian literature, which was an important criticism) was probably superior to most Australian universities, from what I've gathered since, having had a bit to do with them in various ways. It was tremendously exciting to me. The whole area of English literature and history (I did a double major in English and history) were to me such a tremendous extension of my own horizons, that I found it thrilling, really thrilling. As I went on I found it more so.

I taught in the English Department at the University of Western Australia for fifteen years, partly part-time, and for nine years full-time, first as a tutor, a part-time tutor, then as a full-time tutor, and then, towards the last years, as a senior tutor. When I started teaching I found I had an aptitude for it, which I sort of picked up when I was doing primary school teaching; but I discovered I had a particular aptitude for teaching at university level, and I knew I was a very good teacher. I had a marvellous relationship with my students. Many of them were friends of mine who used to come to our house, so it was a very happy time of my life.

There were very few women who taught full-time in the English Department, or had any sort of status. I think Helen Watson-Williams and Jeanna Bradley were two that did. Most of us women in the department were employed part-time and, at the end of the year, we would be stood down. Every year we would wait around to see whether we would be re-employed. Most of the time we were, luckily. This wasn't just in the English Department. It happened in the History Department and elsewhere. The university was notorious on this question, absolutely notorious!

The Union was of little help to women because its brief was to fight for the rights of full-time lecturers. We were part-time tutors so we couldn't even join the Union. We didn't even come under their jurisdiction. So Trish Crawford, from History, set up a women's group. We used to meet to try to fight for the status of women and make it known, at least in the university and amongst our colleagues, how we were being treated. Once I missed out on getting a job, I remember, which left me high and dry. They finally looked around and found me some sort of part-time work teaching external students. A lot of them were part-
time teachers, who did in-service courses in the holidays, and correspondence courses. It was much less pay than I had been getting as a tutor.

Although the conditions of service were difficult I don’t recall any sexual harassment. It does seem strange that there wasn’t any. It’s quite possible that we weren’t, in those days, very aware of the whole problem. Perhaps we were so used to being sexually harassed we never even noticed it. I often think that. I know that things that make my daughter (who became a lecturer in English at Sydney University) furious, probably wouldn’t have been seen that way by me at all, at the time, although I can see it quite clearly now. There were some of the young male lecturers who always had groups of girls waiting outside their rooms to see them. The girls seemed to be as much a party to this as they were, although one wonders, in retrospect, whether this was so. It was rather frowned upon, but seen as somehow inevitable. One or two of them played on it considerably, but the majority in the English Department were pretty good on this question.

What did happen was sexist put-downs. I remember going to see the professor once. He was interviewing me because I think I must have applied for a full-time tutorship, or maybe a senior tutorship. He said to me, ‘Of course I would have given you this job (which had just come up in the department) if only you had some talent, like, for instance. Neville Teede and Peter Cowan’. Now he knew this was the very thing which would really hurt me. because by this time I was quite well-known as a poet, and I knew that I was a good teacher and everybody in the department knew that I was. Therefore, to say to me that I had no talent was deliberately provocative. But then, he was that sort of a man. He was a very unhappy man in many ways.

What finally happened to me was that I got very sick of this and I heard from a friend of mine, who was teaching in the New South Wales University, Drama Department, that there was a job going there, so I applied for it. It was a much worse job than the one I had, in many ways, in that I had even less status; but I just got so tired of the way I was being treated that I said I would take it. As soon as I went to the head of department and told him that this was what was happening he immediately offered me a senior tutorship with tenure, which I took. Then I got into terrible trouble with the head of the Department of Drama in New South Wales. I rang him up immediately I knew, and told him what had happened. He told me I was a woman without principle who had used his department in order to get myself a permanent job, which I hadn’t done at all. I had been perfectly sincere about the fact that I wanted to go and work in the Drama Department. I wanted to go to Sydney, anyway; and secondly, I just wasn’t prepared to put up with what was happening in the English Department in Western Australia any longer. Of course, when I was offered this tenure and higher salary and other possibilities at the end of it, it seemed ridiculous to knock it back, particularly as New South Wales University was not going to pay me any of my removal expenses, which would have been considerable because,
although the three boys were more or less grown up, the two girls were still quite little.

There were other things that went on too, when I was a tutor. For instance, a group of us, men and women in the department, started off an Australian literature course, because we were all very interested and involved in this. The head of department disapproved so we had to do a lot of extra tutoring in our own time. We had more or less volunteered to teach this so it wasn’t counted as part of our workload. We had to take this workload on top of our normal teaching. The normal teaching load then, which seems very small now, was eight contact hours per week and I was doing, at one stage, sixteen, which was absolutely unheard of. It was a lot of work, because when starting a new course you had to devise all sorts of things. Amongst the people teaching it were a few writers: Fay Zwicky, Peter Cowan, and myself. Some have gone on to teach predominantly in that area.

The introduction of the course was opposed because universities, even up to the 1970s, had been oriented to English literature, and the idea that you could actually teach Australian literature or, indeed, that there was any Australian literature to teach, was absolutely unknown. Most of the staff, the higher echelons of the staff, were Englishmen, who came with a prejudice for English literature. The professor of English had actually gone on record at one stage saying, ‘Teach Australian literature? What Australian literature?’. This was not uncommon in Australia at the time. I think it was particularly common in Western Australia. So we had to fight against this prejudice, which seems very odd now, of course, when you’ve got Australian literature courses everywhere, proliferating. But at that time, no!

I finally left and took up an Australia Council, Literature Board grant for three years and went to Sydney. I was sad to leave. I didn’t leave with any sort of feeling of triumph or, ‘I’m glad to leave this place’. I left with a great deal of sadness. All those years when I taught part-time, I did resent that immensely; and I did resent the attitudes of the higher echelons of the university in putting women in that position. I was often very angry about it. The fact that I so enjoyed my own work right up to the time I stopped teaching, did, to a certain extent, offset that.

I was fifty-one before I could become a full-time writer. But from then on I had enormous support from the Literature Board of the Australia Council. I couldn’t have survived as a writer without it. I think I’ve had more grants than any other woman. I don’t know why this was, but it was so. You know, I got an Order of Australia, and thought very seriously about whether I should accept it or not because of my attitude towards structures generally, but decided in the end I should, and got a bit of flack from other people about that. I decided to accept because I thought that it was good for the position of writers and the position of women, to receive such things. I would never have, for instance, accepted an Order of the British Empire because I am a republican, but I thought I could receive an Order of Australia. Now that I think what I think about the Labor
Government I'm not so sure, but there you are, I've got it now. I felt that not all that many women had received this award and certainly not very many women artists and, therefore, for that reason alone, I thought I should take it.

I have had trouble in the theatre as a playwright, there's no doubt about that; there's a lot of sexism there, an enormous amount. It would take me years to tell you about it all. I remember an administrative director saying to me, 'Why do you write about ball-crushing women?'. A head of the drama section of the Australia Council - a man - once said to me, 'Why don't you stop writing those bloody awful plays and start concentrating on poetry?'. It hasn't been only from men - it has also been from women. A woman, who was the head of the arts section of the Australian, once said within the hearing of several people in the theatre foyer in Sydney, 'They ought to keep that woman out of the theatre. She is a menace'. This is all, apparently, aimed at the kind of plays that I write rather than at me personally. There's also been the tremendous battle to be accepted as a woman playwright, for a start because there are still very few of them. When I began writing professionally for the theatre, which was really from about 1968 onwards, there were virtually no women. It was a young man's domain. The whole renaissance, if you like, of Australian theatre, which took place in the late sixties, was a young man's renaissance.

I often used to make jokes and say all I needed was a face-lift and a sex change and I'd be acceptable. Under that joke there was real truth because I was years older than the rest of them and I was a woman, and I wrote about women, largely. The central characters were women in my plays, which didn't happen in their plays - their women always had certain roles. They were the feeder of lines for the more brilliant male, or they were the sex symbol or they were the maternal figure. But they were never the central figure and, therefore, I was going against the whole tradition, which had grown up very quickly in the Australian theatre. I was also trying to do something else, stylistically, which to me is linked to the fact that I was writing about women. I believe that women do have a style of their own in writing, and this was seen as chaotic, over-poetic, subjective, autobiographical (and all that said with a certain edge to it, which was a real criticism of this sort of writing). Well, now we know through all the feminist publications that this is a very strong vein in women's writing and always has been, and I think a very useful one to which women respond - and it's women who are the big novel readers and playgoers. In fact, women are much more interested in culture, generally, in Australia, than are men.
Julie Lewis, born 1925, the only child of Irene (nee Vaughan) and John Heath, achieved recognition as a biographer, fiction writer and radio scriptwriter. Julie has published two collections of short stories and five biographies, and was writer-in-residence at two universities. In 1992, she was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for service to literature as a writer and teacher, and she is a patron and life member of the Peter Cowan Writer’s Centre at Edith Cowan University.

My father died just before I was two and I suppose this affected my whole future. I was brought up by my grandmother while my mother went to work. I only saw her at weekends. I guess if you’ve lived in a household of women, you perceive the world in a slightly different way. We lived in Scarborough for the first three years after my father died, in a little stone cottage that my grandmother and her two sons had built. There was no school out there so, when I had to go to school, the house was sold and we came to live in Perth, where my grandmother had another house. I lived there until I got married with the exception of a few stints teaching in the country.

Why did I become a teacher? Well, I think teaching was one of the few options for women at that time. There were other things I would have liked to have done. I had some crazy ideas. I would have liked to have been a dress designer or a journalist. I didn’t really think in terms of being a creative writer simply because all our reading had been nineteenth century English literature and it never occurred to me that Australians actually wrote and could publish books! I suppose we read things like Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson, but I can’t remember reading any of the very exciting fiction that was, in fact, being written in the 1930s. Most of our reading was nineteenth century. James Joyce was banned. D.H. Lawrence was banned. We read none of that. The literature we should have been reading in the early 1940s just was not available, unless you
had a scholarly family, which I did not, or some teacher who really cared to promote it. I was interested in art too, and I would have liked to have done something in that line, but there just was not the opportunity. As I said, because my grandmother was looking after me, and my mother was working, it was a great sacrifice for them to even keep me at school for the last five years. It was more practical and sensible to become a teacher, which was well paid and a job for life. You've got to remember that the Depression had affected people, and then the War, so permanency was something people looked for. However, I didn't see my career as a teacher as a long-term prospect. I saw it, as most women did, as an interim measure before marriage. Marriage really was one's main ambition.

I started at Claremont Teachers' College in 1944 wearing Roman sandals! I had a foot injury which I had sustained through swimming and gymnastics. It happened like this. At that time the National Fitness organisation was popular. Now, thinking back, I suspect it was not unlike the Hitler Youth Movement. It didn't have the same ideological background, but the emphasis was on healthy bodies, marching and discipline. I loved those sorts of things! I became very involved. I joined the National Fitness organisation, and went, on Wednesday nights, to their gymnasium in William Street. The kind of fitness we were doing was a little bit upgraded from Swedish drill, but it was still fairly regimented. We used the horse and springboards and put on demonstrations. We had an annual display with everyone in neat little white shorts bouncing around.

At the same time I was training at the old Crawley Baths to get my silver medal for swimming. There was a turnstile at the entrance to the baths and I caught my heel under the bottom of it. I cut myself but continued swimming and (it says something for the river in those days) I got a poisoned foot which remained poisoned for six weeks. I was given a new drug, sulphanilamide, which gave me the most dreadful headaches. but it meant that I could perform at a National Fitness concert. I shouldn't have, because my foot was like a football. Then for the next six weeks I could only wear sandals.

I was living in North Perth when I went to Claremont Teachers' College. It was a long way to travel. I would ride my bicycle down to a friend's place in Broadway, leave it there, and we'd catch a trolley bus down Stirling Highway to the College. That was when I was feeling sprightly. When I wasn't feeling energetic, I would catch one tram into Perth and then the trolley bus. In those days teacher training included one year of monitoring, which I did at Mount Hawthorn Primary School. I had a very good headmaster; Oscar Charlesworth was his name. He did the right thing by monitors. Some headmasters used them as extra teachers, but he would always put me in a classroom where he felt the teacher was a good model to observe. I had to give practice lessons under their supervision and they would report on me. Monitors were sort of dogsbodies but you did get an opportunity to learn quite a lot if you were working with teachers who had some real skills, and there were some teachers with good skills there.
That was the first year of ‘training’. The second year was in Teachers' College. That was quite interesting because it was towards the end of the War, and the teacher training program had moved two years earlier from Claremont Teachers' College to the University of Western Australia because the College had been taken over by the Army and the AWAS were housed there. We were the first lot of students to go back, but we weren't full-time there. We spent our time commuting between Claremont Teachers' College and the university (more trolley bussing) and when we went to the College, that first week, it was quite strange because the windows were all boarded up. It was very much a wartime situation.

Upstairs they had transformed the old College into dormitories with showers and toilets for the AWAS. This area was out-of-bounds to us. When we went back there were only about four downstairs rooms available. Professor Cameron had an office, Mr Milligan, who was the deputy, had an office. Miss Houghton, I think, had an office and Miss Martin. They were the principal staff. There was a kind of common room, which was a hall with a stage. There was no canteen, of course, a couple of toilets and no showers. There was all this stuff upstairs belonging to the Army, but we were not allowed to use it. So we would do phys. ed. out on the lawn in front of the College and, at the end of it, there was no way we could have a shower. You just continued the day smelly and hot.

We only had one year training there. In fact we were the last of the one-college-year trainees. The following year students had the option to do two years in College, but we were the last who were only able to do one year, irrespective of what we might have wanted to do. We had to count the monitoring year and our year in College to be so-called ‘two-year trained’. The incredible thing (I find it absolutely incredible) is that we got no certificate. At the end of the year you didn't even get a piece of paper, and when I went to England in 1951 to teach over there, I had no documentation to prove that I was a trained teacher! So I wrote to the Education Department and they did, in fact, give me a letter, but there was no official certificate given at the end of our training year.

During our monitoring year we were paid thirty-five shillings a fortnight, seventeen shillings and sixpence, or something, a week. That was reasonable because people didn't get much money anyway. In our College year we got an allowance that was about a quarter of that amount, so it was really tough. It just about covered our fares. There was the option to borrow ten pounds towards board if you came from the country, or even if you were living at home, to help your family situation. But that ten pounds had to be paid back once you were trained. In addition to that, when you came out at the end of the training year, because the Department obviously felt they'd invested quite a bit of money in you, you were on a bond. You automatically got an appointment. This depended upon the kind of training you'd done and the kind of results you had. Irrespective of that, if you quit the day after you were fully trained, you owed the Department ninety pounds. That was on a sliding scale and at the end of three years you had worked out your bond. This always became a bit of a problem for women who
wanted to get married. They had to resign, and pay back whatever portion of the bond was still owing. This hurt quite a lot. If the unmentionable happened and you got pregnant out of wedlock, that was even worse, because you had to leave and you had no way of paying back that bond.

We made our own fun at College. I can remember distinctly the first week (I suppose it would be equivalent to what you'd call 'orientation week') we would put on impromptu concerts at lunch time. I can remember performing (with various additional garments), the strip polka. I think I was a terrible show-off. Anyway we had lots of fun and it was fairly light-hearted. Later that year I played Autolycus in a musical adaptation of *A Winter's Tale* at the College concert.

Work started the following week. We did a little bit of theory. I can remember a smattering of the Montessori method. Perhaps I've just forgotten, but I felt that our studies were very lightweight. They weren't very rigorous. It was much more geared towards practical achievements. Maybe it turned out better teachers - I don't know. We were trained to teach everything: arithmetic, English, reading, spelling, geography, history, nature study, civics, art, music, sewing. One of the crazy things we had to do was for singing lessons. We had to learn the tonic solfa, so we had this little song, which went:

> Oh, you lazy sheep that play,  
> In the pasture fresh and gay,  
> All thee sheep now tell me why,  
> In the pleasant fields you lie?  
> You eat grass and clover leaves  
> From the morning till the eve,  
> And it seems you nothing do.  
> Wonder I what good are you?

Now, instead of singing it like that, we had to do this: 'doh, ray, me, fah, soh, soh, fah', etc. I can't remember all the tonic solfa, but you had to learn it like this, because you couldn't guarantee to have a piano when you started teaching. If you were lucky you would have a tuning fork to start you off! Cam Egan took us for singing. He was great. I really loved that opportunity.

We learnt sewing from Miss Sheath, who was the inspector of sewing in schools. We did all sorts of little models demonstrating how to hem, top sew and do cross-stitch — and all that stuff. Women teachers were expected to teach sewing in schools. However, later, when I was teaching, I discovered that when the girls did sewing the boys did manual arts and there were never enough male teachers to cope with all the boys so I managed to work it so I mostly taught manual. I'm sure I could sew better than I could do manual, but somehow the boys seemed more appealing than those girls with their little screwed up models that they worked on. I can't really remember what things we made. We did pokerwork and we knocked bits of wood together and all this sort of thing. We had a lot of fun and made a lot of noise. It was really quite a relaxing period during the day.
One of the requirements at College was that you pass arithmetic and spelling. The spelling was a great imposition for some people. Obviously, they didn't feel you could use a dictionary, and you had to study a 'Schonnell Speller', in great detail, learning words like 'haemorrhage' and 'diarrhoea' and all that sort of thing. There were a couple of students who were excellent students, but they failed spelling, and left College 'unclassified', which meant their salary was far, far less than those of the others. They were usually sent to a less appealing school, nearly always in the country.

One of the things I remember is Mr Milligan taking nature study. He was a very genial gentleman, a real gentleman, quiet and formal. I liked him, but he really upset me once when I was doing practice teaching at Nedlands. I had given the lesson and got quite a good mark from the teacher. I was really pleased about this, but I also had to hand in my program notes. On the bottom of mine, when they came back was: 'Can we ever make you methodical???, with three question marks after it! I felt quite indignant at the time but I realised afterwards that we are what we are, and I don't suppose I'm any more methodical now. But at the time it quite stung!

Professor Cameron was the principal of the College. He also lectured in education at the university. We went to the university for some of our lectures. Education was one of them, and this was obligatory. But if you were also doing part-time university studies you had to pass at a higher level than if you were just doing it at Teachers' College, which seemed a bit unfair. I mean, after all, you're either doing it properly or not. We loved it when we went to the university. I suppose I compensated for a frustrated desire to be a journalist during that College year when I was a reporter for *The Pelican*, the university, student newspaper. It seemed to be a totally different atmosphere, but we were really sort of in-between. We were neither fish nor fowl. When the War was on, the American Navy was housed down at what is now Currie Hall near the university. They had some prefabricated buildings there. The Catalina Squadron was housed in the bay, and the servicemen used to spend a lot of time walking to-and-fro through the university. It caused the girls, in particular, quite a lot of distress. The whole place was blacked out, and we worked in the library until it closed at nine in the evening, so we had to catch a trolley bus from the other side of Stirling Highway in the dark. There were some quite unfortunate incidents. Nothing too disastrous, but there were occasions when we felt very vulnerable and quite threatened.

At the end of 1944 I came out of Teachers' College among the top four. I can't remember exactly where I came, third or fourth in the College, so in spite of having quite a good social life, I suppose I did a bit of work as well. We were required to do some country service, but not necessarily in one-teacher schools. Very few people stayed in the city in their first couple of years. You usually could expect to go to the country for up to three years. When I first came out of College I went for two weeks to Victoria Park Primary School, and thought 'Oh, this is wonderful, I'm in the city!'. Two weeks later I was transferred to Manjimup,
which seemed the end of the earth. It took all day to get there on the train. I went alone. I arrived at about nine o'clock at night. A friend in Perth contacted the Anglican minister down there who met me, and his wife's aunt undertook to board me. I was lucky, she was great, but she went away half way through the year, and the only board I could get then was at the local hotel. I think I earned seven pounds a fortnight of which five pounds went on board. It was really very difficult.

At Manjimup I taught Fifth and Sixth Grades, but many of the classes were combined. I liked it at Manjimup. I liked the whole set-up. I liked the class. I liked the headmaster, even though I always seemed to have arguments with headmasters along the way. I think I got a bit too self-confident or something. I can remember sending one of the boys out to chop some wood for the fire. This was fair enough, I thought, because it was freezing, but it seems we were supposed to do this in recess time. I can remember being taken to task by the headmaster for wasting the boy's time. I had a terrible argument with the headmaster in Harvey too. After I went back teaching, post-feminist era, I had Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* on the reading list and I was taken to task by a headmistress for having recommended what she described as a 'nasty book'.

After Harvey, I got a transfer to Highgate Infants' School. I stayed there three months and was transferred, again, to Kent Street High School, which suited me much better because I really preferred older children. I was there until I left to get married in 1951. I then went to England for two years and did some teaching over there. When I came back I taught briefly at Thomas Street Primary School before my first child was born. I left teaching for a number of years, and began to start writing in 1964, which was nine years after my first child was born.

I thought of completing my degree when I first got married, but I enjoyed having children and I enjoyed domesticity. I also enjoyed getting involved in Parents and Citizens' committees and kindergarten organisations. It wasn't until my third child was a couple of years old that I realised this wasn't enough — that I wanted to do something else. It was at that stage that I joined a creative writing class offered by the Adult Education program. I began writing for radio as a result of that class, but it was very much an occasional thing. There was no question of moving in and taking up a new career at that stage. Before I was married, in 1950, when I returned from country teaching, I decided to go back to university and I did three more units towards an Arts degree. That made seven, and there were two still hanging. So in 1966 I went back to the university and completed my degree. And the funny thing was, I thought 'Right! The world is going to want me!'. This was before women were flocking back as mature-age students. In fact, there were only a handful of mature-age students in Arts the year I was there. However, the world didn't want me, so I started looking around. I did some voluntary work and I was still doing a little bit of radio writing, and in 1970 I went back to the Education Department.
When I went back teaching in 1970, I had a feeling that perhaps my methods were out of date, so I enrolled in the Diploma of Education course, even though I didn’t need to – I had upgraded my qualifications by then. I spent a year doing teaching method, and the interesting thing I found was that nothing had changed. I was quite stunned to find that I hadn’t forgotten, or I hadn’t got tangled up over the years. Teaching methods are different now. When I went through it was still very teacher-centred and fairly authoritarian. The basic thing, I think, if you’re trying to teach someone, is to be enthusiastic. It’s important to know your subject well, and to be really excited by it. This just comes across and you can teach anything. I remember, I was at Hollywood High School doing some creative writing classes with the Year Twelve English and literature students. I was amazed, thinking back to the time when I was a student of comparable age, at how sophisticated these children were. I don’t mean that in any derogatory sense. Their knowledge is so extensive. They know about all sorts of things. They have a good background in literature and reading. Kids today have all the books available that we didn’t have. They’re doing non-print material too, so that they’re being educated to look at films and television, and to listen to radio critically. The other noticeable thing is their skill at debating a question. We were looking at a piece of writing that one of the students had done, and I’d queried the use of a particular word, and had thrown it back to them to talk about it. Now, they were able to defend the use of that word very skilfully and I had to concede. This is the measure of the way they approach the subject today, which I don’t think we were able to do. Maybe I’m just underestimating what we were like, but it seems to me we didn’t have this degree of sophistication in the way we approached our work.

I suppose I’ve adapted my teaching approach because now I tend to make them do the work, and we talk about what they’ve done. I get them to be self-critical, both of their own work and of their peers’ work. I try not to come in with too many dogmatic statements of what you should do and what you shouldn’t do. I try to give a lesson, in a sense, as a metaphor and let them see the process through the way their imaginations work. I let them discover it. And mostly I find you get a wonderful response from the kids. They really get excited.

In 1970, when I first returned to teaching after having my family, methods of instructions may not have changed – but the schools had. The high school at Kent Street, when I left it, had a staff of about thirty, and, I suppose, about four hundred students. In 1970, school staffs were about one hundred, and there would have been probably eight hundred students in many of the high schools. Kent Street had been one of the few metropolitan high schools in 1951. Now they were dotted all around the metropolitan and country areas. I just couldn’t envisage going back into that situation. So I eased myself back as a teacher-librarian. I was at Swanbourne High School as teacher-librarian for two years, and found that it didn’t really satisfy me. If I’d been in charge it might have been all right because there were other duties, but as second librarian you really were doling out books, accessioning material, and filing stuff. It was boring. I couldn’t get part-time teaching in a government high school in 1972. So I left the
Department and I went to a private school. I was there for the next four years teaching English and literature.

I started reading books by Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer. I suppose these feminist works tied in with my whole background so that it was logical to think along these lines. During the years that I'd been writing for radio, I'd come in contact with Catherine King, who'd run the ABC's 'Women's Session' for twenty-two years. I'd been quite strongly influenced by her, although she'd hate me to say it. She wasn't a feminist in the sense of Germaine Greer, for instance, but she had always regarded what she did as important, which it was. She had never felt any discrimination as far as being considered second class, either as a woman or as a broadcaster. I'd been fascinated by her interview techniques, by the sorts of programs she put on. Around 1973, I met her again. She'd gone to Melbourne and she'd come back briefly. I asked her if she would be willing for me to write her biography. I knew nothing about writing biography. It was a terrible cheek to even think I could, but I learnt along the way, and she, as I say, was very cooperative. I left teaching in 1976 to concentrate on doing this. That book came together and was published in 1979.

At that stage, I'd begun doing some tutoring in creative writing in Adult Education classes. At the same time, I was writing some short fiction, and two years after the book on Catherine King came out, my first collection of short fiction was published. It was called Double Exposure. From there, I've moved more and more into writing full-time, and doing a lot of tutoring, which was, in some ways, a logical extension of teaching. I find that I like teaching and now, not only am I writing what I like writing, but I'm teaching what I like, instead of being constrained by a program in a high school.

After the Double Exposure collection, I edited a collection of radio scripts. As well as contributing to the ABC 'Women's Session', I contributed to a program called 'Scope', which was a satirical radio magazine. That was quite fascinating. It was an Australia-wide program. The man who produced it, Donald Ingram-Smith, had a very unusual and enlightened view, both of broadcasting and of life, and he managed to invest this program with a freedom of vision. So I put together a series of radio scripts with a short introduction about his life. Over the next few years I worked on the biography of Kathleen O'Connor. That was quite a long-term thing because there was not a lot of material available about her. It was done in conjunction with Patrick Hutchings. Patrick had already put together an appraisal of her work as an artist, and I was interested in her as a woman. He completed his manuscript and I did mine, then an editor worked between the two to make sure that they dovetailed. It came together in a nice book with some lovely illustrations.

In the same year I had another collection of short fiction published, The Walls of Jericho. Then the following year I was commissioned to write a biography of Jimmy Woods, who was a pioneer aviator. That was the first time I'd had a commission. It was quite interesting because it really put you on the line. You have a deadline and you've got to come up with it. It was very good discipline, I
found, and it was an interesting exercise, discovering the spirit of this man, and
testing whether the myth that seemed to be the popular idea of him was, in fact,
valid.

Next, I had a little fun thing to do. I was approached by Greenhouse Publications,
who were putting together a series of teenage fictions for Dolly magazine. They
needed to produce these very quickly, and the editor contacted a number of
people she knew who were writers, who she thought could probably produce a
teensage short story. That was another challenge because I'd never written
anything like that. The interesting thing is you make more money out of that sort
of writing than any other. That perhaps should be kept quiet! After that, I got
involved in writing a biography of Olga Masters. She was a New South Wales
fiction writer who began writing at the age of fifty-eight and produced five books
in the next seven or so years, two of which were runaway successes. They were
best sellers and won prizes. Then she died of a brain tumour very suddenly. She
had many more books she wanted to write. There were lots of myths about her
including the fact that she suddenly started writing at fifty-eight. In fact, she had
been a journalist for twenty years prior to that, and she had, as a young woman
(a child at even), entertained her brothers and sisters telling them stories. She had
even had two stories published when she was fifteen! So it was fascinating
trying to dispel the idea that this sudden fame came easily. It had come after
quite a long apprenticeship.

While working on Olga Masters' biography I had five weeks as a writer-in-
residence at the Women's College at the University of Queensland. That came
about through the 'Olga Masters Place to Write Award', which was offered to
me because I was doing her biography and the University of Queensland Press
was going to publish it. That was a real windfall because it meant I was on the
spot where her papers are stored, and I was given a space to write, with a
computer, and no domestic responsibilities to worry about. That was really
terrific.

I've done a lot of travelling in the course of some of the work, not necessarily
for the writing, but I've been able to incorporate it. With the Kate O'Connor book, I
was in England and Paris. At the time I was doing some research and was able
to spend a lot of time in the Victoria and Albert Museum. I prowled around the
parts of Paris where she lived. With Olga Masters, I spent time travelling the
country of her childhood and the areas where she and her husband lived when
he was teaching in northern New South Wales. In 1985 I went with my husband
trekking in Nepal. I found that a quite a amazing experience. It caused a change of
direction in my outlook. The whole experience of that environment, the physical
toughness of it, made me look at things rather differently. I became interested in
meditation and yoga, which I still do follow-through quite conscientiously.

Like most teachers I like organising, and when I stopped school teaching I was
asked to join the women's committee associated with planning for Western
Australia's one hundred and fiftieth birthday celebrations in 1979. My specific
responsibility was chairing the publications sub-committee, which produced the
book *Reflections* – the stories of women who, in various ways, played a significant role in the State's history. For the next fifteen years I served on a number of arts related committees, including the Western Australian Arts Council, and the Literature Board of the Australia Council.

A writer who has influenced me a lot is Peter Cowan. His writing is pared down, sparse, prickly like much of the Western Australian bush. He celebrates silence. He has always been a stylistic innovator and was experimenting the modernist impulse when most Australian writers were locked into realism. He is interested in the life of the mind, and that fascinates me too. His body of work tells an alternative history of the State, a tragic history and one that I would have liked to explore.

For a while I wasn't even sure whether I would ever write another biography. You invest up to three or four years working on a biography. It takes an enormous amount of energy, both physical and emotional, and I realise more and more that you're tampering with other people's lives. You have to come up with your own version of the life. Especially where there's a controversial figure, you have to be prepared to be tough, and take whatever criticism might come your way if you choose to present a view that is not popular. But then an opportunity arose that was hard to resist, I began working on the life of Mary Martin who started the Mary Martin Bookshop in Adelaide in 1945. She has links with this State too. Archdeacon Wollaston was her great-great-grandfather. These links are fascinating. In February 1994, I went to India to research part of Mary Martin's life that was spent there, mainly in Tamil Nadu. I visited Kotagiri, Bangalore, Coimbatore, Cochin – all significant places in her life – and Vellore, where she died. It was a rigorous trip. A year later I was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.

Since then I have contributed articles for the Parkinson's Newsletter and for an anthology of essays poems and insights: *Voices from the Parking Lot*. During this time I was a member of the steering committee for the establishment of a Writer's Centre at Edith Cowan University in the relocated and restored family home of Edith Cowan, the first woman to be elected to an Australian parliament. It's appropriate that it should be named after her grandson, Peter Cowan, arguably the quintessential regional writer in Australia. I am honoured to be both patron and life member of the Peter Cowan Writer's Centre.

All things considered, I think my training at Claremont has stood me in good stead. It was a fairly naive kind of training in those days. We were very simple people and the program was fairly simple. But there was a grass roots validity to it that has remained. I think, perhaps if you like teaching, if you feel teaching is for you, it's something that you respond to, and I do – I love teaching.
Born in 1931, Lorraine Hale studied at Claremont and was appointed to the College as a lecturer following her years of classroom teaching. She eventually became Claremont's warden of women students, then deputy vice-principal, and associate director until Claremont amalgamated with other former Perth teachers' colleges to become part of the Western Australian College of Advanced Education in the early 1980s. In retirement, Lorraine is president of the Claremont Alumni.

I'm not sure that I chose teaching as a profession. I suspect that my mother chose teaching as a profession for me. She always told me that I was going to be a teacher, and I always knew that I was going to be a teacher. My mother was the youngest of fourteen Irish children. I've seen where my mother was born and I know why they migrated. There was virtually no room for them to develop or to have a livelihood. My mother sent me to the local convent school. Her seven brothers were all strong Ulster-men (Orange-men), but the convent was nearby so I was sent, at the age of five, to Christ the King, Beaconsfield. A few years later I moved to the Beaconsfield Primary School. Then I went to Princess May, Fremantle, and all the time my mother said to me, 'When you are a teacher . . .'

When I was doing Leaving in 1947 all my friends were preparing to go out into the schools as monitors, but an article appeared in the West Australian saying that a new course was being started at the University of Western Australia. This was a four year course in education leading to a Bachelor of Education. Now, my mother knew absolutely nothing about education. She had no influence, no friends, no contacts in the field, so I was taken to Jim McCall, who was in charge of guidance at that stage, and he was asked whether this four year course would
be suitable for Lorraine Hale! Jim actually knew nothing about it until he saw the paper, but he read it and said he thought it looked very interesting.

So I became a teacher. I went to university, at the age of sixteen, for four years. I had no intention whatsoever of going to Claremont Teachers' College, but it so happened that the Bachelor of Education did not offer all courses at the university. At the end of my second year, nine of us, including Rolf Harris, went to Claremont Teachers' College. The group at that stage split up. Rolf Harris decided that he didn't want to continue at all at the university. He stayed at Claremont. The rest of us either decided to stay with the full-time university course or we joined the Education Department. The carrot was twofold. Firstly, as well as the Bachelor of Education we would get a Teaching Certificate. Secondly, we would be paid by the Education Department. My parents made considerable sacrifices for me and my brother so I chose to finish off the Bachelor of Education and simultaneously do my course at Claremont. It meant that at the end of four years I started teaching with a Bachelor of Education and a Teachers' Certificate. So I started off with considerable advantages. My degree had a major in English, with four units of education and two units of history; and I was appointed to Bunbury High School to teach history right through the school. I loved it!

I was at Bunbury for two terms. I was twenty and not at all nervous about teaching to Leaving level. I would be now! I'd be petrified. Then I went to Midland High School. That was a shock to the system. It was a three-year high school. I was given the lowest boys’ class called a non-junior class. There were children from the Swan Cottages, Parkerville. Some of them were little demons! And if I was ever a successful teacher I learnt to teach at Midland. Thirty boys, and I'm teaching about the Picts and the Scots! You can imagine how interested they were! I was at Midland for two and a half years. I was given the opportunity to teach history in the classes above, and a little bit of literature.

During the Christmas holidays in 1954, I received a note from the Education Department to say I was being transferred to Narrogin Senior Agricultural High School. I did not want to go, but I had no option. I was there for three months when the deputy (female) left and I became acting principal-mistress of the first agricultural high school in the State. At the end of the year several jobs were advertised. One was the substantive position of principal-mistress at Narrogin and one was the position of Lecturer B in social sciences and English at Graylands Teachers' College. I applied for both and I got the Graylands job.

I was appointed as a Lecturer B. Back in 1956, Lecturers B were appointed for three years only. Then they could be reappointed for another three years. Then that was it. You had to go back into the schools. I stayed in the College for three years. My job was re-advertised and was split into two – social sciences and English. I got the social science job. Three years later it was advertised as a Lecturer A and I received that position. In those days we did not have tenure or permanency in the teachers' colleges. Your job was advertised after five years if
you were a Senior Lecturer or a Lecturer A. People came in and out of the system. I liked lecturing so I stayed in College. Eventually, I was senior enough to do what I wanted to do, which was history and then, by default, sociology. I was really left to develop my own courses. If I'd gone back into the schools I would have been fettered by a curriculum.

I went on to get a BA and the MA Prelim. When I finished that, I started to do a dissertation for the Master of Arts. Frank Crowley, who was my supervisor, suggested that I do the history of the Royal Perth Hospital because the hospital wanted that done. I was given every assistance by many people to finish my MA, but in the middle of all this, I had the opportunity to go to Malaya. I went to Malaya for three years. When I came back, I'd gone cold on the topic, and I just left it. Also there was sickness in my family. My father had been totally and permanently incapacitated for years due to World War 1 injuries, and my mother had cancer. So I let things drop, and then I just didn't go on. That is a regret, but I did what I wanted to do. I really wasn't ambitious. I didn't see myself as becoming ever a warden of women students. I just saw myself as becoming a teacher of history, and then a lecturer in a field that I liked lecturing in. I didn't see myself becoming an administrator at all.

In 1962, the year of 

In 1961 Neil Traylen, the principal of Claremont Teachers' College, approached a number of staff and asked if they were interested in going to a new teachers' college that was being opened up in Kuala Lumpur. Most middle-primary and upper-primary teachers for Malaysia were trained at two teachers' colleges in England at Brinsford and Kirby. They were closing down because Malaya, on the verge of independence, wanted to train its own teachers. Under the Colombo Plan regulations, only staff aged thirty or over could be posted to Malaya. I had just turned thirty, so things fell out nicely for me and I went to teach at the Malaysian Teachers' College, Kuala Lumpur. English was the language for most of the courses. There was a language stream and, of course, all the students were learning the national language. This was compulsory. It was a fascinating time in Malaysia because they were gearing up for independence and promoting the national language. They established the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, literally, 'house of language and culture'. They were coming words to fit in with the new technology. So there was the national language week and, later, the national language month. I went, myself, to the Merdeka Stadium and raised my hand to swear to uphold the national language. I went to Petaling Jaya, near the booming city of Kuala Lumpur. When I arrived, the principal told me that they really needed someone to teach English methodology. So I lectured for three years in English method to trainee teachers for the middle and upper-primary levels. Of course I had never taught in a primary school in my life! But they were three marvellous years. In that college there were what they called the ex-pats. These people had taught at Brinsford and Kirby and they were now out in Malaya. There were also Malays, Chinese, and
Indians. I won't say the students were very advanced, but those local staff were highly professional and very well qualified people.

My social life was absolutely marvellous. I was single, I was thirty and I was available. The men up there, of course, were all married. There were rubber planters, whose wives were back in England, and also tin miners. The clubs needed single women. We didn't have to pay any entrance fees. We were welcomed. I had an absolute ball. I first arrived in Singapore and I was met by an official from the Australian High Commission and was looked after magnificently. I was taken to what was then the hotel, the Cathay Hotel. My letter of introduction said, 'When you are in Kuala Lumpur you'll be under the general jurisdiction of the High Commissioner, Mr Tom Critchley'. But when I arrived at Kuala Lumpur airport there was no-one to meet me. So I rang the High Commission and said, 'I'm here. No-one's here to meet me'. I became 'famous', because the High Commissioner came and met me in the Commission car, the flag flying, and took me then to the Merlin Hotel. Had it been with one of underlings, I probably would have gone to a very ordinary hotel I I met people from the various embassies, and became friendly with them. So my horizons expanded. I was living in what they call the Race Course Chalets. I chose that rather than living on the campus. There were World Health experts, International Labour Organisation experts, and superintendents of police! I had a social life that I'd never had before and I met people from wide-ranging backgrounds. So I loved it.

I was there lor two years. Neil Traylen had said, before I went, 'Two years, Lorraine! After three years you won't really be any use to the College. You'll have been out of the system too long'. But, because of some foul-up with visas I didn't arrive in Kuala Lumpur until March 1962. So the academic year had started and they asked me to stay on for the third year. Neil agreed to this. I came back for two reasons. Firstly, there was the health of my family. Secondly, at that stage, the ex-pats weren't welcome. Their future was suspect. On the plane coming back I was saying, 'I don't want to come back. I don't want to come back. I don't want to come back!'. But I am a conservative: safety, security, a sale, secure job! And I'd had three marvellous years. The students there were tremendous. Oh! I felt like the Delphic Oracle! The students were polite to everybody and they were kind to me. They were really kind and they welcomed me. They invited me into their homes. And I lived up to it! I wore my saris when I celebrated the Indian festivals. In those days I was slim, so I could get away with Chinese clothes and not look too bad. So professionally and personally they were marvellous, marvellous years. I had travelled a lot in Asia. I used my time there. Every holiday I went somewhere. For example, I'd been to Vietnam and later on, in Claremont days, I was able to talk about the war in Vietnam because I'd been there and I had friends who were there.

In 1971, I responded to an advertisement for the women's warden's position at Claremont. I had a lot of people urging me to do so. And I thought I'd just throw
my hat in to the ring. But I really didn’t think I would get the job. Allison Aldridge was the warden of women students at Mount Lawley. Mary Moir (now Mary Pusenjak) had at that stage moved to the position of the warden of women students at Nedlands. There was Lesley Graham, at Graylands; and the Churchlands job was open, and also the Claremont job. I applied for both. I put Churchlands first because I thought somebody else was going to get the Claremont job. Time went on. I heard absolutely nothing until there was an end-of-term dinner at the Highway Hotel in Claremont. Doug Jecks, [about-to-be principal of Churchlands College], was an invited guest at that function. He got up and said that he was in Western Australia appointing his vice-principal, who was John Liddelow, and his warden of women students, Avril O’Brien. I knew Avril because she’d been working at Graylands with me for the last few months. Avril was about eight years younger, she was pretty, she had a doctorate, she was married, she had a family and I thought, ‘Oh, God, I’m gone. I haven’t got Buckley’s chance’. Clarrie Makin, who was the principal of Claremont, was a bit embarrassed at the fact that this was announced at a public function and he came up to me and talked about qualifications and said, ‘There are other qualities like loyalty and hard work that count’. About a week later Clarrie rang me up and said, ‘Lorraine, you’ve been appointed to Claremont’. I was surprised and excited at the new challenge, and very apprehensive. I was following Mary Moir. I’d known her for years. She’d lectured to me when I was a student. She was someone I’d always admired. She spoke beautifully, was articulate and always looked as though she’d just come out of the beauty parlour. She was blonde and beautifully groomed, always. In fact, in my student days, Mary used to come along in the bus, because nobody had cars then. She would get off the bus in Goldsworthy Road wearing hat and gloves. She looked magnificent. She always did. So the first thing I did was go to Shirleys [a boutique] and spent, I think, more on clothes in one visit than I’d spent in the last five years. Also I started to go regularly to get my hair done. I wanted to look the part!

The warden of women students was responsible for the welfare of the women. At that stage, the students were paid by the Education Department, and it was one of my responsibilities to follow-up students who were absent from classes. There were no student counsellors in those days so it was largely a counselling job. My philosophy was never to press anything. I didn’t want to intrude or impinge on their private lives. I would never say to someone, ‘Dear, tell me what your problems are’. But students and staff, female staff, knew that if they wanted to come and talk to me, the door was open. I was very apprehensive about the whole deal. I remember my first address to the students. I thought, ‘What on earth am I going to say to the girls?’ I mean, what do you talk about? Morality? I’m not quite sure what I did say to them but they were receptive. In fact, they even clapped me at the end! I don’t know whether it was because they were pleased I had finished!

The warden of women students was the social hostess of the College, but I did try to play down that aspect. I was determined that I would try to support the
social life of the College, make it look attractive, but not obviously muck-around with flowers and tea. I just called the women together. I said, 'Ladies, do what has to be done'. I left people to their own devices. It was still accepted that whatever had to be done was the lot of women — there was no one else to do it! If there was alcohol to be served, the men would cooperate. I still think it is important to get staff together to build up some sort of cohesive feeling for the institution.

I did continue teaching Asian history. You see, I was interested in the Asian content, and I was pretty-well up with it. I had kept on with my reading. I'd concentrated on current events in Asia at that stage, so it was no great hardship for me to keep lecturing. I wanted to continue lecturing, not only because I liked it, but also because I wanted to retain some sort of credibility with my colleagues. I thought that if I made the excuse not to lecture, or wheedled out of it, they would consider that I was not making a contribution to the system.

About 1974, my title changed to deputy vice-principal and, later, around 1978, to associate director. The role changed because other things changed at the same time. The bond system disappeared and students weren’t paid. So the pastoral care aspect of the job for both the deputy and for the women’s warden began to disappear, though we were still using a staff advisory system. Three-year training was coming in. Also, we broke our nexus with the Education Department, so the whole institution was being reorganised. I was put in charge of staffing. Now, this was completely new. I wrote the duty statements. I wrote the advertisements for staffing. I chaired the selection panels for support staff and I was virtually the executive officer for the academic staff selection committee. I went to the airport to meet people appointed from overseas, and took them to the local hotel to stay. I won’t say that I agreed with every appointment made and I was sometimes uncomfortable, because there were all sorts of pressures at the time. For example, some people had been replaced by overseas appointees. It wasn’t very easy. I can’t say that I deliberately supported women candidates, but I hope that I gave them a fair go. I have never been in favour of positive discrimination for women. I believed that there should be absolute equality of opportunity. Now, I know it becomes very difficult if you’ve got two people equal in every way, but that doesn’t very often happen. The women, at that stage, hadn’t had the opportunity to get qualifications or experience at higher levels. So you see, for a long time I had a very big input into staffing at Claremont.

I was also the chairperson of the Academic Progress Committee, which was much the same as the present Board of Examiners. That was a fairly influential position. I was also the Conversion Course, program coordinator. I knew the campus backwards, frontwards, every way, because I used to write the annual report. It used to take oodles of my time. It might have been good for me in the sense that I had to think about how I was presenting things, but it was time consuming.
There were awful power struggles. There were the power struggles in terms of getting students. Unless they got a certain number of students the electives wouldn’t run, so departments were vying for power. New departments were being set up and there were rivalries. Claremont launched a Graduate Diploma in Reading Education. Initially, however, internal difficulties arose due to differences in methodology. The staff involved were experienced, capable and, it is fair to say, expert. The administration should have handled the situation (a sensitive one) better. This was the only period in my years at Claremont that I did not enjoy.

When the first Council, or Board, was set up at Claremont, I was a staff representative. They voted me on to it. I don’t know why, but Tom Ryan and I were both elected. Then, when the Board was reconstituted, I was on it because of my position. When it was reconstituted yet again, and I didn’t have voting power, I was there as an observer. So I was in on the decision-making all through that period. Now, at the very last meeting, the Board had its wind-up. I was not invited. Now that hurt! Lesley Derksen, a valued friend, invited me out that evening so that I didn’t sit at home moping.

It didn’t even occur to me, that no female was represented in the negotiations about the amalgamation of Western Australian Teachers’ Colleges into WACAE (Western Australian College of Advanced Education). They were all men at the top, so I suppose it was logical that they would be the ones who made the decisions. I wasn’t happy, of course, with amalgamation, because I’m a Claremont person and I felt that we would be swallowed up, lose our identity and disappear. Amalgamation was a shock to many people. It certainly affected my own career quite significantly. I’m not sour about it because I didn’t have the academic qualifications that I should have gone on to do.

I was sent back to Claremont in 1983 as the Senior Administrative Officer. It meant absolutely nothing. It was just an empty title. But it was something. In effect I was dumped, and there is some resentment. But I’m not alone. If it were just me, I might feel it. But a lot of my colleagues at Claremont were also dumped and pushed aside. I am absolutely appalled at the way people were treated at the time of amalgamation. Avril O’Brien and I were the two senior women in the Colleges at the time of amalgamation. Avril and I worked together with Brian Lawrence and John Collins. We were a team of four in the year 1982. At the end of that year the Liddelow Report had been presented and accepted. All the senior staff were called into one of the lecture theatres at Churchlands College. I was sitting with all the senior staff and we were given, publicly, material about our future. It was then I learned I was going as campus manager (campus secretary) to Claremont. I felt everyone was looking at me. They weren’t. They were all worried about themselves! That was an exercise in insensitivity! The reason given was, ‘You are all hearing this at the same time’. I don’t suppose I should have been singled out for any special treatment, but everybody is special. The fact that I went back to Claremont was a delight. I was
to do things at Claremont that I'd not done before, but I was back at a campus that I knew. I felt that I fitted-in there. There was a certain sensitivity from the top, I suspect, as I was put into a position where they knew I wouldn't be unhappy or hurt. Other people were given jobs they loathed.

Nobody at Claremont was on any of those committees relating to the future of Claremont. Dr Harry Cohen (lovely man) was the chairperson of the Claremont Campus Committee. He and I worked very, very closely. He was representing what Claremont staff wanted. He was also a member of the College Council. I had my input but it was second-hand. I was always one who, naively, thought that the decisions at the top were right and proper, and that it was quite wrong for me to query them. Now I know that was quite wrong, but it wouldn't have occurred to me to criticise Neil Traylen, or Harry Dettman, for that matter. Doug Jacks was a slightly different kettle of fish because he was the principal of a rival College, Churchlands, which was the up-and-coming, exciting institution. Claremont was the old plodder—old Dobbin!

The other committee was the Buildings Committee. Colin Cook was the chairperson of that. At Claremont this was the time when we put up the Thomas Sten building. That library resource centre, I think, is something that the College can be proud of. But for that building, Claremont might have disappeared earlier. That building and its resources added something to the campus and, perhaps, made it difficult to sell it off to the Japanese or to some other body because of the facilities.

I had my ups and downs, but the ups far outweighed the upsets and the irritations and the hurts. I think the greatest reward in my career was that several principals gave me responsibilities; and, of course, I liked, always, the contact with students. Most of the staff I liked. I had a bit of fun, particularly in the early days, with some of the women staff. I know this sounds pretty minor, but it was fun. Lorrie Liddelow was one. Elizabeth Ford was another. We had the time, in those days, to nip out for an extended lunch hour, and we'd go to the local dress shops and try clothes on and buy them. I'd always gone out on teaching practice. I like to get back to the classroom, like an old war-horse scenting blood! This shows how I'm really out-of-touch with the changes to WACAF and ECU. I am a teacher-educator. I'm not really part of the new scene. Even so, at Claremont, we were always trying to find ways to broaden our base. The only other area we moved into was health education—now the Centre for Public Health. We also, I think because of Tom Ryan and his affiliation with Catholic education, started to move into religious studies. We got a lot of students in the teaching courses from the Catholic schools. We didn't have the expertise or the knowledge or the imagination to do what Doug Jacks did, like move into business studies, which attracted large numbers of students.

I won't say that life was a ball, because occasionally I'd come home and worry about things. Occasionally, I had rows with people. It's not often that I cry, but there were a couple of occasions when I did. On one occasion I just went home
one Friday and I went to the doctor on the Monday. I was away for a week. I was absolutely shattered at something that had happened which I just couldn't cope with, and that is unlike me. We were cutting back financially and cutting back on staff. So muggins me said, 'Right, if we have to cut back on staff I shall set the example'. My secretary was leaving at the time and I said, 'Right, I will do without a secretary, but if I need one, if I can't cope, I would like for this to be reconsidered'. And I did. I worked damned hard. Eventually, I went to the principal and I said, 'Look, I'm just not coping. Could I possibly have some sort of secretarial support?'. I was told, 'Yes', and I expected an advertisement to go in the paper. No advert went in the paper, and I asked, 'What's happened?'. I found the finance committee had decided I could do without one. I just collapsed. Firstly, I got a shock, because I was generally supported by my superiors. Secondly, I just couldn't face the situation. I did eventually get a secretary. I think it was argued that at my status I should have one. But it taught me a lesson. I thought, I am never going to set myself up like that again. You take and you keep! I know that is rather an unfortunate philosophy, but this episode gave me a shock.

It’s interesting to reflect on the ways in which I reacted to different situations in my career. My mother was ambitious for me, and I always did what she wanted me to do. I was four when she thought I was going to be an Eileen Joyce, so I learned to play the piano! I was never talented. I was reasonable. I played the organ for about twenty years. I was a reasonable practitioner. But as my mother said (she did play-off my brother and myself a little bit!) she always knew who was playing the piano because Robert played with feeling and Lorraine played with technical proficiency. So, at the age of sixteen I was travelling to Modern School every day, doing my Leaving, and at seven o’clock I was up at the Convent practising so that Sister Mechtilde knew that I was practising. She was in the chapel. Now, another child would have revolted and said, ‘I’m not going to do it’. It’s in my nature, to do what I’m told! At the end of it all, it comes back to my Mum!

When I think of the women who had a profound effect on my educational outlook, three stand out. They were all wardens of women students at Graylands! Lesley Graham (my first teacher at Princess May Girls’ School) was an excellent role model. Dot (Dolly) Newton was a caring and compassionate teacher and Edith Westhoven was warm-hearted and capable. My move from Graylands to Claremont was eased because of the invaluable assistance given by Mary Moir. At Claremont, the Junior Primary ladies, Thelma Jones and Joy Jones, dispensed lots of sympathy and advice with tea. More recently, Brenda Buchanan has helped me retain a sense of proportion in a changing world.

Looking back, I would have quite liked to have been in an academic ivory tower reading and doing research into some aspect of ancient, medieval or modern history, perhaps even modern politics. I think my mistake was not to go on to get higher academic qualifications because you cannot, in this world, expect to hold
a high position academically unless you have got those two little letters, 'Dr', in front of your name. I really love teaching. I thought I was a natural. I didn't realise how hopeless I was until I went to Midland Junction and got these boys who didn't want to be there! Now that WACAE has become Edith Cowan University, it is important to have people with academic credibility in senior positions. What I hope is that the women with academic credibility get on the committees and have their say. I think I've probably had my fill of power, and the benefits and the problems that power brings. Now I look forward to a long, quiet retirement with some association with the University through the Edith Cowan University Alumni Association because I am convinced that former graduates can make a significant contribution to ECU's development.
MAY O'BRIEN

talks to
Verna Voss and Janina Trotman

May O'Brien was born in 1933 at Patricia, in the Eastern Goldfields, Western Australia. Her mother was an Aboriginal woman of the Wonggutha nation. May was the first self-identified Aboriginal woman to become a teacher in Western Australia. She was later appointed to a number of State and national positions in Aboriginal educational policymaking. In 1991, in recognition of her work, she was awarded an inaugural Edith Cowan University Fellowship and is a recipient of a British Empire Medal. May has been chair of the Western Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Council since 1997.

I was born at Patricia, via Edjudina, about seventy kilometres north-east of Kalgoorlie. It was a gold mining town and a sheep station, but it's a ghost town now. We were desert people, bush people, so I can't really say when my mother was born because we weren't allowed to be born in hospitals. Our births are not recorded but information from the community indicates that I was born on about the 20 May 1933. I believe my mother was barely a teenager when I was born. My father deserted me at birth. He is non-Aboriginal – an Anglo-Australian. I'm the eldest in that family and my full name was Lorna May Miller. However, I was born in the days when the police removed part-Aboriginal children from their parents, so I used to have my name changed that many times I really didn't know what it was. The Old People used to call me Lorna but when I was taken to Mount Margaret Mission my name was changed to May, because there was another girl there called Lorna.

I'm part of the Stolen Generation of Aboriginal children. I was taken from my family and admitted to Mount Margaret Mission in August 1938. I was five years and three months old. I remember that, when I heard that the police were looking for me, I'd go bush and hide. If it was too late to go bush, because sometimes the police would come on you unawares, the adults would wrap us in their
swags to hide us. Sometimes, I'd be taken to stay with the Crocker family. They would look after me until it was all over. Through them I learnt a bit of English, like 'Yes', 'No', and 'Go to the toilet', and everyday things like that. I also knew the language from my mother's side. At Mount Margaret four languages and dialects were spoken. There was not much bonding between my mother and myself because, as a little child, I thought she didn't want me. She kept my half-sister Thelma, and she'd come spasmodically to pick me up but I spent my time with many people and families. I could never understand the reasons why when I was young.

I was at Mount Margaret Mission from 1938 until 1950. I liked being there but I missed being with my group. It was a good mission, but there were lots of rules and regulations. The government of the day made decisions for me. The government was our 'mother', particularly the commissioner for Native Affairs. He made decisions for us about who we should marry and what would be our outcome in life. Aboriginal adults were treated as children. That was the thinking of the day. No matter how old you were you were still a child in the eyes of non-Aboriginal people. We attended the mission school under Mrs Bennett. We used to go to school for about two hours a day. There were a hundred children at Mount Margaret, so the school day was shared so that everyone received some kind of education. All the young children would go in the morning and the seniors in the afternoons. They weren't qualified teachers, but they were very good. We got our first government teacher in 1949. His name was Mr Wedd. I was a monitor there when he was appointed. I think that was the reason I was able to cash-in on enrolling at the College.

In 1950, Mr Middleton became the new commissioner at the Department of Native Affairs. He realised that Aboriginal children throughout Western Australia were deprived of compulsory education and he wanted to give Aboriginal people an opportunity to further their education. So he established a hostel in Perth. Then he visited all the Aboriginal reserves, communities and missions to identify Aboriginal girls who would benefit from further education. Four girls from Mount Margaret were given the opportunity to reside at the hostel in Alvan Street, Mount Lawley. We didn't know at the time that people didn't want us in the area, but we found out later. There were lots of things written about Aboriginal people coming into that suburb because it was one of the suburbs in its day. I first came to Perth at the tail-end of the six o'clock curfews for Aboriginal people. We had to get permission to go here and there and anywhere. We were allowed to go to the pictures once a week, but I had come from a mission and had been taught to believe that all pictures were wicked, so I didn't go. Instead we went to church services called Campaigners for Christ.

I was seventeen-turning-eighteen when I went to Perth Girls'. I must have been the oldest pupil in the school! Come the first day, off I trotted! I was so excited about going to high school. I had to wear this ugly uniform, you know, box pleat, with a belt around the middle. I was a real podgy thing. With that belt tied
around my middle! Looked like the shape of a butternut pumpkin! I had to wear shoes all day, which I didn’t when I was at Mount Margaret. (I don’t blame the mission that we didn’t have shoes. We were too poor – they weren’t rich either). I was too scared to go to school on my own. So I made sure that the person who was looking after us at Alvan House took us. I went up the stairs and into this big hallway. The first thing they had was a type of service at which Miss Wright, the headmistress, made the announcement that all the first years were to stay back in the hall and all the others could return to their classrooms.

We had to do this IQ test. I looked at it and thought they are trying to trick us with words. English was my second language and I wasn’t used to the structure of questions. I thought I had done all right, but next morning there was a knock on my classroom door and the prefect said, ‘May Miller is wanted up in the principal’s office’. As we were walking along the prefect said, ‘Are you in trouble?’. I said, ‘I don’t know! I don’t know what I’ve done’. I went in and knocked on the door. Miss Wright said, ‘Come in’. She was scratching around looking for my results. She looked over her glasses at me and she said, ‘May Miller, you didn’t do too well in your IQ test. Because you are seventeen-turning-eighteen, you’re the oldest pupil in Western Australia at a high school’. She said, ‘I’ve made arrangements with the Department of Native Affairs for you to return home to Mount Margaret Mission’. They were the saddest words I’ve ever heard. I sat there stunned and numbed. Immediately, all these thoughts came into my head, ‘What would all the other kids say and all the people at Mount Margaret?’.

I knew what would happen. The siding at Morgans was eight miles away from the mission. The missionaries went in and got the goods and I’d be in the truck coming back with them. I knew what everybody would say, ‘Oh! You’re a failure, failure, failure!’ As I was sitting there I didn’t hear any more of what Miss Wright was saying to me. All I knew was that I was going back to the mission on the first stream train out of Perth on Wednesday. I knew I had to do something drastic so I borrowed some money off one of the girls at the school and ran across the road to make a telephone call. At the end of that telephone call was a Dr Robertson – director-general of education. The telephone booth was out of bounds but I just didn’t care that I broke the rules, nor did I care what might happen to me. All that worried me was that I was going home as a failure. All I wanted to be was a teacher and everything had come tumbling down. All I could think was, ‘I am not going to be a teacher’. I knew what I was going back to. I would be going back to work as a servant for someone – washing and cleaning and being a domestic servant. As the Native Affairs people called it in those days – I would be ‘in service’ to other people. If there was any washing and cleaning to be done, I wanted to do it for May Miller, not for somebody else!

I felt really knocked out, so the only thing I could do was ring this stranger who was the big boss of education at the time. I knew how to get in touch with Dr Robertson because somebody had given me a little address book for Christmas. I think it was from the Methodist Church at Kalgoorlie that was sponsoring me while I was at the mission. I went around getting everybody’s address – big noting myself! We had come down a couple of weeks before school started and
on the desk of the person in charge was this card, all covered in plastic, that contained all the main addresses and one of them was Dr Robertson’s. So I had copied it down. When I rang he said, ‘Oh! You’re the native girl at Alvan House from one of the missions’. I said, ‘Yes. My name’s May Miller’. I kept telling him my name all the time so that he wouldn’t forget who was ringing him. I told him my problem. ‘Don’t worry’, he said, ‘I’ll talk to Native Welfare. You stay there and we’ll test you in six months time when you get to know English and when you get used to our ways’. I thanked him but I said, ‘Don’t tell anyone because I’d get in trouble at Alvan House or with Mr Middleton – the commissioner for Native Affairs at that time’ – and he kept his promise.

I had to do what I did because my hopes had been dashed. I didn’t tell the other girls about me having to go home. Some of them still don’t know but they’ll find out now through this story and in my autobiography! What else could I have done? If I’d gone back people would have said, ‘Ah! You think you are smart! You come back a munjong, a numbskull, idiot! Don’t know anything – think you know everything! You come back as nobody’. I also knew the alternatives. The only way girls left Mount Margaret Mission was either to be a domestic or to get married, and I didn’t want to do either. Coming from the bush I had learnt so much at Mount Margaret. I had learned that there was this big world out there. We thought that we were the only Aborigines alive at that time! We thought the only white people there were, were these people that we had come in contact with. We didn’t see that we were living in this huge world because we had been living in the bush. I wanted to become a teacher and I thought, ‘If I go back to the mission, that’s the end of the career that I wanted’. I had to make that phone call and it helped me. I’ll tell you what else it taught me: If I want something done don’t bother about people down the bottom, go straight to the top!

I was at Perth Girls’ for two years. After the War, the Education Department was short of teachers and, more so, short of teachers for Aboriginal children. They were calling in anyone to come and teach. So, I thought, ‘Well, why not have a go?’. We had to qualify by passing a test. I passed with flying colours, and I subsequently did extremely well at College. I did the Junior Primary course at Claremont Teachers’ College. We got a good grounding in how to become a teacher, how to go about teaching phonics and how to teach all the different lessons like spelling and reading. So when we went to schools we knew what to do.

I loved being at Claremont. It was because I was able to make my own decisions and do the things that I wanted to do. I was free from having other people making rules and decisions for me. I made mistakes, and I had to learn from those mistakes, but everything was really and truly joyous for me. It was a relief. It was like I had been in a cage for a long time and suddenly they’d opened the doors. At Claremont, there were all these things that I could do to achieve my aim and goal, which was to become a teacher.

At Claremont I had so many friends. There were many, many people who made my experience there exciting and worthwhile. Of course, the student group that
I was in the Teachers’ Christian Fellowship. Miss May Marshall was a favourite of mine. She was my staff adviser, and she was more than kindness itself. It wasn’t just that she advised me at College, but she invited me to her home in Claremont. I was able to visit her, have meals and stay overnight. She was a real help and a real friend. Other students didn’t always see her in that same light, but she had a heart of gold and she certainly made life for me at Claremont exciting and worthwhile.

When I was at College, and when I was at high school, we had the Coolabaroo League operating in Perth. It organised social activities for Aboriginal people, because we found it rather difficult to participate in some of the social functions at the time. I can remember the times when Aboriginal children, even in the early sixties, could only go to the pictures as long as they came in after the lights had gone off and sat at the back. They had to leave before the lights came on. So a lot of those kids missed out on what happened at the end of the film! The Coolabaroo League was also a rather political thing where we grouped together to fight for equal rights for Aboriginal people. The main agenda we had at the time was the inclusion of Aboriginal people as Australians. We wanted the Australian people to recognise Aboriginal people and to include them in the census. We weren’t counted as Australians before. The Coolabaroo League remained in operation until the early sixties, I think. Then the Aboriginal Advancement Council came into being. At the time I didn’t have a very clear understanding of what was happening in education at a State or national level. The only thing we knew was that in the past Aboriginal people had been excluded from schools and, now that education was compulsory, we were mainly fighting to exist and to be recognised.

I was the first self-identified Aboriginal, female teacher in Western Australia. There was another person there before me, but he didn’t identify as an Aboriginal person at that time. My first school was Mount Margaret Mission. I taught there for five years, then I was transferred to the Methodist Mission at Mogumber. I was there for two years and the superintendent said, ‘Look, I want you to have further experience and teach non-Aboriginal children’. Then there was a dilemma in the Education Department about Aboriginal people teaching white kids. In the early days Aboriginal kids couldn’t sit next to white kids. The principals had the power to tell Aboriginal children not to come to school any more because they had been sitting next to Mrs Brown’s children! They asked different principals if they could take me and, in 1961, Mount Hawthorn Infant School said, ‘Yes’. I had a marvellous time there. I felt at home because I taught ethnic children there. In those days they called them ‘New Australians’. My class was full of Greeks, Italians and Yugoslavs. I also had some Aboriginal children. I was so pleased to be able to help children who had the same experiences that I did as a child. After ten years at Mount Hawthorn I went to Nollamara. I was there for eight years.

I’ve always been interested in politics because it’s important to everyone but in 1972, when Labor came into power, I started to get really interested. The
Whittam government came in and Kim Beazley (Senior) was the minister for education. He invited Professor Karmel to investigate what was happening to education in Australia, but he didn’t do much on the Aboriginal component. He said he did that purposely, because he felt that, as a non-Aboriginal person, it was not his role to tell the government about Aboriginal education. He said that the people who should be talking to the government on these matters were the Aboriginal people. So Kim Beazley (Senior) set up the Schools’ Commission under which there was a section on Aboriginal education. That was the first time ever that the Australian government had asked Aboriginal people to have a say in the education of their children. I was teaching at Nollamara then and I was asked to be on the Consultative Group to the Schools’ Commission. It meant going to Canberra every second Friday. We travelled on Friday, then on Saturday and Sunday we met and we came home by Sunday night. It took out one day of school time each fortnight so the Education Department thought they needed to do something to help me. They also wanted to put into place in Western Australia the government’s ideas on Aboriginal education. So I left Nollamara Primary in August 1978 and was transferred to the Education Department to be the consultant on Aboriginal education.

There wasn’t a written description for me to follow but there was a kind gentleman next door working in the secondary area, his name was Jim Hunt, and I asked him what I should do. He said, ‘Write your own agendas for what you want to do’. So that’s what I did. It was the best advice I ever had. The Commonwealth wanted to set-up education committees throughout Australia, but Western Australia was the only State, I am sorry to say, that was holding back on that issue. At that time each State got fifteen thousand dollars to do this, which was a lot of money, compared to today. So I established ACOEs (Aboriginal Committees on Education) in different districts throughout the State’s regional areas. People still talk about the Aboriginal Committees on Education because they were the forerunners of education committees throughout this State.

Toby Metcalfe was acting as superintendent of Aboriginal education at the time I started working in the department. Toby was a gentleman. He was very kind and gave so much of his time to helping other people. The students of Warburton, the central reserves, got to know him very well because we used to get lots of visits from them when they came on excursions to Perth. Jim Quinn was superintendent of primary education. I had worked under Jim Quinn at Mogumber and I knew he wouldn’t ask me to do anything that he wouldn’t do himself. I grew in knowledge under both those people. I will always be grateful to them for helping me in my time of need when my career was changing direction.

I held the position in the Department from August 1978. I started off as the consultant on Aboriginal education. Then I became a senior education officer, and, after that, superintendent of Aboriginal education. The last position mainly came about because in 1983 I applied for a Churchill Fellowship. I was
interviewed, but I nearly didn’t get it because I tried to withdraw my application when the interview date conflicted with work I had to do with the Aboriginal community at Roebourne. I thought that came first. So I rang Dr Vickery, who was director-general of education at that time, and I told him, ‘I’m withdrawing my application because I won’t be able to commit myself to the interview date. I’ve already planned this meeting and they’re expecting me’. He said, ‘Oh, that’s easily done. We’ll interview you by tape, by TV’. So that’s what happened! I won the Churchill Fellowship and spent three to four months in the USA, Canada, and England. It was heavy going. Every school day I was busy, busy, busy. When I came back and completed my report for the Churchill Fellowship, Dr Vickery rang and asked me to go and see him in his office. He said, ‘How long have you got to complete your commitment for the Churchill Fellowship?’. I said, ‘I’ve got one more week. I’m having my report typed and printed. Then I’ll be finished’. He said, ‘I want you to finish it because next week you are going to be acting superintendent of Aboriginal education’. I held the position from 1985 to 1988.

Within the Aboriginal community they were very pleased with what I was doing, because I was getting them together and bringing them to workshops in Perth, and I was getting their views on where education should be going for their children. But in the non-Aboriginal scene, when I want to assess some of the teachers, I felt the women were the ones who didn’t want to come near me. I’d go in a classroom and it would be the men who’d say, ‘Hello May, how are you?’. Yet the women held back, and that upset me a lot. One woman came to see me at the motel! I was staying at and I said, ‘You didn’t seem friendly and we’re friends. You know, I was disappointed in you. We’ve been friends for a long time and you’re a teacher’. She said, ‘I didn’t want to be seen to be crawling so you would give me good marks’. So that was the barrier. It didn’t worry the men one little bit! They were pleased to be able to say, ‘I know May’. So that was the difference. It was strange for me and I’ll tell you I was most disappointed because I was a supporter of women’s issues and I still am. My own gender was holding back. But I learnt lots from that so I was pleased because it toughened me up a bit. People who are friends may not be your real friends tomorrow. So you find out who your best and real friends are. I have a lot of those, who remain my friends today.

I got married in January 1972. When I got engaged I talked it over with Jim Quinn and told him that I wanted to continue teaching. I was at the right place at the right time because by then women did not have to resign when they married. I just wrote a letter to say I wanted to continue teaching. But it was not so long ago that women did not have equal pay. The guy next door to me was getting more pay than I did and I thought I worked jolly hard. The men also saw it as an injustice so we didn’t rub it in. They felt the same because a lot of them had wives who were teachers so they saw it as an injustice. It’s also not so long ago we weren’t allowed to wear slacks at school. I think things are better for women in some ways, but not in others, because there is still some hostility when women become superintendents, directors and things of that nature. I think there is really a lack of understanding. It’s also to do with people who have
agencies as well, because then our children will see there is hope for them. They'll be proud to see their own people in those positions. I know I will!

Our kids are saying to themselves, 'Why do I have to go on to school?', because they haven't got many role models in senior positions. I would like to see more of our kids completing Year Twelve, and then going on to either university or doing vocational and education training, which is just as important as going to university. We have to tear down the barriers that are stopping Aboriginal people from getting to the top, so that our students in their different communities will say, 'Look what they're doing. I want to do that too'. Of course, what teachers teach at school only happens if parents and communities work together. If they're not participating it's not going to happen! I haven't come across an Aboriginal person who has said that they don't want the best education for their kids. They want the best! And so we must make sure that our students, and indeed all kids, get the best education possible. We have the best teachers in the world here in Australia - I found that out on my Churchill Fellowship travels. They play hard, yet they work hard as well. But we need to reward our teachers a lot more, and acknowledge that they are doing great work.

Teaching is one of the most rewarding jobs on earth because you have the opportunity to mould students' lives. You have the opportunity to help them set goals for themselves and to achieve them. It is a privilege to be able to work with children, because you have the children as long as the parents do and, whether parents like it or not, the children tend to listen to what their teachers say. This is why we want good and dedicated teachers. We want teachers who have a vision for the students they are teaching. I hope teachers will not only concentrate on the students being better than the other person, but also on being the best for themselves.

I don't really work for honours because I am accountable, really, to myself and to God, but I thank the people who've nominated me for awards, and I appreciate their thought. Early in my life I won the British Empire Medal. Then I became an inaugural Fellow of Edith Cowan University in 1991. I was happy that I was recognised but, really, I should be awarding Claremont College for where I am today! I won a Churchill Fellowship and one of the inaugural John Curtin Medals in 1998. An Aboriginal community nominated me for their own award: the 'Marlu', which is a Kangaroo Award. I have also been included in the Education Department's Hall of Fame. I owe what I am not only to the Wonggutha people, who wanted us to have a good education, because they wanted us to know what the non-Aboriginal person was saying, but also to the missionaries at Mount Margaret and to God's goodness.
Lucy Mary Callaly was born in Dublin in 1935, the only girl in a family of five children. She came to Western Australia to join the Dominican Order. Her name in religion is Sister Declan Callaly. Since training at Claremont she has devoted much of her time to rural education.

I guess I was the leader in the family. Some of my earliest recollections are of trying to teach my brothers even before I went to school. I always wanted to be a teacher. I'd never thought of doing anything else. To begin with, I didn't think of being a religious teacher, but I suppose the seeds of a religious vocation were sown at school where I first began to think of going to the Dominican Missions in Africa.

I attended the local, what we called national, school. It was a mixed school with boys and girls in the one classroom. The school was attached to the parish, so we were taught religion and prepared for the sacraments. I always loved school, particularly the academic side. I wasn't taught by Sisters until secondary school. My memories of those women are of dedicated, enthusiastic teachers who gave me a great love for history and literature. I attended secondary school at the Dominican College, Eccles Street, which was one of the top schools in Dublin. I loved it!

At school we had visits from Dominican Sisters from all over the world, particularly during what was called Holy Year, when mother-generals from various orders visited Ireland. I was very impressed by Mother Laurence Prendiville and Sister Ignatius Prendiville, who visited our school and encouraged anyone who was interested in joining the Dominican Order to come to Western Australia. I had already acquired a great love for the Order so I came out here to Western Australia with those Sisters. It seemed to me that their
message was a very simple one and I was fired by their enthusiasm and their zeal.

I completed my secondary education in Western Australia, at Dongara, studying for my Leaving Certificate under the guidance of Sister Mary Aloysius O'Neill. She was also our novice mistress and a wonderful teacher. It was my postulancy year and, after twelve months, I was received into the order as a novice. The next year was spent in the novitiate. Life in Dongara was secluded but very happy. I've always enjoyed my life in the convent. I had a very happy novitiate. I suppose I was fortunate to be in a place like Dongara. It was a boarding school with a farm attached to it, so there was plenty of good food.

At the beginning of 1953, three of us were sent down to join some other Sisters already studying at Claremont Teachers' College. The decision to go there was made by my superiors. As a private student there was a nominal enrolment fee. I can't remember the sum because I wasn't really responsible for that. We weren't bonded, as the other students were, so we were quite free to go back to our own schools. I recall going on teaching practice to our schools at Inglewood and Scarborough, and to the Sisters of Mercy School in Victoria Square.

Claremont was chosen for me because it was the only teachers' college in Western Australia at that time. We were just about bursting at the seams. We had very big groups and crowded lecture rooms. I enrolled for general primary teaching. In our second year, in 1954, most of the women were channelled into Infant Method, so our primary teaching group was made up, I think, of about thirty-three men and only four other women beside we three Sisters. It seemed to be the thing that women went into Infant Method, but we Sisters wanted to do the general primary course because we knew we had to be ready to take any primary class when we left College. I found the years at Claremont very enjoyable. I lived at the convent in Inglewood and travelled out to Claremont each day. The Sisters gave great encouragement and support. In particular, I remember Sister Marie Therese Sharman who, like Sister Mary Aloysius O'Neill, had been a teacher in government schools before she joined the Order. She was of great assistance to us particularly in preparing our lessons during teaching practice.

We Sisters were living, I suppose, what you would call a secluded lifestyle. We didn't engage in any of the social activities in the College or the phys. ed. program. When I first arrived at Claremont College it seemed to me to be a very secular place. It struck me that we went through a whole day sometimes without ever the mention of God or religion. Remember, I had been in a Catholic school system and our novitiate. At College there weren't any prayers. There was a Scripture class for students. I think various ministers came to take those classes. Monsignor Bourke came to take us one afternoon a week. He later became director of Catholic education and then federal director of Catholic education.

In 1953-4, students were treated differently from today. College was very much an extension of high school. I can remember that we had assemblies periodically
at which we'd be admonished for leaving our lunch papers on the lawn. The boys would be reproved for revving up their motor bikes after a social, and there were other complaints, which I don't think would be brought to the notice of present-day tertiary students. There seemed to be a great rapport between lecturers and students. We did sit up and listen. I think of all of them as being very dedicated and inspiring lecturers and tutors. One in particular, I remember, was Mr Mossenson who continued his lecturing until the next lecturer was on the platform, anxious to take over from him. There were people like Miss Marshall, the women's warden, who showed a great concern for all the women students. She also exercised care where we were concerned. It was accepted that we wouldn't be participating a great deal in extra-curricula activities. I think College provided us with a very good basic training for the world of work. I enjoyed the academic program because there were subjects that contributed to our personal development and general education, as well as various method courses, which provided a background for our teaching careers. Those latter subjects imbued me with a confidence that carried me through my early years of teaching.

I was assigned to my first teaching post at the Dominican Ladies' College in Dongara, to teach middle and upper-primary classes. The Teachers' College didn't actually prepare me for those composite classes. I had the challenge of teaching four classes all at once. Fortunately, I had a very good principal. She had been my novice-mistress and she gave me tremendous assistance. She helped me with any small problems I had. I think that's the reason why I've never looked back. She didn't ever come into the classroom. We had to sort out our own problems there. But she gave excellent suggestions on how to draw up a teaching program and teach. I can remember that, after my first day, she reminded us that we were there for the students. The students weren't there for us. We were there to serve them and to assist them in learning and enriching their life and helping them to develop as persons. Maybe it was a gentle reminder to me who was so enthusiastic about the joy of teaching but, of course, that joy helped me to be a better teacher.

We had boarders at Dongara. It was a boarding school for girls from all around the Murchison, particularly from the sheep stations. We also had some students from neighbouring farms. The day scholars would have been mostly Anglicans, or denominations other than Catholic. These girls intended to go to colleges in Perth for their secondary education. They were there, I suppose, because our curriculum included music, speech and commercial subjects, which weren't available at the local State school. As teachers we also had duties with the boarders. It was a full day! The boarders had to be wakened up in the mornings and brought down to breakfast. They had to be supervised during meals, in sports and recreation times, and during private study periods. I was very young then, not much older than some of the final-year girls. I turned twenty that year, and some of those girls were seventeen.

The girls also did what we called house duties. We swept around the College after breakfast in the mornings. I can remember having that delightful duty! The
principal spoke to me once about some duty that hadn't been done for some time and I said, 'Sister, I told a girl to do that duty'. I then realised that I had to remind students every day while they were young. I really can't remember any particular incident about my first job but it was a challenge because we were involved with the students for just about twenty-four hours a day. There must have been some time for myself because I had enrolled for my Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Western Australia. During my first teaching year I studied English and philosophy in the evenings. I passed those two subjects. I enjoyed them because they were a nice break, but it took me ten years to complete my degree externally.

I can remember the challenge of preparing my social studies lessons. When I was at Teachers' College, I realised I was one of many new Australians, so it didn't really worry me that I didn't know what went on at Broome or what the population of Sydney was. There were many others in those lecture rooms at that time, who also didn't know all those facts. Then, when I got to Dongara, I had to teach Standards Three to Six, and prepare lessons about the Riddle of the Rivers and various excursions that explorers made round this State. Having studied European history and the history of Ireland, which went back almost, I suppose, to the beginning of history, it seemed to me that we made so much out of so little with Australian history. I spent half the night trying to work out who met who on what bend of the river; and what was in a cave that an explorer went into; and where the Aborigines were about to spear the explorers.

In 1956 I was assigned to Morawa, where I spent two years. I had my twenty-first birthday there. There, once again, I taught the middle and upper-primary classes, both boys and girls. I also had all the post-primary children. It was only the second year of operation of the convent in Morawa. I enjoyed life there just as much as I had enjoyed Dongara. It was a very different set-up in that we were more involved with the local community. Dongara was a boarding school, so we didn't see the parents very much. I got a great deal of encouragement from the parents and local community in Morawa. They would have known I was young and inexperienced. There was a great deal of enthusiasm and community spirit which I suppose was characteristic of most country towns in the wheat-belt area.

After two years at Morawa I was transferred to Gwelup. I found that a very different sort of experience. The students were all sons and daughters of market gardeners. The children there loved school because it meant a break from working in the market gardens, so they rarely missed a day of school. In fact, I think some of them used to come up to the school on public holidays! They wouldn't tell their parents they were on holiday because it meant that they got out of working in the garden. Some of them worked very, very hard even before they came to school. I think we had one Australian student in the school. All the others were Italians and Slavs. They were really delightful children to teach. Later it gave me great pleasure to teach some of the sons and daughters of those children I taught at Gwelup.
I later returned to Dongara and became mistress of boarders. I had a special room off the dormitories. It meant that if someone was sick in the middle of the night, I was called. I had to attend to people who had colds and flu, and to the younger boarders. It was a fairly responsible task and a very busy one. I was still studying that year. I don't know how I managed to fit everything in — teaching, studying and caring for the boarders. I enjoyed it. I was still very young and the challenge of the job, I suppose, even invigorated me a little!

My next teaching post, in 1962-3, was Leonora. In one way I had longed to go on what we used to call the missions because our Sisters in the early days had taught at places like Cue, Meekatharra, Day Dawn, Reedy, Yalgoo and all of those faraway places which seemed romantic in a way. I thought I'd love to go to teach in one of the goldfields towns. I can remember it took me three trains to get to Leonora. We travelled all night from Dongara to Perth. We stayed in Perth that day then caught the overnight train to Kalgoorlie. After that, we took the train to Leonora. That took all day, even though it's only one hundred and fifty-seven miles. We just chugged along in that train. I think everybody had their own little compartment and we just chugged, chugged and stopped at every little town. Even the ghost towns still seemed to have the pubs operating, so everybody got out at those places and went across for a drink. That first time I went up, the train broke down at Malcolm. We were stuck sitting there in the boiling sun of January until people came out from Leonora to take us into town. That long journey to Leonora was fascinating for me. I was fascinated by the fact that we could travel for so long without seeing any sign of human habitation. We passed through places, which, I later learned, had been very busy towns, with their own newspapers and hospital. I think that in the days when our Sisters first went up to Leonora there were eleven hotels operating between Gwalia and Leonora (Gwalia was the gold mining town and Leonora the twin town) and a tram operated between the two towns.

The school at Leonora looked like a huge shed, and the convent appeared to be made of corrugated iron. It seemed to be leaning. The convent was, in fact, made of corrugated iron and hessian and it wasn't in a state of good repair. I mean, one was likely to lift up a window and see it fall out, or open a door and see it come off its hinges. But we seemed to get by. As well as teaching I looked after the sacristy and cleaned the church. I was also responsible for the cleaning of my own classroom. In those days, the students just took it for granted that they would help. We had a roster system. Two students would sweep and somebody else would dust. There was always plenty of dust! I also looked after the boarders. The boarders at Leonora were children who came in from the sheep stations where they had been studying by correspondence. When it got to the stage when the parents felt that the lessons were too much for them, they considered it time to pack them off to boarding school. Our own conditions weren't wonderful so that made it a little more difficult looking after those children. However, they just took it for granted and there weren't ever any objections raised about the conditions.
The school had about sixty students from Grade One to post-primary. They were lovely students to teach. I found them very resourceful. Like most country kids, they were able to do things for themselves. Many were Italians and Slavs, who were anxious to learn. If we had a loose floor board one of the bigger boys would bring in a hammer and a nail and hammer it down. It was just bare, stony ground there. I think we had one tree in the playground—a pencil-slim gum tree. I can remember them calling in one of the workers from the Shire to grade one of the playing areas. Then the children ran around with a tin and a little sand and marked a netball court and the football area so that they could organise games with the State school.

We taught music, speech and some typing there. You see, in most of those country towns, and especially in the early days, our Sisters taught subjects which weren't available at the government school. We got very little in the way of school fees, so it was one way of supporting ourselves. We didn't receive a stipend in those days and depended on the generosity of the people in the towns where we taught. One day an elderly lady knocked at the classroom door. She had become a professional singer and she'd made this trip back to Leonora where she had been a student. She wanted to see the room in which she had been taught singing by one of our Sisters way back in the early days. That made me realise just what the Sisters had done over the years. The convent school in those days had been the centre of culture for many of the townspeople.

I continued with my studies. I'm sure I was the only person who studied Latin and Greek in Leonora! I can remember having conjugations and declensions hanging up round my room. I found Greek very challenging because I hadn't had the opportunity to do the bridging course. I'd never done any Greek before, but the Sister who was there with me that year (she was the prioress and the principal of the school) had studied languages so she did the early part of the course with me and helped me with the grammar. It was a fairly full life, but I still got time to recreate and enjoy myself. We often went out on the weekends and visited some of the ghost towns. There was an elderly lady up there who knew the history of the place extremely well and she often came out with us on Sundays. Leonora was a very interesting place but it became run down after the mine closed. I still go back to Laverton to visit a former pupil who married a prospector. I have even used a metal detector but I haven't struck it lucky!

I moved around a lot during my teaching career. There was always a reason for moving on, but maybe I wasn't always told what it was. In those days one was assigned, one was sent, one didn't ask why, but I was always happy. Sometimes I initially regretted having to move off because I had become attached to one group of people and students. After those years in the wheat-belt and the goldfields, and getting to know Western Australia first hand, I was moved down to the city. By this time, I had completed my Bachelor of Arts and I was appointed principal of Holy Rosary Primary School in Doubleview. It was about the biggest Catholic primary school in Perth at that time so that meant a further broadening of my experience. I found the children very different because in the country they
were more resourceful and seemed to look after themselves a great deal more. At Doubleview, I found that parents drove them to school and picked them up. We had a Parents and Friends' organisation which made decisions that in country schools were often made by the students themselves. I had very cooperative parents, many of whom were professionals and academics who wanted the best in the program that was offered. I had to keep up-to-date with everything, including all the changes that were taking place in the curriculum.

I also discovered that, as principal, I couldn't promote my own ideas very much. I found that, if I promoted my own ideas, the teachers who were working with me didn't use their own resources or their own initiative. I found that, if I wanted them to use their own talents, I had to keep all my own ideas in the background and make it possible for them to be as individual as possible. I soon saw that my role was to make it possible for teachers to carry out their projects and ideas. To begin with, we had only one lay teacher, but when I left Holy Rosary four years later, there were four. It was a great learning experience for me there. I was a full-time teacher with forty girls in Grades Six and Seven and no secretary or support teachers. The administrative work was done after school and on weekends.

After 1969, I worked in Catholic secondary schools: Siena, St Thomas Aquinas and Newman College. I finished at Newman College, Churchlands, in 1991 after fifteen years teaching religious education, English and English literature. In 1992, I took part in a three and a half month pilgrimage course at the International Dominican House of Studies, in Rome. This course involved travel to sites in Italy, Spain and France. We visited places connected with the founder of our Order, St Dominic. This experience broadened my horizons and gave me a deeper appreciation of my Dominican heritage.

When I returned from Europe, I spent eight and a half years teaching religious education and English at the Christian Brothers' Agricultural School in Tardun. It was a boarding school, situated between Morawa and Mullewa, about eighteen kilometres off the road. It catered for boys in Years Eight to Ten. It was isolated and disadvantaged and some of the boys had special needs. I think they were the most challenging but the most fulfilling years of my teaching career. One of my enduring memories is of the dedication of the Brothers who worked for the boys from morning until night without complaint. I think I've left my heart back there and I still yearn for the wide-open spaces and, above all, the friendliness of the boys, the Brothers and the staff.

If I'm very honest, I'd say I enjoyed teaching boys more than girls. They're easier to teach. During my first years at Newman I had classes of Year Ten boys, totalling thirty-plus pupils in most cases. They were at their most awkward age then, physically, and there was always a great deal of noise and racket as they came in, but I really loved teaching them. In my own family I have all brothers, so maybe I understand boys a little better than girls. Perhaps one is a little easier on boys — more patient. Girls seem to learn faster than boys and mature earlier. They seem to be able to cope with concepts and metaphorical language better.
than boys, especially if one has maths-science students doing literature. They take a very literal approach to everything! But boys are much easier to cope with and they're much more cooperative on the whole. Now this is just generally speaking. I've enjoyed teaching girls as well, in fact I favour coeducation.

I can remember once teaching Sean O'Casey's play _Juno and the Paycock_. One of the characters, a Mrs Tancred, mourns the loss of her son, who's been killed in an ambush and she says, 'The pains I suffered bringing you into the world are nothing to the pains I'm suffering now, seeing you out of the world'. I can remember, one day, quoting that to the students and saying that the pains I suffered bringing them into high school were nothing to the pains I was suffering trying to get them out of high school. At the end of the year they gave me a book in which they inscribed, 'Thank you for the pains you suffered', and added the quote from the play, and their names.

In one way, every student is outstanding because no matter how difficult a student is, no matter how challenging, there's always a bond between myself and that student. Partly, I suppose, this is because of my religious vocation. I would hope that I would encourage each student to be the person that God means him or her to be. I like to think that I empower them to use their talents and gifts. One student I remember in particular was the first female premier of Western Australia, Carmen Lawrence. I taught Carmen in Grades Four and Five at Morawa and, later, at Dongara. She was extremely keen and enthusiastic and very bright. In an interview in 1989 she paid tribute to what the Sisters had contributed to life in country towns.

Being a teaching Sister has given me every opportunity to be competent and qualified. I have done various courses and I attended quite a number of adult extension courses at university. The Order always encouraged me to attend seminars and in-service courses. For years there was little interaction between the different orders, but after Vatican II, when some of these rules and regulations about our lifestyle were relaxed a little, we came together a great deal more. People who had expertise in different areas put on courses and we went to as many of those as we could. One of the characteristics of being a Dominican is that one continues with study for the whole of one's life; studies of sacred truth and also study in one's professional area. I think that this was what attracted me to the Order in the very beginning - love of truth. 'Veritas' is, in fact the motto of the Order, and if one loves truth one is anxious for knowledge in every field. I realise that, as a Sister, I was able to do things and teach classes that were very much the male domain in the State schools. I also took it for granted that one studied during school time and holidays. It was only after twenty-five years of teaching that I enjoyed a year off. I went back to Dublin and studied at Trinity College.

My training at Claremont gave me a very solid foundation on which to build. We had lecturers like Miss May Marshall. I don't suppose anybody has taught Infant Method like Miss May Marshall! I mean, one went into the classroom and one really knew how to take an Infant reading lesson. I was fortunate in that I had
primary school training to begin with. I think sometimes that young teachers who leave college and go into teaching in high schools haven’t really got the background that I had. You see, I had all that experience of teaching, gradually building up teaching methods that I found worked. So, by the time I came into secondary school, teaching was second nature to me. I just assume when I go into a class that most of those students want to learn and that I’m there to help them learn. One of the highlights of my teaching career has been the great joy I’ve experienced when I’ve taught a student to overcome some learning difficulty, particularly in reading. It gives one a great deal of satisfaction to give the gift of being able to read and write. The highlights for me were the times when I succeeded in helping students to realise their own talents and their own gifts. One of the things I do each day is to pray for all my students, past and present, and all their families. In a sense, I maintain a spiritual link with them. If young people can see that you care for them and you’re concerned, I think it makes all the difference.
Halina Szuniejko with children in national costume at the Polish ethnic school, Perth, Western Australia, 1994.

'I think it's most important that the children remember where they come from and that they are able to still read, write and speak in Polish, and know some of the culture, traditions, history and geography of Poland'. HALINA SZUNEJKO
Halina Szunejko, the seventh child of Roberta Fietkiewicz and Franciszek Czekalowski, was born in Nowopole, Poland in 1936. Her early years were disrupted by World War II. However, in 1950 her family moved, via Africa, to Australia where Halina trained as a teacher and became an activist in the ethnic schools movement. In 1989 she was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia. She also received a Silver Cross of Merit (1973) and a Gold Cross of Merit (1979) from the Polish Government in Exile and in 1993 the democratic government of the Republic of Poland honoured her as a Member of the Order of Polonia Restituta.

I was born in Nowopole, near Oszmiana, about fifty kilometers from Wilno. My father was a soldier and my mother a dressmaker, but after they got married they had their own farm, which was very small by Australian standards. When the war broke out, in 1939, and Germany invaded Poland life went on as before, to some degree, as we lived on the eastern side of Poland near the Russian border and we were relatively untouched until Russia, too, invaded Poland on the eastern front. Then, in June 1941, we were taken forcibly by the Russians. My father was handcuffed and led away and my mother and the four children were taken to the train station and eventually to Siberia. We were lucky to have survived the trip and the long, hard life in Siberia. When Joseph Stalin declared amnesty, saying that the Poles who were evacuated by the Russians could now go free, the Polish soldiers organised transport and managed to move thousands of Polish people from Russia to Persia (Iran). Later, through the United Nations Refugee Relief Organisation, we were placed in the displaced persons camps in Africa. Some, however, remained in Iran for some time. Towards 1949, Australia was looking for migrants and, as we had a relatively young family, we were selected to come to Australia.
I attended Polish primary school in East Africa. I also spent the first year of high school there. Subsequently, we moved to Perth, Australia, where I attended Santa Maria College for five years. I liked school quite a lot. I enjoyed the learning experience. I recall my biology teacher, Maria Sidor, when I was in first-year high school in Africa. She was the first woman to climb Mount Kilimanjaro! She was fascinating. We all waited for her lessons! When I was doing my secondary schooling at Santa Maria, Sister Mary Claude had a great influence on us; also Sister Mary Bertrand, who was the principal of the College. I think she was the first woman to gain a Master of Arts degree at the University of Western Australia. In those days, I really didn't think that I could make it to become a teacher, but I guess these women had quite a strong influence on me.

My mother was also very supportive. She wasn't a very highly educated person herself because, in her time in Poland, girls used to do Grades One, Two, Three and Four. That was the extent of their education. Mum did some sort of professional training in dressmaking and that became her field. But she was very supportive about her children becoming well-educated. She valued education more than anything else. I guess, having gone through the War and having lost everything, she felt that education was something that you don't have to pack in your suitcase to take with you. It's all in your head. She never ever pushed me. I guess she didn't understand the Australian education system at all, either. So we were really left to our own devices to do whatever was best for ourselves.

When I told my family 'I got into Teachers College', they were thrilled. I think it was quite an honour to become a teacher, especially because, when we came here, I could speak no English. It was extremely hard, but I was so determined, and I knew that my mother valued education to such an extent, that I guess I had a goal in mind. For the first year at Santa Maria we really just sat. There were four of us Polish girls and we sat in the classroom and we just listened more or less to what was going on. We weren't really able to take much part in the lessons, except maybe for maths. We could do that quite well but as far as history and English went, it was a different kettle of fish. I really didn't understand a great deal in the first year there. It was a great struggle and in the third year my friend Mietka Nowak and I sat for our Junior Certificate and we got seven subjects in the Certificate and I think everybody was quite surprised that we achieved it.

Sister Bertrand, I think, was the great mover behind the scenes. She obviously put our nominations in to apply for a teacher's bursary to continue with our Year Eleven and Twelve, and we got that. I guess that was the only way that I was able to remain at school because I am quite convinced that my mother couldn't have afforded to keep me at school for another two years. So a teacher's bursary was really a great boon. I started teacher training in 1955. It was a two-year primary teachers course. I lived at home, but I had a bursary. I obviously paid Mum some board and I had enough for bus fares and texts and so on. I'm quite convinced that I wouldn't have made it without the bursary.
My first impressions of Claremont Teachers' College were that it was big, it was beautiful and it had history. It was very inspiring and I think I was probably determined to make the most of it. In those days at Claremont, it was only just straight lecturing. A lecturer stood up in front and either read from the notes or just spoke from the top of his or her head. There were no handouts and we had to go and research a lot of topics ourselves. I'm not saying that's a bad thing, but we were really left to our own devices quite a lot. There were a couple of lecturers who were quite supportive as far as women go. I found that very good. But I must say there weren't too many rewards and pats on the back. Once I'd set my goal of becoming a teacher, I really think there was no way of me pulling-out or doing something else. I enjoyed it. I can't remember any particular high points or low points at College. I guess the graduation was probably the most important thing. I was really proud of that. We had our graduation ceremony in Winthrop Hall. My mother came with my brother Edmund and sisters Genowefa and Regina. She had to take time off from work because it was during the day. That was wonderful!

The girls at College were expected to do lower primary school teaching, Grades One, Two and Three. The guys were automatically expected to go into Grades Four, Five and Six. I think that kind of expectation was there even for lecturers. We had lady lecturers who took us for primary or Infant practices and teaching strategies. The male lecturers taught what they considered to be the important things. To start off, we had observation lessons at nearby schools and thought those teachers, who could actually teach and have observers, were absolutely marvellous! Also we had two-week teaching practices. The highlight of my two-year training at College was country practice. I happened to go to Narrogin Primary School, and that was just wonderful, to be able to live in the town and teach and observe what was going on was just great. However, I was also terrified when I went on practice. I felt that I wasn't really in control and that the classroom teacher was in control. I'm not sure that I did all that well on practices, so they weren't really that enjoyable. But, when I got my first class and I became my own boss in my own classroom, I really felt good about it. I knew what I wanted and I knew that the only people I had to relate to were my principal and myself.

I did feel different at College because English was my second language. We weren't ever given any opportunity to let anybody know how we felt about it. We were told to assimilate, to become Australian. In effect, it's very difficult to suddenly drop your nationality, forget all about your past and become a part of a society that you don't really fit in to at the moment. You know, in those days it was difficult. We had come from different backgrounds, different customs, different traditions and yet we were told to forget about them. It was very hard. To start off, the lecturers couldn't come to grips with our names. In the two years I was there they were never game to pronounce my name. I thought Czekalowska wasn't such a difficult name. They made no effort whatsoever to pronounce it. In fact, I was very often third or fourth on the list because my name started with
'C' and I was often left out. You know, the Bakers and the Darbies were called out but not Czekalowska. I thought that was strange with my heart pounding, waiting for my name to be called, and nothing happened! It was very disconcerting. Sometimes, when I didn’t know the answer to the question, that was okay. But, lots of the time, I wished that they actually had said my name. In my own teaching, I think it’s very important to be able to pronounce the student’s name. When I talk to them, I get them to tell me three or four times, then say it back to them and they say, ‘Yes. That’s okay’. It’s important you know, if your name is, for example, Ryszard and in English it’s Richard, it’s important that you don’t Anglicise it but you keep it to what it is. Like, I’m Halina and very often people call me Helen, and Helen is not my name.

College prepared me well for general teaching, but when I went out to a small country town, and I had children from different national backgrounds, I had to draw on my own experience, because College did not prepare me. I remember having a few Aboriginal, Italian and Polish children in my class. I had to draw on my own resources to try and cope with a multicultural classroom, although, in those days, it was just ‘New Australians’, as they were called. My first teaching appointment was at Ewington, near Collie. In those days it wasn’t even on the map. I was really quite stunned when I was told that ‘Accommodation is available in Collie Hotel’. So I knew it must be somewhere close! I had to be there for two years and, really, they were the most wonderful two years that I’ve had. It was a lovely, two-teacher school. There were only two classrooms and the little shed where the children had their lunch and, of course, the toilet facilities. There was no lawn. It was pretty gravelly and yet we spent quite a lot of time outside playing with the children and making the most of the facilities that we had, which were very minimal. I had Grades One, Two and Three and I had twenty-seven children in my class. It was quite a poor community. Some of the children came to school with no shoes on. I guess they were adequately fed, but they were mainly miners’ children and there wasn’t a great amount of money at home to clothe them as well as feed them.

They were two wonderful years. We had very supportive parents and they expected us to give of our best and look after the children. But I don’t think they put great demands on us in the way that we were teaching. I guess, being fresh out of College, one had the latest ideas in teaching and we were very conscious of providing our own teaching aids because there was nothing in the school apart from electricity. I don’t recall ever having even a gestetner or one of those spirit duplicators. There was nothing like that. If you wanted to make multiple copies of anything, you had to use carbon paper and trace over different things that you did. There was a blackboard in the classroom.

The most precious thing that I can remember after teaching at Ewington was the fact that a lass by the name of Laura Audino, who could speak not one word of English when she came to me, by the end of the year topped the class in reading and writing and spelling. I really felt marvellous about that because I felt what
she had learned was what I had taught her. I remember her and I remember what a thrill it gave me to find that she had come on so well.

It was the first time, of course, that I had been away from home and I was very lonely. I had a boyfriend in Perth and it was important to come to Perth for the weekends. We'd come on the train on Friday afternoon or we'd get a lift with somebody who was going to the footy or something. There were always people travelling to Perth and we'd get a lift back on Sunday night and on Monday we'd start looking for somebody who was going to Perth again. I think we only had to travel once on the midnight horror from Collie to Perth. We left at about ten o'clock in the evening on the train and it got to Perth about seven in the morning. So we obviously didn't want to do that too often! Looking back, it may have been a nice thing for me to get more involved in the community life instead of rushing off to Perth every weekend. But then you can't change what's happened. There were quite a number of Polish people in Collie. There's quite a big Polish community there, but unfortunately my heart was elsewhere.

In my second year at Collie, I applied to be transferred to Perth. That was in 1959. The reason that I applied was because my father had recently arrived from Poland. You see, when we were evacuated from Poland in 1941, my father was taken prisoner and we had lost trace of him completely. We had no idea where he was. We tried unsuccessfully to find where he was through the Red Cross— and nothing. Even when I was at College, say 1955 and 1956, on the forms where it says, 'Father's occupation' I would put down 'deceased' because he was presumed dead. It was in about 1957, I think, that we discovered that my father was still alive and he was in a Russian prison ready to be released. He was released and he went back to the original place where we lived, although our house was burnt down. So I think he stayed with my aunty. When we found out that he was alive and well, we then took steps to try and get him out to Australia and it took us two years for him to come out. He arrived in 1959. I was transferred to North Inglewood Primary School, within walking distance of home. I had Grades Two and Three, and then the most wonderful class there, Grades Three and Four. They were just superb.

I think I've been studying all my life and quite enjoyed it. Of course, when I went out teaching there were no courses that I could go to as far as improving my teacher qualifications, but I remember doing a course in typing at night school and that's helped me quite a lot in everything that I have done since. I was always interested in art but there were no qualifications in art that you could study for in those days. So, when Perth Technical College offered some art teaching studies, a group of us enrolled in those courses. Of course, it was all done at night school after a hard day in the classroom. We did our Art Teacher's Certificate, then we did our Art Teacher's Diploma and then when the Institute of Technology opened at Curtin we then continued with our Associateship, and that then completed my art training. When I had completed my diploma, I let the Education Department know what further studies I was doing. They must have noticed that I had qualified as an art teacher and in the middle of the August
holidays, they transferred me to Applecross Senior High School because one teacher was going away on leave, and they needed somebody with an art background, and there I was!

I spent all the holidays worrying about it. How am I going to cope? Where is this big school? What am I supposed to do? But it turned out very well! It was great! That was 1960. I was there for three years and in 1963 I got married. In those days, women had to resign when they got married. So I had to resign and lost my status as a permanent teacher. I was re-employed, of course, but I lost all my rights. In 1964, when I was expecting my first daughter, I resigned in May. So I wasn't teaching for about a year. Then the Education Department said, 'Would you like to come back teaching again because there is a vacancy at Kent Street?'. So, reluctantly, I went. I had my mother and my mother-in-law, who were great supporters as far as baby-sitting goes. So they looked after Teresa, on alternate days, and I was able to go to work. Then, of course, when I was expecting Monika, I had to resign once again, and become a housewife and that was fine. So, in the next twelve months, I wasn't teaching and then they said, 'Hey, there's a job back at Kent Street'. So I went back to Kent Street. Once again my mother and my mother-in-law took charge of the two youngsters. I think they really quite enjoyed it and I was back teaching and really enjoying it, and so I've been teaching ever since then. Since Monika was one, I didn't have a break. At that time, I was still on temporary staff until, after so many years, I applied to go permanent.

There was a lot of discrimination against women. There were very few women going into promoteional positions. In fact, in those days, there was not one female principal. I believe in having rights and I believe in there being justice for all and equal opportunity, but I'm not militant. The Union has helped women teachers. In the last few years, for example, they have been addressing the issues of equal opportunity and helping women to try and raise their status by actively organising seminars for women who wanted to go into promotional positions. I've attended a couple of those and I've found them very useful, because if you want to be promoted, you really have to know what language to use to write your application. You really have to know how to sell yourself. I'm afraid I'm not a very good person as far as that goes. I'd much rather let people discover that I've got some good qualities rather than boast about them myself. I think a lot of women are like that. We've got a lot of qualities. I really think we're multi-skilled in lots of ways. But we tend to hide our light under a bushel. We don't really know how to promote ourselves.

I'm a great believer in taking opportunities. For example, when I was teaching at Kent Street, and I was eligible to apply for promotion to be a senior-mistress of art, I took that opportunity realising that I may have to go to the country or may have to go somewhere else. In the first year I wasn't successful but in the second year I was, and I got Applecross. I was so happy at Kent Street in those days that I was really disappointed to have been put in charge of the special art department at Applecross! Yet it was a wonderful seven years at Applecross.
think we mustn't pass by any opportunities that come our way. I would regret not having done some of the things that I have done.

Subsequently, I thought administration would be a really good direction to take. I became a deputy principal at Cannington Senior High School. Well, then I thought, 'If I have to be here for five years, I might as well use that five years wisely'. The Institute of Technology wasn't too far away, so I set myself a goal of completing a Graduate Diploma of Business and Administration in five years, working after school hours. It took me four years to do that. I was really quite pleased with myself when I had completed it. I had also done my Teachers' Higher Certificate, because that was a prerequisite for promotion. I had done that between my Associateship and my Graduate Diploma of Business and Administration. I could see that, if I didn't continue with studies, my immediate bosses would be younger people them myself, and that's not where I wanted to end up. I knew that the only way to bridge that gap would be to go on to further education, and I did that. One of the negative things I remember about doing extra studies was when one of my sculpture lecturers at technical college said, 'Oh, Halina, you don't really want to go on and do your Associateship, do you? I mean, you're married. You've got children. You don't want to go any further than that'. I was just stunned that someone I considered to be quite an open-minded man suddenly was very, very sexist and he didn't feel that women should go to the top. That really made me more determined than ever to do that.

When my children were old enough to know about studying and teaching and raising a family, they were very supportive. They were really very encouraging, although, by the time I finished my Diploma of Administration, I thought, 'This is it! I don't want to sit up until three o'clock and four o'clock on any more nights or sit for exams' – it was really very difficult to raise a family, to look after their interests and the house and teaching. I really couldn't have fitted in much more, as well as my community work that I was doing. But you've also got to be prepared to work hard, and I think that's been the motto in my life. I could see that without hard work one couldn't achieve anything.

Naturally, I've been involved with the Polish community for the last forty years, ever since I arrived in Australia. Initially, I had been teaching children dancing at the Polish Ethnic School, which we held in Brisbane Street, Perth. In the last ten years, I have actually been the teacher-in-charge of the Polish Ethnic School, which involves developing and advertising programs, organising timetables, and hiring teachers. Those classes are held on Saturday morning from about nine o'clock till one o'clock. At the moment we've got something like eighty-six students, which is really quite a crowd. I'm a great believer in getting the parents in on those activities. Their involvement means covering books, making costumes, looking after the tuck shop at recess, making sure the children are supervised. We take the children on camps in the Christmas holidays. It's really running very smoothly.

I enjoy doing that type of work. I think it's most important that the children remember where they come from and that they are able to still read, write and
speak in Polish, and know some of the culture, traditions, history and geography of Poland. My two girls, Teresa and Monika, used to go to Polish School. They weren’t terribly happy. They didn’t always want to go to Polish School because it’s an extra thing for children to do on Saturday morning, but I persevered with that and their mastery of Polish is quite good, and they are proud to be Australians with a Polish background. I think that’s the most important thing that we can give our children: a little background about their origins.

The other thing that I’m involved in is Polish community social welfare. During my term of office as president of the West Australian Association of Polish Women, we successfully put in a submission to the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs to employ a social worker to help newly arrived migrants settle in the community. That service is run from the Polish House, the same location as the Polish School, and the Polish Library – it’s right next door to the Polish Church in Maylands. So it’s all very close together.

I’m really very much involved in all aspects of Polish community life: fund-raising and lobbying and committees, like the Migrant Settlement Committee that I was on a few years ago. Also, through the Polish Ethnic School, I’m involved with the Ethnic Schools’ Association in Western Australia. That’s a fairly important organisation, although I must say we don’t do as much as they do in other States. So when we talk about ethnic schools it’s not just the Poles who have those schools, it’s most of the migrant groups: Lithuanians, Greeks, Italians and Vietnamese. We all run ethnic schools because it’s very important for us to retain our culture and language and traditions.

In 1989 I received the Medal of the Order of Australia for my services to education and to the Polish community. I think I was the first Polish woman in Western Australia to be awarded it. So, it was indeed an honour and, obviously, my children were very proud. I also received a Silver Cross of Merit (1973) and a Gold Cross of Merit (1979) from the Polish Government in exile for my services to the Polish community. Later, in 1993, I was honoured by the democratic government of the Republic of Poland when I became a Member of the Order of Polonia Restituta. That, too, was a very great honour.

As far as my daughters are concerned, I think I was a fairly good role model of what you can do if you work hard. Yes, when I look back, it may be something similar to what my Mum had done as far as I’m concerned. She was always there in the background making sure that we were heading a certain way without putting too many obstacles or too many barriers in our way. So, when my daughters went to school there was always the expectation that they would go on to do further studies. There was never a question of them quitting at the end of Year Ten, or at the end of Year Twelve. Teresa has done her Honours degree, majoring in English and politics, Monika, too, has finished her Honours degree in English and anthropology. They found it fascinating and really enjoyed university life, especially the social life. I think their tertiary education was quite different from mine. They were able to get out a lot more because they were more mobile than I was in my days at Claremont Teachers’ College.
I became principal at Kwinana Senior High School, which had the lowest socio-economic level in all of Australia. It beat Redfern in New South Wales! I was really quite stunned when I heard that. When I applied to become a principal I had put down that I was available for any school in the State. I knew that my chances of getting a metropolitan appointment were fairly slim. Originally, I got Bridgetown and my children were quite happy about it. They said to me, 'Oh good, Mum. You can leave home. We don't have to leave home!'. But then another position became vacant so we all shifted up the ladder and I got Kwinana, which was the only metropolitan vacancy in 1990. I was very happy because I didn't have to leave home. People kept saying, 'Halina, do you really want Kwinana? It's a big challenge'. I can now see what a big challenge it was. It took six months to actually get to know the school and the community. It's fifty-three kilometers from home so it took me almost an hour to get to school and another hour to get back. So, on most days, I put in a twelve-hour day. On the days when we had our Parents and Citizens' meetings it really was an eighteen hour day. That's a long day but I was prepared for that. After Kwinana I transferred to Hampton Senior High School and was its principal for six years until my retirement in 2000.

I think teaching is one of the most demanding jobs, nowadays. You have demands from the parents, you have demands from the teachers (yes, your colleagues), you have demands from the pupils, you have demands from the community. The community wants to put more and more issues into the school system. They want us to be teaching about anti-smoking, anti-drinking, and anti-drugs. The community sees the school as being able to fix anything! These days the parents, even the parents of young children, expect us to teach them manners, teach them behaviour, teach them all the social graces! I'd still recommend teaching as a career if you are prepared to put in the effort.
'Then, in that year, we had this wonderful courage given to the whole of Australia by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam saying, 'Hey, it is possible to do other things'. So we thought about starting an alternative school'. MARGARET HODGKINS
Margaret Hodgkin was born in Perth on 19 February 1937, the third of five children in the family of Margaret (nee Sneddon) and Gwynne Woodward. She became an innovator in the field of education and established her own alternative schools, called 'Kids', in Fremantle and Maylands.

I enjoyed my own schooling, but, in retrospect, I have many questions about the rights teachers took in putting students down, the rudeness of teachers to students and the heavy oppression in primary schools. In high school it got even worse. I was at an all-girls school with a principal who'd been there for twenty-three years. She totally dominated the school, which was mostly staffed by geriatric teachers who were misfits even then! They were leftovers from the shortage of teachers after the war years. Many of the teachers who were there should have been retired or hospitalised! When I get together with groups of my friends, contemporaries from the time, we say, 'We've got to get together sometimes to talk about these things because we're the only ones who'd believe that they happened'. We had one teacher who would say to a girl, 'You! I don't like your face! Get out of this room!'. I objected to it, but at the time there wasn't a great deal anybody could do about it. I was a rebellious student and I spent hours of my three years at that school standing outside in the corridor or in the principal's office.

At primary school there was no such thing as equity. The girls were disciplined in a different way. The boys were allowed to be caned, which was used very freely. In my last year in primary school I had a teacher who got very angry about lots of things. Even though I don't swear a great deal myself, I'd just like to tell you of one of the things he would do. He would come in and if anyone had passed wind, he would say at the top of his lungs, 'You're a lot of farting fools', and he'd shut all the windows and the doors and say, 'You can sit here and rot.
in your own filthy stench!”. That was almost a daily occurrence. If he could isolate who it was who was causing the smells, he'd cane them, but it didn't stop. They're very strong memories and I think it's reasonable to suggest that such behaviour among teachers was common. When we were doing handwriting we'd get a chunk of 'four-by-two' jarrah dropped on our fingers if we made a mess of our work. They gave us writing to do first thing after lunch. So we'd come back steamy and hot and, not surprisingly, make a mess of our work! I had one teacher who used a walking stick to walk, and when she wanted us out of our desks she'd hook the walking stick around our necks and pull us out of the desks! I really can't remember anything useful that I learnt at school. I knew how to read and write before I went to school. No one has ever taught me how to spell anything because I already knew how to spell before it was presented as a 'spelling' thing.

I used to sing a lot and I spent lots of time in the junior primary school sitting under the headmistress's table because her way of teaching me to stop singing was to make me sit there and sing. When I stopped singing, she'd jab me with a walking stick and say, 'Sing!'. This was her way of curing me of singing! It didn't work, but it was indicative of what they considered therapy or student behaviour management! The main concern was student management. It wasn't really the development of the students, their creativity or their personalities. It was just that they had to behave themselves. That was the most important thing to the teachers I had.

My primary school was fairly international, but the Australian-speaking children were the privileged ones. There was a lot of anti-Semitism — not taught in the sense that anybody ever sat us down and said, 'Jews are to be picked on', but not un-taught, or counter-balanced. So Jewish pupils got a rough time. There were forty-five kids in each class and the classes were graded. We had A, B and C and Special. That's how they termed it! The kids in C classes were considered by everyone in the school (including the staff) to be pretty dense kids. It was the general view that the C class kids were not much more advanced than the Special kids, who had particular difficulties — in fact, some were Down's syndrome children. I think it was a terrible sort of grading to have.

That sort of nastiness didn't go as far as secondary school. Instead, there was an enormous emphasis on being ladylike. For example, one day I was sitting on a stage when the principal walked in with a visitor. We had to stand up whenever a teacher walked into the room, especially the principal, and so we all scrambled to our feet. I got a dressing-down in front of everybody because as I scrambled to my feet I dared to show my white thigh with the black stocking on a suspender belt. I got into a terrible lot of trouble! She was very rude to me and when I answered back and said, if she had been a polite person she would have looked the other way, or pretended that she hadn't seen, I got into more trouble! That was one of my mother's teachings — that if something happens that isn't quite polite, then it's very polite for you to ignore it! So I was dishing up my mother's philosophy and the teacher didn't forgive me for that for the rest of my
time in school — just because I'd spoken to her like that in front of a visitor. Whereas, I think a humane teacher wouldn't have belittled and embarrassed a teenage young girl trying to scramble to her feet on the stage.

At my primary school there were three or four of the teachers who tried to be kind, but they were tied up in a system that wasn't kind, and so it was difficult for them to let their benevolence show. In the senior school I think they'd all given up and they just went with the system. When I went to Leederville Tech, it was an amazing revelation for me because we were treated like we were real people with minds capable of thinking, and a great deal of respect was shown to us. Many of the teachers there stand out in very positive ways in my memories of those days. They were super! I suppose I noticed them and remembered them because I'd always wanted to be a teacher. My mother always recalled that, from when I was four, whenever we drove past Claremont College, I would tell them that's where I was going to learn to be a teacher. She didn't even know how I knew it was a teachers' college!

My family was working-class and educating us beyond secondary school imposed a terrible strain. There was a lot of conflict over it. My eldest brother was very intelligent and wanted to study at tertiary level. He wasn't able to because the family income didn't allow it. So it seemed unfair to him to allow me to go on to study at Claremont. However, by that time they were awarding teacher bursaries. Although the bursary didn't come anywhere near covering what I would have earned if I'd got a job, it was enough that my parents didn't actually have to pay-out for me. Once I got to Teachers' College I got an allowance, of which they got half for board. So, I suppose there was general support for my education. In fact, there must have been a lot of parental support in the face of my brother not being able to go on and then letting me! But I got lots of threats all the way through. You know, the blackmail thing that some parents do? 'If this doesn't happen then you'll have to leave College'. It was pretty grim, but it was only a two-year course so it didn't take long. I worked each vacation, so that gave me some income. I worked one of the vacations as a nurse's aide, and that really set me well and truly back on to the path of teaching, because I was quite sure I didn't want to be anything medical!

I married during my course at Claremont. That meant that I had to refund my bursary. We started off married life with a debt of four hundred and twenty six pounds, six shillings and eleven pence! But that whole bursary system seemed pretty smokey, legally. When we wrote and said that we were in financial difficulties and couldn't pay it, we didn't hear any more about it. As a feminist, the bit that really struck me was that women had to pay back the bond if they married during their course, and men didn't. It was a bit strange. But I think that was a strange period when the whole of society wasn't quite sure how it was going to view these things.

I had gone straight to College from school, after doing my Matric. I'd taught Sunday School from the age of twelve and I'd run two youth groups at church from when I was fifteen. I then ran a youth group at the YWCA after I turned
seventeen, so I’d done a lot of youth work and worked with kids, but nothing formal in the way of teaching. For me, going to Claremont College was just like going home. That was the place where I’d always wanted to be. It all felt very familiar and I had an amazing loyalty to the place and the people. My teacher training was a tremendous experience. When I have students with me at school now, I feel very sad. They’re not trained nearly as well. They’re not given as much help. Perhaps they don’t take the help that’s offered — it might be partly them. It seems now that most teacher training institutions give at least as much time to the development of the person as they do to developing teaching skills. Whereas my training was almost totally devoted to developing teaching skills: how to be a teacher, how to handle yourself. I think it was a fairly rugged course — we had thirty face-hours per week. By face-hours I mean being in class with a lecturer there — as distinct from private study. So thirty face-hours was just about every working hour from Monday to Friday that students had a class to attend, and I’d estimate ninety per cent of those classes were about teaching skills. There were the occasional bits that were self-development, but it was mostly things to do with teaching.

I think the curriculum was excellent. I’m stunned that in 1989 the administration at the Western Australian College of Advanced Education closed down what I consider was one of the most efficient teaching machines they had — Claremont! I’ve supervised students from every teacher-training program, and others don’t get the background that we got at Claremont. If anybody ever applies to our school for a teaching job, a Claremont certificate carries greater weight with all of us on the staff. We still look at the Claremont person as one who’s got a general coverage of a lot of skills.

Even a place as good as Claremont had some things that needed to be addressed! I was very dismayed, in 1956, when a really nasty thing happened when a student was drunk in a phys. ed. class. He was actually bilious during the class and vomited on one of the girls. We fronted up to the woman who was our staff adviser at the time, and said to her, ”What do we do about this? Is there anything that we can do?” She went straight off and reported this to the principal and the women’s warden. We had been told that our staff adviser was like our father-confessor, or our mother-confessor, and that we could say anything to the staff adviser and it would be held in the strictest confidence! I was disillusioned with the particular person who broke our confidence — but not with the College. Perhaps she was only doing her job — it’s easy to be wise afterwards. Maybe, she felt that she had to do something about such unprofessional behaviour. It resulted in the student being suspended for two weeks without pay. But those of us who had gone to see the staff adviser (there were about five of us, including the girl who was vomited on) got into a terrible lot of strife over reporting the matter and we were sent to Coventry for the next six weeks! Nobody in the College would talk to us for doing this most heinous thing of ‘dabbing’ which, even among adults, was considered to be awful. I think I was considered to be the ringleader because I was the eldest person there. I wasn’t, but that was certainly how it was seen.
There's always a snobbishness in schools, even tertiary institutions. Working-class people have to struggle to be proud of their background because they are made to feel that there's something wrong with being working-class. I was the first person in my generation, of my family, to have a degree. That indicates how hard it was for working-class people to make it. There are several people in my family who are incredibly successful people. They've done brilliantly in the things that they've done, but they haven't added tertiary qualifications to their successes because it is difficult for working-class people. If you have to get a job to support yourself, as many do, it's difficult to fit in study and a social life as well.

When we married we did think that we'd like to have a fairly big family, and our six children became pretty much a full-time occupation. In those years I was a home-maker and a mother, so after I left College in 1956 I did very little teaching - mostly only relief work. We were in Tasmania for a while and I did some work with handicapped students, teaching them how to use the limbs that were not working. I went back to the College in 1970, partly because I thought things might have changed in the fifteen years since I started training, and I needed to be up-to-date because I wanted then to teach full-time. When I went back in 1970, the College administration was really beaut. They had a University Primary (UP) course there, which had been running for years, that provided a one-year teacher-training qualification. The idea of the course was that they would take anybody who had either a university degree, or two years of a degree, and had then decided to change course. So they let me do that course and I found it was just wonderful. In 1955 and '56, like most young kids, I'd had a wonderful social life at College and I had sort of breezed through. But in 1970 I had a lot more determination. I didn't want to just scrape through. I wanted to do well, and so I found that it was a very, very fulfilling year. I think I had a straight A's year. It was very easy, aged thirty-three, to understand what I was doing and to do it. I had a tremendous advantage over other students for I was examined at the same level as them, yet I'd had far more experience of life. They didn't expect more of me, so it was relatively easy to score well, the second time around. There was no financial assistance in that year, but my husband had become accustomed by then to supporting me and it didn't cost any more for me to be at College than it would have been for me to be at home.

I was one of the first mature-age students to be enrolled. Unless you count twenty-one and twenty-two as mature, I was the only mature-age student in the College! By then I was thirty-three and had six kids, so twenty-one seemed very young to me and I seemed very old to them! The students, once they got to know me, were fine. The College staff were a little bit wary because they weren't quite sure if I was one of them, socially, especially as my husband was on the staff of another teachers' college. That made it a bit awkward. So I had to bend over backwards not to presume on their professionalism. I think marriage makes you markedly different. Marriage with children puts you on another planet and in another time zone! A lot of students came home to meals and met us all. We were friends but not the sort of chummy friends that you get to be with people
of your own age and status. I think it's generally agreed that mature-age students can often be a bonus in a course rather than a drag because of the determination and the sense of urgency that they have. Heck, here I am, I'm thirty-three! I want to get this stuff done! When you're eighteen and nineteen you think you've got the whole world ahead of you. Both times that I was at Claremont I was an active member of the Student Christian Movement. It was always fun to be with people who were like-minded. But in 1970 I had almost no other social life with people at College because, if you've got a gorgeous husband at home and six wonderful kids, then you go home to them.

I found it was terrifying when I went into schools on teaching practice. The teachers were totally intimidated by having this person who had six children of her own. One teacher, in particular, was less than helpful; she was quite aggressive and antagonistic and said to me, 'Just because you've got six children, don't think you know more than I do. You're in my classroom and you'll do as I say'. I went back to College to get some stuff, and I burst into tears on the shoulder of one of the lecturers. I remember telling him that it was just awful to be in a class with a person who hit the kids and I had to sit there and sit on my hands. I didn't have any way to stop her. I felt that teachers who hit kids because they misspelt a word should be barred from teaching. I thought we should have some sort of a professional code of ethics, so that if teachers broke that code there'd be some way that they could be reported to stop them from behaving unprofessionally. To be told, 'Just take deep breaths, sit on your hands': I mean it was good advice because there was nothing I could do about it, and he added, 'Just last out the three weeks'.

Once the College staff knew what I was looking for they were incredible. There would be these very traditional, straight down the middle of the road lecturers, who'd tell the students all the things that they are supposed to do, and yet be so subversive themselves. They'd see me before College started. I'd meet them at eight o'clock and they'd give me this pile of alternative schooling stuff, and really set me off in a direction that probably led me to starting an alternative school. They were absolutely marvellous to direct my reading program and find out stuff for me – 'This is what you'd like to do, and you really must read this person'. You know – the Holt books, Illich and Friere – the all-time greats. They just kept the supply going – every article that they ever found on alternatives in education. Obviously, they were Claremont staff! I mean they were what made Claremont the place it was.

A particular woman who arrived early in the morning, was just an incredible person. She would have been one of the high points of Claremont College for years and years. She was really super. She used to turn up at about quarter past seven each morning bringing flasks and cake and sandwiches. She gave hot tea and coffee to the cleaning staff. She was a really loving, caring person. Now, you can imagine what she was prepared to do for students! If you got there early enough you could join in with her flasks of coffee and early morning victuals and then she'd start off with this alternative stuff. Even her traditional ideas were
wonderfully good traditional ideas. She's just an amazing woman! She knows more about reading, how to teach reading, what reading is, reading difficulties, how to overcome reading difficulties, than anyone else in the country. When I arrived at eight o'clock in the morning she provided me with a whole heap of material, then all I needed to do was make the things that she suggested. I'm still using them!

On the whole, the phys. ed. staff were pretty butch and macho. I think they probably had a struggle to be recognised as fully qualified academic people. They threw their weight around a bit with the students, to establish their status. In those days phys. ed. studies were rather less than average, academically, whereas nowadays it might be rather more! By the '70s there were people there who were academics who did phys. ed. and they didn't need to establish themselves so much. But I can remember some pretty vicious sort of stuff – if you put a foot out of line, then you were supposed to run around the oval – you know the sort of oppressive stuff that they do. They treated us a bit like glorified high school students. To us that was a shock, coming from tech., because at Leederville Tech. we had been treated as real, live people. But the rest of the staff seemed to be very, very professional, caring people.

The strength of Claremont was in the development of the student to teach the full curriculum. The current emphasis on having a major field and a minor field, often means that schools get pract. students who say they can't do 'XYZ', but they're really good at 'ABC'. As a teacher you have to be good at the whole alphabet! It's no good to have some strengths and some favourite things, but other areas that you can't work in at all. It doesn't work that way! In general, the staff at Claremont were incredible people. Many were absorbed into other campuses following the amalgamation of the teachers' colleges into the Western Australian College of Advanced Education in the early eighties. As far as I'm concerned, as soon as they got to the other campuses, they added something really brilliant. In spite of the stifling administration they had to work in, they did really, really well in expressing themselves as lecturers, and helping teachers to train. It's interesting that they achieved that in spite of the heavy oppression that provided for little professional freedom at all.

However, in 1970 I spent a lot of time at the beginning being very disappointed – almost bitterly disappointed – that I could use the notes that I'd taken fifteen years before, and the classes weren't much different. I expressed this to some of the staff and that's when they started to give me the more subversive stuff. I was really shocked that psych. notes for instance, were almost identical to what they'd been before, because I felt there'd been so much development that it would have changed. I was shaken to discover that they didn't do anything very much: a little bit of Piaget and Bruner in the developmental school, but nothing in the humanist school. Abraham Maslow wasn't even mentioned, except by my subversive staff, who introduced me to the transpersonal school of psychology. I thought it was a shame that they didn't at least have one lecture to say, 'Now, there are these other people, too, who are bona fide psychologists'.
Between 1956 and 1970 there were attitude changes I noticed, particularly with regard to women. We were fascinated when we were told about the studies of teachers' questioning in class, and that teachers only wait three seconds for an answer, and direct questions mostly at the boys. So I guess we were taught indirectly not to be sexist, just by looking at the evidence from these studies. In general, though, I think I was far more concerned with children's issues than sexism. I think the way children are treated in schools, almost without exception, is dreadful. I was trying to establish the rights of the child. So, I didn't care which child, whether it was a boy or a girl. I thought they were all treated rather badly. I was asking, 'Why can't the kids come into the classroom before school starts? It's their school! It's pouring with rain! Why can't they come inside in the warm, in the shelter?'. Oh well, the rooms aren't well-designed and they need the ventilation, and if they're in here from that time, you know, they're going to get stir-crazy. All this stuff that they tell you! So those were issues that I felt were important.

I've always taken up causes I believe in. At Claremont, there's a carpark. It was on the plans that all the trees in that area (not the trees on Bay Road, but all the other ones there) were going to be knocked down to make room for the carpark. It had been on the plans for thirty or so years. When I was there in 1970 they were foolish enough to try to implement the plans. So I just sat in front of the bulldozers and said 'No!'. They weren't going to bulldoze the trees down. They said they had to put a carpark in there, that the residents were demanding that students have off-street parking. Eventually, after a lot of haggling, they put in the carpark and they left most of the trees. I think there were two trees out of a possible sixty-eight that they did take out, but they left sixty-six of the trees there. So, I was given a little public service award. That, I thought, was very nice!

I was appointed to a primary school in the northern suburbs straight from College. I particularly asked if I could have an open-spaced building, so I was really thrilled that I got just that. The principal was a really difficult fellow. He'd been teaching for thirty-nine years and he'd had the same year thirty-nine times! He was really awful. For instance, one of the staff might be taking a lesson, and be using a tape-recorder, to give a group a spelling lesson over in the corner (with a tape-recorder that he'd bought out of his own money). and the headmaster would walk in and turn it off! He'd say, 'That's not an appropriate thing to do. I've been teaching spelling for thirty-nine years and I've never needed a tape-recorder. Why would you?'. So that was very difficult. There were six on the staff and the five of us pulled together and we did great stuff. We had people coming from all over the country to see what was happening. We did a lot of cooperative teaching. We did team-teaching, lots of experimental stuff, and had the most amazing conflicts with this incredible man. He said that we had to line the kids up to come into school. We had three double-doors in our teaching area that the kids could have come through without queuing up, but he wanted them to line up, boys there, girls there. He said I was facetious when I said, 'People with socks on there; people with sandals there; people with bare
feet there; people with blue eyes there; people with brown eyes there'. He said that was ridiculous: Why couldn't it just be boys there, girls there? He had no idea at all that it could be considered sexist and discriminating! It was also foolhardy to put all of those obstreperous little boys together in one line and leave the rather nicer girls on their own.

One of the other difficulties that I remember in my first year teaching in government schools, was when I had a Grade One student who had a slight speech impediment. The kids laughed at him when he spoke, so he ran away. One of the staff drove off and brought him back. To teach him not to run away, the headmaster locked him in the storeroom. We didn't know that was what he was going to do. We heard the child screaming and yelling. I went down there and by the time I got to the headmaster's teaching area I was very angry. I took him not very gently by his tie and told him that he should open the storeroom door. When he did so, the boy was absolutely petrified. He was in a terrible state. The relationship between the headmaster and me didn't improve from then onwards, because I guess he got pretty angry with me, too. We often had those sorts of fight with him (perhaps I should say 'conflicts') but what could we do? Where could we go? Who could we talk to? Things went from bad to worse, and we approached the district superintendent to ask if there was anything that we could do about it. He said, 'No', and reported us to the Department. As a disciplinary measure -- and they told us it was a disciplinary measure -- we were all transferred out. We'd worked remarkably well as a group of people to the point that we were a show school, demonstrating what could be done with open-space buildings. That's something that they turned their backs on. Now, look at the number of open-space buildings where nobody is quite sure how to use them and so they build the walls back again!

At my next school the principal was a person who'd taught me swimming when I was eight, and he was one of those people who'd say, 'Come on, come on out. I'll wait here. Just swim to me', and then each stroke you do he moves further back. That happened to me at Crawley Baths. By the time I got to him I was so panicky that I nearly drowned him! When I walked into Osborne Park Primary School and found that he was the principal it didn't make me feel very confident. He didn't remember me and I didn't remind him, but he said, 'Now, tell me a bit about your feelings about teaching. What's your philosophy?'. I said, 'Well, I believe in the development of the whole child'. 'Nonsense!', he said. 'What a lot of rotl'. He said, 'The school is here to teach reading, writing and arithmetic. The community should provide sports, the Church should provide religion, and you'll teach reading, writing and arithmetic. These are your hours. This is your spelling program. This is your reading program. These are the times that you're allowed in the library. These are the times that you'll be...'. I said, 'You don't need a teacher, you need a teacher's aide!'. So I hopped into my little car and drove straight down to Loreto. I'd been told that there was a job going there and it was an open-space building that provided me with rather a nice opportunity to try some of the things that my subversive course at Claremont College had taught...
I worked there for an incredible two years. The principal encouraged me enormously in trying alternatives, and together we tried lots of things.

Then I was offered a job at the Music Branch with the Department. I decided that I'd go back to government schools and try them again. I had four, different schools that I went to each week. What I saw in those four schools, combined with what had happened to me before, filled me with horror. I'm not being over-dramatic. There were dreadful things happening. At one school it got to be so bad that on Sundays I'd find that I'd have a headache developing and I'd do anything to get out of going to school. I thought, 'Heavens! If it's like this for me, what must it be like for the kids who go there?'. At least I had a choice about it.

As a peripatetic teacher, I had no status. I could not even talk about what was happening with anybody in the school. There was a deputy principal at one school who was just dreadful. I gather he'd been an efficient sergeant in the army and he transferred that mode of operating to the school. He'd walk around with one of those telescopic wands and swish it around and poke people on the bottom: 'Close your eyes! Bow your head for the Lord's Prayer!'. I thought it rather an ineffective way to get people to pray! He used his telescopic thing quite freely to hit the children. On one occasion I stepped between him and a student and he lifted the cane to hit me! I thought this fellow was going to continue hitting but he stopped. (It brought back memories of a similar thing that had happened to me, when I was at primary school, when I'd stepped between the teacher and the boy he was caning). I discussed the incident with the district superintendent. Initially, he didn't say, 'There's nothing you can do'. He said, 'And how is everything else in your life going?'. And I said, 'But I want to talk to you about this. It's important'. 'Oh, and how was your week at the other school? Did you enjoy that?'. Finally, he said, 'I'm trying to tell you, you can't discuss this with me. It isn't something that I'm permitted professionally to discuss with you. The only thing that you could do is to get the student's parents to object'. Well, I tried, but they thought that it wouldn't hurt him to be beaten up a little bit. I found that very degrading. The same teacher would say to the students, 'Come on, stand up and let Mrs Hodgkin see what dreadful pieces of meat I have to teach!'. I don't think teachers should be allowed to speak like that.

I think I'm a de-schooler. I tried to change things while I was within the Education Department, but I could see that it wasn't going to happen in my lifetime. Perhaps, if I'd come to all of that as a young teacher, I might not have felt the urgency. But I was thirty-three when I went back to teaching and I thought, 'I don't want to wait for all this to happen. I don't want to be caught up in this thing where I'm not allowed to use the training that I've had'. Because of this, I was one of the founding members of 'The Trinity Remedial Clinic' in 1970 — if we'll ever be forgiven for calling it that! It may have been our naivety but we were trying! We were working with kids who had specific learning difficulties, and it was called 'Trinity' because we were using Trinity building. By 1974 we had got quite a big group going. We saw them often after school, Saturdays — sometimes Sundays. We ran holiday courses for them and effectively developed
an alternative school outside of school hours. After we'd been going for four years, we had not only the kids who had learning difficulties, but their siblings and the kids next door, and the ones who saw these kids going off to this 'club' where they made puppets and wood-carvings! Then, in that year, we had this wonderful courage given to the whole of Australia by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam saying, 'Hey, it is possible to do other things. You don't have to just stay being what you are!'. So we thought about starting an alternative school with the nucleus of kids that we had. Whitlam's government was dismissed in 1975 but we decided we'd go ahead and start 'Kids School' in Fremantle even if we didn't get funded. I don't know if I would have had the courage to do that if I hadn't already had the backing of the group of kids with whom we were doing remedial work. If I hadn't had the backing of Gough Whitlam and the first of the Karrnel reports that mentioned 'supported schools' (the model that we used), I wouldn't have been courageous enough to do what I did. But with that and the support I had at home, it was possible to do something new and different. I had been used to being a 'kept woman' when my children were little and my husband, Graham, was quite willing to go back to supporting me so that we could start our school, even if we didn't have salaries.

At the school we established working relationships that encouraged the sharing of ideas. There's a bit of secrecy in some traditional schools – the feeling that teachers should keep good teaching ideas to themselves. In our school, if there is a good idea, it's put on the table and everybody works on it to make it better. If it's effective, we look at what worked. If it didn't work, we try to trim the idea and say, 'Well, we won't have those bits'. Sometimes, we'll put it on hold for another time. But there's not the professional jealousy or carelessness that makes teachers guarded about what they do. I think that's very refreshing. At 'Kids', we are not obsessed with student behaviour management. It's an incredible thing! It's a real contrast with what's creeping into government schools, which involves putting students into 'time-out' rooms. It's awful! It's just so fascist and frightening. It's wanting to manage and manipulate people to make them do as they're told. Nobody is looking at it and saying, 'What are we asking the kids to do? Are the requests reasonable?'. If they were reasonable surely there wouldn't be such objections to doing them. The staff at our school looks at it from the angle of what's reasonable. At any school there's a group of students, so there has to be some rules – that applies even in the family. We look at seeing what might be the best thing to do. It's not just the teachers who plan, we get ideas from the kids as well. We say to the kids, 'We must have it that you don't do things that hurt yourself'. So that's our first rule. The second rule is that you're not allowed to do anything that will hurt anyone else, and the third rule is that you're not allowed to do anything to damage property or equipment. They're our three, basic rules. When you get to be older and more mature you'll understand that all you need is the first rule because if you were taking care of yourself you wouldn't hurt anyone else because hurting someone else hurts you'. Our whole approach is about understanding each other, cooperating, caring about each other, and treating each other with respect. It sometimes makes me angry when
boys behave as if it's their right to offend on the grounds that 'boys will be boys'. I've had severe conflicts with boys who think that it's okay to sit and classify a girl on the shape of her breasts. I find that obnoxious! I don't know whether I react just because they're boys. I would react just as much if girls behaved in that way. It's the behaviour that I react to rather than the sex of the person. Although, the reality is that we don't get such behaviour from girls. They don't sit and classify boys on the shape of their scrotum or their penis!

I think I'm an anarchist! If anarchy worked we wouldn't have to have governments or a police force. If every person was self-operating, and we treated each other with respect, look at what we'd save! I'd admit we'd be hard-pressed then to find something for a prime minister to do, but we would still have a better society! I don't believe in hierarchies at all. You'll hear people say, 'Oh look, that's a wonderful school, the headmaster is super'. That shouldn't be what makes it a wonderful school! At 'Kids' I call myself the coordinator, because I work in a cooperative group, so, by definition, I can't be a principal. We all chip-in and do everything and we encourage parents to take responsibility for the internal running of the school. Perhaps that's one of the lovely things about having trained at Claremont - that you trained as a person who did everything. I had the example of Thelma bringing early morning cuppas for the cleaning staff at Claremont - nobody made her do that! She did that sort of thing, and she washed up and cleaned up after them. I clean up rubbish at 'Kids' and there was one famous occasion when I had my arm up to my elbow in a toilet that wasn't working! I must admit that at times like that I mutter, 'This is what I've done all those years of training for!'. Really, though, I'm not snobby enough for that to bother me - I'm happy to do the gardening and to move the furniture around. I'll be the first-aider and mend people when they get themselves all busted up. I'll be the person who comforts the kids when they get to school after they've had a row at home - all of these things, strictly-speaking, are non-teaching jobs. I have children come and stay when their folks are in distress. In the last eighteen years we've fostered fifty-two kids for periods of six months to seven years. We occasionally have parents who seek refuge at our home. We often have parents who seek refuge at school - we're a backstop for them. I also do a bus run. I pick-up between twenty-five and thirty students each day from the front door of their houses, and take them home each day. I consider that part of the pastoral care of the school. I don't fix fuses! If that has to be done I call in somebody else. I've got a really healthy respect for electricity! But almost everything else I'm prepared to have a try at. I think that's probably one of the differences between alternative schools and traditional schools.

We have disappointing moments. You know, when you have some success with the kids you are working with, and then the parents get frightened. Parents get frightened a lot. They're always worrying about whether they have done the right thing in enrolling their kids at an alternative school. Sometimes they say, 'I'm too scared to stay on in this school. It's too different', and so they withdraw the kids, and for us it feels like somebody has just ripped Band-Aids off our raw flesh. It's disappointing.教育上, 我不认为我们有任何大的失望。
because anything we do that doesn't work we still consider successful because we've had a whole heap of learning experience from it. If you don't make mistakes, then you don't learn - well, you don't learn as much. If you continue making the same mistake you are not learning.

I love teaching. I can't imagine anybody ever wanting to be anything else. It's a most terrific job. If I could choose again how I'd train, I'd train at Claremont. I think the setting and the style of the building is lovely - all those little rabbit-warren rooms. If I could ordain the course that I'd do, I'd like the course that I did in 1970 to be repeated. I wouldn't mind going back and doing a similar course every ten years. I'm always a bit frustrated and disappointed that teachers don't update more. I wouldn't be happy to go to a doctor for cardiac surgery, if he said, 'I haven't done any study for twenty years'. I'd think, 'Ooh! That's my heart you're going to play around with. I wish you knew more!'.

One of the highlights of my career was the music job that I ran as a peripatetic teacher. I got a real egotistical chuff out of it the following year when they had to employ four people to do what I'd been doing! It was an innovative program. When you run something for the first year, I think that often happens. You have to work much harder to justify the program. But I think the crowning glory has been my continuing involvement in Kids School. That's quite a major achievement.

Although I'm a rampant feminist it isn't something I think about a lot. Sexism affects me personally when we have a government inspection and some of the inspectors are quite different in their attitude to me compared with the attitude they have to male members of staff. I've even had a government school inspector tell me that I should be at home looking after my children, which I think is pretty blatant in this day and age! I've had six children - apparently that counts against me! There are lots of people who think that pregnancy is like senile dementia, that once you've been pregnant your brain doesn't work properly ever again! Equally blatant is sexual harassment. I had some pretty heavy approaches made when I was a student on prac. in primary school, particularly by a school guidance officer, who became a senior person in the Department. I'd love to make it public! Oh, I would love to make it public! But how can you?

There are lots of jokes that go around about 'equal pay for equal work'. 'Don't be silly!', the men say, 'We don't want to work that hard!'. I was an only girl in an otherwise all-boys family, and for me it's been a fight all my life to be recognised and to be allowed to be intelligent and reasoning and thinking. My support has come from Claremont and my husband and children. It's hard to know what I would have been like without Claremont. I can't imagine my life being uninteresting now. I learnt a lot of things at Claremont. Most important were the relationships that were developed there - the friendships, the respect; the fact that you were a person and you could learn. I think that's the biggest thing that Claremont has done for me.
‘They had this quaint custom that you had to get to morning assembly on time. Quite often it was held in the open air and if you didn’t get there on time they had lecturers patrolling the grounds and the perimeter! If... you [were] late twice, your pay got docked. I was always late... and I had a special route through a back fence... The idea was to get through a back fence and make a dash for it and sort of nonchalantly stroll around shoulder-to-shoulder with everyone else. It was a stand-up assembly and they played God Save the Queen, and once I stopped for it. I stopped for the National Anthem and they caught me. So that’s what happens to you if you’re patriotic!’

HANIFA DEEN
Hanifa Deen was born in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, in 1941. She has contributed extensively to the life and politics of minority ethnic communities in Western Australia, rising to become deputy commissioner for multicultural affairs. She acted as an honorary consultant to the Australian Law Reform Commission’s review of multiculturalism and the law and, between 1987 and 1991, served as a director on the board of the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). In 1991 her expertise in multicultural issues was acknowledged by her appointment as a hearing commissioner with the Human Rights Commission. More recently she has reinvented herself as an author and has published three books.

English was my mother’s first language but my father’s first language was Urdu. He also spoke Punjabi and read Arabic. However, German is the only language other than English that I can speak. My family name was Deen. A lot of people say to me that ‘Deen’ sounds very English — that it isn’t a Pakistani name — but I say: ‘Ah, but really it is’. You see, when my grandparents came to Australia in the nineteenth century, like many people from India (there was no Pakistan then), they didn’t have a surname. People there are called son or daughter of so-and-so. Both sets of grandparents, one in Victoria, one in Western Australia, were confronted with the problem of finding a surname. While they didn’t have a surname, they had a suffix at the end of their name and it’s a fairly common one. You’ve heard of the famous water carrier Gungha Din — it’s pronounced ‘Gungha Deen’; Aladdin of the magic lamp is Allah Deen; there’s also Saladin of the Crusades. Well, my grandfather took the name ‘Din’, but because he didn’t want to be called ‘Mr Din’ he changed the spelling to D-E-A-N, so that’s my family name! Now, quite coincidentally, my mother’s father came up with the same solution, but he spelt his ‘Din’ differently as D-E-E-N. So, my mother’s name was
Deen before she married my father, when it became Dean. I know a whole load of Pakistani families in Queensland, all called Deen (Dean), who came out in the early twentieth century. All went through the same business of having to find a surname.

I grew up in the Perth suburbs, Northbridge and Highgate. They were very much inner-suburban working-class areas with boarding houses, rented accommodation, people living on top of, or behind small shops. I identified myself as being different, but then there were a lot of 'different' people in Highgate in those days. It was pre-multicultural Australia but you knew you were different. I was very much aware that my religious background was different. I was Muslim, which meant that when we were learning Social Studies at school, I learnt that Richard the Lion Heart was the scourge of the Muslims. I was always very confused as to who exactly were the infidels and who were the true believers. I remember that we Muslims were always supposed to be villains. My dad used to reinterpret the Social Studies curriculum, otherwise I wouldn't have had much of a time at school! I wouldn't have had any self-esteem or self-respect. Thank goodness the curriculum has changed, though there is still work that has to be done on curricula generally.

I went to Highgate Primary School, which was a multi-ethnic school. In those days there were lots of kids from Greek, Chinese, Italian and Jewish backgrounds. It still has that character today. I don't recall any racism in the playground or in the teachers' attitudes. I then went to Perth Girls' High School, an all-girls school, which was lots of fun. It was in the days of centralised high schools. There was Girdlestone, into which those who were going to pursue commercial careers were streamed. Or you could go to Perth Girls', if you were from a State primary school, and you were tracked to go into a vocation like teaching or to go to university.

I loved drama and reading and literature. Fantasy was an escape. You could do anything, you could be anything, no matter that you were a girl, no matter what your background. I absolutely loathed phys. ed. and I hated sewing because I couldn't sew. Even today, if I sew-on buttons they usually fall off within forty-eight hours! My mother couldn't sew, and never knitted, so I didn't have a role model, who sat knitting at home. That meant that sewing classes really used to be agony. I used to pay friends to finish my sewing models! It was a bad habit! I even carried it through to Teachers' Training College, too. Swimming was fun. I have memories of being in the school bus, and off we'd go to Crawley Baths. There was usually a sing-along and that was lots of fun. So was conducting. The teachers used to let me conduct poetry. I'd stand there pumping away, waving my arms. It was wonderful.

I stopped school when I was fifteen and went out into the workforce. I remember selling books in Boans. I worked in a camera shop for a few months. I worked in snack bars and did my Leaving at night school. Then I did some studies at Leederville Tech. That's where I met a group of male and female students who were all doing teaching, and sort of went along with them. That was probably
about 1958 or 1960. I didn't actually decide to become a teacher. I drifted into it. Was it George Bernard Shaw who said, 'Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach'? Someone with a streak of honest cynicism in him! My friends were going to teach and I heard they were all going to an interview so I thought I'd go too. I went through the interview and must have convinced someone on the interviewing panel. Maybe, it was my acting ability – I used to love acting. I think that's what you need to be a good teacher these days, so perhaps that got me through.

In primary school, teachers suggested careers to us but in the forties kids didn't have choices, certainly not people from my kind of background. Girls like me didn't have the career choices that young women have today. Typist, schoolteacher, nurse – those were quite often deemed to be the only professions for young women. Parents, of course, weren't necessarily as well informed as parents are today about subjects that girls need to take. The whole society was sexist. It was something that was part and parcel of everyday life. This was, 'You get married and your husband looks after you' time! My parents had a traditional Muslim outlook so that they didn't really believe in education for girls. Education for boys was more important. But when I've spoken to women of my generation they've said it was also their parents' outlook; and they were Anglo-Australian. Education for boys but not for girls! They didn't see education as a great investment for me, so that's why I did it myself, part-time, night school. They were very proud to have a teacher in the family. That was the zenith of social mobility for them. That was very pleasing. My father always believed I had too much education but as he said, 'What can you do? You bring them up in this country, they get too Westernised and too much education'.

By the time I went to Teachers' College I was well and truly integrated. I was more conscious of class differences at Claremont than I would have been of ethnic differences. It was quite clear. You could always tell who were the girls who had been to private schools, and quite often who the fellas were too, particularly in the first year. Those girls were not used to mixing with boys at all. So there was lots of giggling and lots of social experimenting and interaction that perhaps other students had gone through three or four years earlier. I remember the Loreto girls. Who could ever forget the dear Loreto girls? There were cliques. For example, one group went out with the boys from Scotch or Christchurch. If there were a lot of students from immigrant backgrounds, I wasn't aware of them. I don't think many were going through the teacher-training institutions at that stage. It was assimilationist Australia, then. Most migrants had come out in the forties and fifties and so their kids would have been entering higher education later. I think, if you walked on to a campus today, you would find it far more representative of Westernised society than it was in the fifties and early sixties.

I desperately wanted to go to Claremont because Graylands Teachers' College had the reputation of being very 'gung ho' and sports-mad. I believe they even built their own gardens and rockeries and did strenuous things like that!
Claremont wasn't a bad place for the times. It was a stately campus. It had a Victorian (as in Queen Victoria) air about it. With hindsight, I would say that it was rather a conservative campus, but then everything was, at that time. It had a Charles Dickens style to it. It was as if we were primary kids and the lecturers were primary teachers. We were not treated as adults. Some of us would have been nineteen or twenty, and I remember a few guys who were veterans from the Korean War. Yet, we were all treated very much like primary-school kids.

They had this quaint custom that you had to get to morning assembly on time. Quite often it was held in the open air and if you didn't get there on time they had lecturers patrolling the grounds and the perimeter! If they caught you, you had to go into a room; and, if it happened to you twice, your pay got docked. I remember I was always late. I was notoriously late and I had a special route through a back fence. Quite a few people had these little special routes! The idea was to get through a back fence and make a dash for it and sort of nonchalantly stroll around shoulder-to-shoulder with everyone else. It was a stand-up assembly and they played God Save the Queen, and once I stopped for it. I stopped for the National Anthem and they caught me. So that's what happens to you if you're patriotic! The lecturers were rather embarrassed about it, but obviously they had to do it. I had to go into a room. I sort of swaggered around quite heroically. I was a bit of a rebel, a bit of an individual! I took it in my stride and got fined. But I muttered and moaned about it and swore under my breath.

We had an awful lot shovelled down us. We were a pretty motivated bunch of people by and large. We were convinced that what we were doing was important. I always felt we should have been doing fewer subjects and in more depth. That's a complaint a lot of people had. There were a lot of compulsory things. I remember 'attitude'. Your attitude was very important and attitude meant team sports. The people I hung around with didn't like sports and team sorts of things. I guess we were as collective as anyone else, but we were more into debating and drama. We used to have a little cult thing of hanging around in the Common Room listening to the Goon Show, which was the big thing in those days. We were a very 'cool' bunch.

There were some very important people who did influence me. There were some wonderful English literature lecturers there that I viewed at the time as eccentric and 'my kind of people'. Probably, I'm as eccentric now as I thought they were then. There were wonderful drama teachers too. We used to do drama productions and reviews. There were some great creative-writing people too. So if you weren't into sports and having the right attitude and having a 'ping' at it (that was the expression a lot of teachers used — having a 'ping' — a go), there were lots of alternative things to do. You could go with people who were into puppetry and put on puppet shows. There were many creative outlets.

My study at Claremont created a thirst for knowledge. I also encountered people from the University of Western Australia. I mean, there were some people at Claremont who'd flunked first-year uni. so they came into Claremont Teachers'
College and swaggered around. After all, they'd flunked first-year uni. hadn't they? I encountered different people whose horizons were broader, more interesting. The interaction was there and so was the difference. Coming from a narrow, working-class, inner-suburban area you had tunnel vision. You go to Claremont where horizons broaden. You find out there are more choices, and finally the idea of a career in uni. studies becomes a reality. After Claremont I did do university studies. I think it was about 1968 when I enrolled, part-time, at uni. I ended up doing a history honours course there.

I had a 1946 red-and-white Hudson. It looked like one of those Al Capone cars with running boards on it that you could stand on. It had overdrive and I needed three cushions to sit on and two cushions behind me to reach the clutch! My father bought it for me for about one hundred pounds because he thought that if I got hit by anything, nothing could hurt me. I used to call it Sherman because it was just like a tank. Some of my friends, instead of going to phys. ed., would play cards in my car. So, as I said, there were lots of alternative things to do.

After I graduated I was a serf. I was bonded to the Education Department because of the allowance I had received during the two years at Teachers' College. You were supposed to pay back your student allowance if you resigned. If you married you were automatically expected to resign. Married women who were given jobs were sacked at the end of each year and then reappointed, quite often to the same school and the same classroom, the following year.

When I graduated I taught for one year. My first school was Deanmore Primary School, out in Scarborough. At the end of that year I got married and had to resign. By January of the next year, I hadn't received a letter or been assigned to a school. I was getting rather worried. I needed the money. By February nothing had happened so I looked in the papers and got a job at a very radical school. It was out in Morley somewhere. They were into something like the Montessori method and had a couple of wonderful teachers, who were later accused of being communists. One of them, as a matter of fact, adopted an Aboriginal boy and emigrated to the Soviet Union. Well, they employed me. Shirley Strickland, the famous runner, used to teach maths out there too. I had to advise the Education Department that I had found employment. Within two weeks of my telling them this they sent me a telegram. They'd found a school for me! So I had to resign from this alternative school and go back into the government system, because, after all, I was bonded.

I had no status. I was a good teacher — that was generally recognised. But you had to be doing it for personal satisfaction rather than the money because at that stage it wasn't equal pay. You certainly weren't doing it for a career, because the only women who were building careers were the women who were not married. Things weren't the same for male teachers so there's no doubt about it, it was out-and-out discrimination. Yet the Education Department then, and still today, depends on women, particularly for its primary teaching and, I would say, probably for its high schools, too. We're the very backbone of the teaching profession and yet we were very badly treated. We didn't have the same career
opportunities as men. Seniority didn’t exist if you were married. You couldn’t even get long-service leave if you’d had a break in service. Because you were forced to resign each year, you never built up long-service. You could be teaching for fifteen years but you were forced to have that break each year. I’ve always believed in the Teachers’ Union but the campaign for the rights of married women teachers was a slow and hard campaign. I do recall one very strong woman unionist – Nennie Harken. I remember her very well because she taught me at Highgate Primary School and she was really, when I think about it, a role model. She was the only unionist I remember who fought the good fight for equal pay and I bet that was an uphill battle for her too.

I taught for nineteen years, altogether, about eight years in primary schools, then some high-school teaching. I taught for a year in Victoria and then I went overseas and taught at a German high school. I came back in the late seventies to Western Australia and found that they didn’t need teachers any more. I got some part-time teaching as an adult migrant education teacher and then taught at Curtin University for a couple of years, part-time, before I became tenured as a public servant. So it was nineteen years in all, with probably about ten or twelve in the government system.

I experienced sexual harassment during my teaching career. Gosh, if I were a young woman teacher today I would not have to put up with what I used to put up with through the innuendoes and the jokes. I mean, even if there were more women teachers on the staff, primary schools were nevertheless male-oriented. The organisational culture was very male. That meant having to put up with the football and the cricket and the jokes, the sexist jokes, the mother-in-law-bashing jokes, the off-colour language.

In some of the schools I taught at I do remember Aboriginal students, just a sprinkling here or there, perhaps one or two in the entire school, which was rather sad for them because being one Aboriginal student in an entire school was pretty hard. Remember, we’re talking about the early sixties. We’re talking about Civil Rights time in the USA. People generally weren’t sensitised or weren’t aware of Aboriginal history. Aboriginal leaders didn’t have, or weren’t given, a profile or access to the media. Aborigines weren’t allowed to control their lives. I often had very talented Aboriginal kids in class, and I made sure there was never any discrimination. I gave Aboriginal kids the same opportunities as the others. I would never have tolerated any kind of slinging-off or racism of any kind. I was very conscious of that, probably because of my own background. I made clear my own values. If there was any tension between kids in the classroom I never hesitated to make my own position known because I believe that a primary teacher has a very powerful role in setting up standards in what is acceptable behaviour and what is unacceptable behaviour. I don’t believe you can let these things slide. But it was very, very sad to see bright kids, bright Aboriginal students, and to wonder what their life chances would be in the future, in terms of higher education, employment and general well-being. Ugly stereotypes were very, very much in evidence in those days. Black history
was unheard of and Aboriginal culture ignored. Aborigines were depicted as 'quaint tribes' rubbing sticks together. This reflected a nineteenth-century, anthropological viewpoint. It's only now, since Aborigines have started to write their own history, that we're hearing the truth, I mean the real history.

The values of the schools were solid Anglo-Australian values. In those days, kids were not encouraged to have pride in their own backgrounds. If you were proud of your ethnic background it was in spite of your schooling. It was because of your parents. My parents made sure I knew what my ethnic background was and that I never felt ashamed of my religion. If I had any problems I could discuss them and they would patiently correct a biased curriculum or say, 'Hey, that's only one version of history'. I suppose lots of ethnic kids and lots of parents were doing similar things, but what I don't recall is kids speaking their own languages in the playgrounds. There wasn't a pride in anything that wasn't true-blue Australian.

The social studies curriculum was incredibly biased - loads of gender bias. I remember Boadicea and Joan of Arc as women who had made it and both of them died prematurely, didn't they? Look at all the explorers. It was very much men who made Australia what it is today. I think you can rest your case there, can't you? Look at the comics of the period. I remember the comics I used to read as a kid. They reflected very much the fact that we were going through the Korean War. There were these terrible GI comics where there were hordes of the 'yellow peril'. This was put forward as propaganda. Remember the pygmies of the Belgian Congo? I mean, that's all we ever learnt about Africa. It was really the White Man's Burden through and through. If we learnt anything about China it was how wonderful Marco Polo was, not the great Chinese civilisation. It was a pretty dreadful monocultural curriculum.

Looking back over my career I wonder whether the status of teaching wasn't a little higher than it is today. We didn't seem to have the disciplinary problems that they have today. I think too many demands are made of teachers. There are extra pressures on teachers today that weren't there twenty years ago. Now, I ask myself, what are the changes, what are the differences? I think part of the problem is unemployment, which hangs over everyone's head. Kids are becoming increasingly disillusioned, and this is swinging around in a circle to haunt teachers. It is having a bearing on school attitudes, the status of teachers and students, and, more importantly, the reason for getting an education.

If I had my chance all over again I'd go into law or journalism, because I think teaching's a very tough profession. I've done primary, high school and tertiary teaching. My conclusion is that primary teachers work very, very hard, partly because they have to create that 'community in the classroom'. I've known a hell of a lot of committed primary teachers who really worry about their students. I think, today, that teachers are expected to carry the load for the whole of society. Once upon a time it used to be mutually agreed that teachers had a role to play in the moral upbringing of kids. Parents had a very important role to play too - society in general, as well. Then came that beast of a thousand heads, television
the whole media, video, commercialisation of our lives. I think that too much is placed on the shoulders of teachers; and I don't know that I could go back into that and be prepared to take it on.

I've always believed that women excel at reinventing themselves. If they were married women teachers before the 1970s they had to because they were forced to resign! I transformed myself from a teacher into a public servant and human rights activist. I became deputy commissioner of the Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission of Western Australia, served as a director of the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) and worked for the Human Rights Commission. My latest reincarnation (hopefully my last) is as an author. In 1995 I wrote my first book, Caravanserai: Journey Among Australian Muslims, which won the New South Wales Literary Award in 1996. My second book, Broken Bangles, came out in 1998; and my most recent book, The Grand Tamasha, is a tale of literary intrigue and Islamic politics, which seems very topical in 2001!

I gained certain skills as a teacher that have been very useful in reinventing myself, particularly in my public service life and management roles. I remember when I went for my first job in the public service in Victoria I was asked if the teaching I had done had provided me with any experience in management or organising. So I looked at the chief interviewer, gave him eyeball-to-eyeball time and said, 'By the time you've taught twelve subjects across the curriculum, taken the roll, collected the swimming money, the lunch money, the milk money, dealt with irate parents, colleagues and headmasters, you know quite a bit about organising and management'.
Barbara Agocs was born in 1941, the eldest of Mary and Kenneth Beckett's four children. A strong feminist, Barbara has worked all her life as a classroom teacher always seeking to introduce the principles of gender equity into the schools at which she has taught. She worked through the Teachers' Union and the Women's Electoral Lobby to enhance working conditions for women.

I attended a number of different primary schools and particularly enjoyed Toodyay School because there was a certain freedom for kids in a country school that was not available in the city. But, as was often the case in rural schools, it was lacking in curriculum choices in maths and science because there was no one to teach them to us. Later, I enjoyed Santa Maria College in Perth. It was one of the first schools to have a swimming pool and I did like sport! But I hated boarding and I disliked the religious education side of school. What I remember most is that we weren't encouraged to question. We had to learn everything off by heart. We couldn't say, 'Well, hang on a minute! I don't agree with this'. We were constantly being told that this or that was wrong, rather than developing our ability to question. Although the religious side of education was fairly repressive, the nuns themselves were not. In fact, I often wonder whether this is why, if you look at the women's movement, you'll find there are an awful lot of Catholic-educated women in the women's movement! That may have had something to do with the nuns!

I fell into teaching. The only things I ever considered that a girl could possibly do would be nursing or teaching. I hadn't really thought about the fact that I could have done economics or similar subjects that I'm sure I would have been interested in. In any case, I got a teaching bursary to help me through my sub-Leaving and Leaving years - and that was a significant incentive to enter
teaching. It was a job that was seen to be good for women, so I just did it. I didn't have any great expectations of doing anything else, really.

I went to university for a year but then decided to go to Claremont College the following year. My first impression was not so much of the lovely buildings and surroundings but of being hauled into a big lecture theatre with May Marshall—the women's warden. She gave us a talk about what to do and what not to do. I've got a feeling that it had a sexual connotation to it. It certainly had a strong message of conformity: 'You are now at Claremont and there are certain codes of behaviour that you are expected to abide by'.

There were two groups of ex-university students, who were seen as the rabble-rousers in the College. That had something to do with being at university the previous year. We had become used to the freedom of university where no one checked up on us. Compared to this, College was a bit like school. We even had to attend an assembly! I can remember the principal, standing at the gate checking on people coming into the grounds. I can still see this man, who always looked like a huge bat in his academic gown, standing at the entrance! We treated it as a bit of a joke, though it was mainly the academic subjects that I considered a joke—they were taught at such a low level. The science lecturer often didn't call the roll so people didn't bother to turn up. One day he had nobody there! Of course, after that he had to call the roll! I suppose we behaved like this because we knew jolly well that, unless we failed everything, we were going to get a job. So we were fairly slack, on the whole.

Sewing was one of the 'A' subjects that we had to pass before we got our Teachers' Diploma. I absolutely hated it! It had always been my worst subject in primary school! We had to prepare a sewing file and, of course, I left it all to the last minute to complete. I remember staying up between twenty-four and thirty-six hours to get this jolly thing finished so that it could be submitted on time! Physical education was worthwhile. I thought the woman who ran that was excellent. The other subject that was probably of some relevance was Junior Primary Studies. I had very little junior primary training, but what I did have was very, very good. There was a strong practice component in the course. We went out at least three times a year for three to four weeks' practice. We also had very good method lectures by teachers who'd just come from the classroom. They only stayed in the College for two or three years before going back to the classroom. They were good, practising teachers, who didn't get the lecturing job unless they were excellent classroom practitioners. Other than that, I don't think the course did an awful lot in terms of preparing me for teaching. I still maintain, even today, that you learn teaching on the job. Most jobs are like that to some extent—teaching more than most.

When I was appointed to Boddington after Teachers' College, I went to see the woman I was replacing. Just in conversation I said, 'Well, how did you enjoy it?'. She said, 'I hated it. I came home every weekend'. I thought, 'Well, hang on. Don't go up there with preconceived ideas'. I decided I wouldn't go home every weekend. I chose to get involved in the local community. That made a hell of a
difference. One of the reasons why the previous teacher hadn't particularly enjoyed it was because the community saw her as flitting in and out. They must have thought, 'Well, you're not meeting us half way, so why should we bother?'. There is that expectation in the smaller towns. Later, when I worked in Collie, I noticed how much the teachers got involved in things. In fact, we made up the whole Repertory Club of the town.

I really did enjoy teaching in Boddington. Frank Usher was the head and he was a very likeable person. I threw myself into the social activities in the town. I joined the tennis club and got a tennis group going at the school. They actually put-up a practice board, because I had noticed that nobody knew how to stroke properly — which obviously meant they'd taught themselves. I thought that the least I could do would be to get a few kids interested and show them how to form their strokes. I was really quite upset when I got a transfer because it was a beaut little town. I wasn't too unhappy, though, because I was transferred to Collie, where a close woman friend I'd met at College was teaching. So I was able to get a boarding spot with her.

I'd been appointed to fairly big schools in Boddington and Collie, so the conditions were quite reasonable. The big problem was the heat in summer in the prefabs — they got very, very hot; and they were pretty cold in winter, but we did have Wonder Heaters, which the cleaners would light in the morning. The only dangerous thing I remember — and it freaks me out a bit — is a ceiling that was partly hanging down and I'm positive that it was made of asbestos. I've got a vision of the fibres hanging loose, but whether or not they were actually becoming dislodged from this piece of ceiling I don't know. It wasn't my classroom. It was one of the spare rooms that we used for music, but we were in there on a fairly regular basis each week.

I was at Collie for about four or five years. That was where I met Nick and we married. I had to resign when I got married, of course, but I was reappointed annually. Nick didn't have to resign. As well as losing tenure I lost a bonus awarded for teaching for a particular number of years. I couldn't get long service leave either because I had to resign before it came up. Also, when I started work, women teachers started on a pay that was not equal to the male rate. I must admit I hadn't really thought seriously about gender inequities in pay. I just considered it to be the norm. The first time it hit me was three years out of College when I was teaching at Collie. We had an increase in pay and one of the guys, who was only just one year out, got more than I did and I had three years' seniority! That's when I realised just how unfair it was. It was only when I was confronted with the facts that I suddenly realised, 'Well look, there's something wrong here'.

I went back to teaching on temporary staff after I was married, but I fell pregnant about three months later, so I taught for only about four months. Then I resigned (I had to). My baby, Andrea, was only ten months old when I went back to work again on a temporary basis. We'd come to Perth in the meantime. Since then, I've been teaching on and off for most of the time. I taught till I was eight months
pregnant with my second daughter, Carolyn. I was going to give up at four or five months but they were very desperate for teachers. I gave up for two years after she was born and then I went back again and I haven’t been out of the work force since. So, I would say that I have been out of the work force for no more than three to four years, since I graduated in 1960.

I went back on permanent staff in 1972. I could have regained my permanency earlier. The reason I didn’t was in fairness to my mother, who was looking after my children. On temporary staff I only had to give a week’s notice. I felt that if she ever got to the stage when she said, ‘I’ve had enough of this’; I would be able to leave work quickly. If I’d gone back on permanent staff, I would have had to give a month’s notice. So I stayed on the temporary staff by choice until 1972. As a temporary teacher I went through quite a few schools including a Catholic school, which had absolutely appalling rates of pay. I was paid as a first year out of College! They had very different standards for men and women, I can tell you! Male teachers entering the Catholic system earned what they would have been paid in the government schools, but women didn’t—certainly I didn’t! We didn’t even have any sick leave provisions. When the offer of a Department job came up, I had no compunction about giving them just a week’s notice. I’d been to a few meetings with the parent council and, after having to sit through one of those to justify why I thought I was worth more than a first year out of College (with all my experience!), I thought, ‘No way!’ I didn’t owe them anything!

I hate teaching junior primary classes. They are not my forte at all. I’ve had only a little junior primary training and I feel fairly unskilled in what I consider to be a highly skilled area. Yet, it is always the women who are shunted off to those classes. If you are lucky, and there aren’t any men who wanted to take upper-primary, then you might get slotted in to teach the older age groups, but in my experience the men always got the choice of the upper-primary classes before women. Fortunately, I never got anything lower than a Grade Three. I know that if I’d been given a Grade One class I would have been a lot more vocal than I was! Even now I couldn’t take a Grade One class in a tit. I’d have to be below the poverty line or something before I’d teach the little ones. It’s not that I dislike Grade One kids, but I just don’t feel competent in that area. I’m not alone. A lot of women feel that way, but men just assumed it’s their God-given right to teach upper-primary classes. Yet, over the years, a lot of these men went out. in the process of getting their promotion, to teach in one-teacher schools, where they had Grades One to Seven. So it was acceptable, when they were going for promotion, but not when they had a choice!

Another thing I felt very strongly about was the deputy principal’s position. It’s the equal-pay thing again! The female deputies were in a position of equal responsibility, yet they were paid less than the male deputies, even though they took full responsibility for the Grades One, Two and Three classes. I became aware of this when I was at Collie because the female deputy there was so good. Even so, she was the one who got the jolly morning tea in the staff room! Even at that stage I must have been thinking in feminist terms about
discrimination because I was already asking, 'Why the hell should the women do that?,' and 'Why is this woman taking so much responsibility when she's not even being paid for it?'. These experiences did influence me. I never sat down and consciously said, 'I am definitely not going to go for promotion because this is what I will have to do', but I knew that there was no way I wanted to be responsible for morning teas and junior primary classes. In fact, I wasn't looking at teaching as a career per se. I made the assumption, like a lot of women, that I'd get married. I hadn't really thought in the long-term about what I would be doing as a next step. This was in spite of the fact that I had always been aware of equity issues because my mother, in her own particular way, was a feminist. She certainly expected her daughters to do as well as her son.

At that time, it was expected of women on the staff that they would organise getting the biscuits, and buying tea and the coffee, as well as organising the kids to do the cleaning up. There was also an expectation that if something went wrong with the children in a medical way, the nearest woman would attend to it. Now, morning teas are a responsibility that everybody shares, but I had to fight for that. I actually raised it with the staff at my school when I was in the women's movement. I said, 'Look, there's no way I'm going to be doing the dishes'. Such fights sound almost archaic now because there have been changes in women's status, but those old, discriminatory conditions of service still affect women's teaching careers today. I mean, the negotiated wage package in the late 1980s was a classic case of women of my generation being discriminated against — again. The agreement reached then established a big difference between the increases for teachers at the top of the three-year trained scale and the four-year trained scale because the latter had a degree. But it took no cognisance of experience! No one in the Union or the Department sat down and said, 'Well, who has been in the work force for twenty-plus years and how can that be equated with an extra year's training?'. I think the difference was about five thousand dollars a year and that was for doing the same work! In any other job a pay discrepancy like that would warrant extra duties and responsibilities. That wasn't the case here at all! The Department had an Equal Opportunity Officer when that went through but I sometimes wonder what was she doing! It just appalled me!

In the early 1970s I had to do a two-year Conversion Course to become a three-year trained teacher. I could have had at least two-thirds of my degree out of the way in that time, if I hadn't had to do that course, then I would have been four-year trained! I started from scratch, when I returned to permanent staff in 1972, and that discrepancy between three and four-year trained teachers in the 1980s just rubbed salt into the wound as far as I'm concerned. Once again, it was that group of women who graduated in the 1950s and 1960s who were discriminated against. The difference in pay increase affected our situation then and it will affect us in the future. It's certainly going to affect our superannuation, because it will be based on a percentage of what we earn when we retire.

I got my first long service leave only at the end of the 1980s — my first six months, even though I'd been teaching nearly thirty years! Because I had to
resign on marriage, none of the teaching that I had done prior to 1972 was taken into account for long service leave—nothing! Nothing for promotion either! If I'd been in teaching, without having to resign, and got seniority and accouchement leave I might have actually looked at promotion. But the fact that I had to resign and break service put me back to square one. It does tend to lessen the ambition a bit!

Equal opportunity legislation and other changes have altered the status of women. There's no argument with that, but I really think it's a case of one step forward and two back! No! It can't be one step forward and two back, otherwise we'd be in dire trouble! Maybe, it's just that I expect things to happen too quickly. The fact that I've been involved in teaching and equal opportunity issues for over thirty years means that I would have expected to see more women in senior positions by now. While there may be more opportunities these days, there remain a lot of psychological and structural barriers. For example, promotion has always been associated with moving into administrative positions. I wanted to stay in the classroom— but, how do you reward the teacher who wants to continue teaching?

I was the person who actually put up the motion at a Teachers' Union branch meeting about accouchement leave. That was the initial motion that went to the Teachers' Union, State Conference. That was quite an eye-opener for me because most conference delegates at that stage were men. There were only a few women. We got comments like, 'Oh well, you're here for the women's thing, are you?'. At the time, Anne-Marie Heine held a senior position in the Union. We were very fortunate to have her because she was such a fabulous speaker. Other speakers at Conference muttered and mumbled and the chairperson had to keep calling for order. But when Anne-Marie stood up you could hear a pin drop. Her argument and her oratory in favour of accouchement leave didn't give the men in the audience an opportunity to argue back in a disparaging way, but I could feel opposition around me on a personal level. So the Union was dragged along screaming! Nennie Harken was also excellent. She'd been pushing for equal pay, but she was one woman among many men. She had a really tough job to get anything that she wanted done. She was very successful with securing equal pay for women teachers. That's why teachers got it before the equal pay decision came down in 1972 via the Federal Arbitration Commission.

I was well into politics at that stage. I wasn't just active in the women's movement. I was involved in the Australian Labor Party as well. I helped to prepare the Equal Opportunity Case under the State award system. After the 1972-73 Federal Awards granted women equal pay, we had to work to get the same thing for women whose salaries were determined under State Awards, because it didn't flow automatically to them. So I worked with Yvonne Henderson and another woman to prepare the case and Yvonne presented it at the State Arbitration Commission. It was an experience-and-a-half sitting in that Arbitration Commission because I had this view of the judiciary being very objective, yet these guys were just so challenged by what we had to say! 'What
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right do you have to be standing up here representing all these women when you've only a membership of such-and-such? In fact there were a lot of women teachers in the State! Yvonne went through the most incredible grilling. She was very well suited to the ministerial job she subsequently got in the Burke Labor Government. She was such a poised and competent person and she just never got frazzled once — and she'd just had a baby! So, I ended-up looking after the baby while she presented the case! I could never have coped with that public forum.

I was an inaugural member of Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) in 1972 and I remained a very active member until about 1976. In fact, I was the convener of WEL when it had a national conference over here. I chaired some sessions, but that was another public situation in which I didn't feel comfortable. I also used to give talks to groups, but it never got better for me. I got worse! I was involved in different WEL action groups on education, the work force, and child-care and that raised my awareness about the prospect of women having careers rather than just jobs to supplement the family income. This had real spin-offs in terms of my job as a teacher — not just from the point of view of promotion and pay, but also in the way I taught children. I tried to change things to make the opportunities much greater for girls than they had been.

I wasn't consciously feminist when I first went teaching and I can't think of any one notable event that sparked my feelings about this during the time that I worked in the teaching profession. Nothing dramatic happened that suddenly made me see the light. It seemed to be more ongoing. I never sat down and looked at the reading books and said, 'My God, this is really sexist nonsense'. Yet, it was only after I became involved in the women's movement in 1972 that I started to analyse and make conscious decisions about how I was talking to the kids, and how I was teaching them — particularly the girls. I grew to understand more about how I was doing things in the classroom and how I should encourage girls to take a more active role in classroom and school activities.

The early years of the women's movement in Australia were very exciting, for me, because I got together with a lot of women who'd obviously been thinking about similar issues, and we were all coming to the same conclusions. I realised, 'Well obviously, I'm OK. I'm not weird because I've had these thoughts. It's not me — there really is something wrong with the system'. We sat down and talked about things an awful lot. In fact, there was a hell of a lot more talking then than I think there is in women's activities now. So, just by the process of sharing experiences and talking I began to realise what I was doing in the classroom. I started to look at the sorts of books the kids were being provided with — even the way the girls behaved and how they stood back to let the boys take over. It started fitting into place as to why they were doing that. That then got me involved in the Women in Education group, from where I started to push for changes to be made in the system.

One of the things that I was involved in was research on how girls were presented in school reading books. We found a consistent pattern of female
passivity. It was the old 'Dick and Dora' syndrome: Dora's at the bottom of the tree watching Dick climb the tree! That was really brought home to me when my youngest daughter, Danielle, first started Grade One. She came home with this book and she asked, 'Why isn't Dora climbing the tree?'. She was obviously picking up a few clues herself at that age!

We also thought that girls were lacking opportunities in the high schools because they didn't have access to the manual arts component of the curriculum. So we lobbied hard for girls to be able to study manual arts. Now it's taken for granted that Year Eight boys and girls will do both home economics and manual arts, but we met a lot of flack when we first suggested the notion. These days you just wouldn't comprehend the sort of rubbish and nonsense that we were fed about why girls shouldn't do manual arts. I remember going on a deputation to the minister for education at the time. He sat there talking about the fact that girls' brains (or women's brains) were smaller than men's and so this affected their capacity to learn! It took us all our time to keep a civil tongue in our heads! We couldn't 'go off our brains' at him because it was a formal situation.

There are probably hundreds of ways in which I still unconsciously discriminate on the basis of gender. In fact, studies have shown that even feminist women discriminate against girls! I have to admit, when I'm getting a book out of the library to read to the kids, I will immediately think, 'Will this appeal to the boys?'. I still don't have that same immediate concern about the extent to which a book will appeal to the girls. However, what I've tried to do over the years, particularly with literature, is to get books in which girls are equally represented. These are quite difficult to find, although there's a lot more coming out now. Even though I teach older kids, I will read to them for five or ten minutes a day. So that's an opportunity for me to present girls in positive and active roles.

I've tried to promote compensatory activities for the girls but not in an overt way, because that sets up all sorts of dynamics in the room — the boys may think I'm favouring girls. I've managed to avoid that, primarily because I get the boys and girls to interact with each other as much as possible — I do like the girls and boys to work together. At the same time, I make sure that the boys don't take over. Even so, I'm not always committed to the strategy of integration because often I think, 'No! The girls should have their own space to do this — like computer studies — because the boys are taking over'. If I'm taking a new sport, like soccer, I will get the girls to work on their own for a while, just until they learn some of the skills. Alternatively, I set up a game in which the kids have to keep within certain areas, so that the boys are not constantly moving in on the girls' space. When I get them out doing softball, I don't allow the boys to take over all the skilled positions. I say, 'Right. Every time there's a new innings, you will have a different position. It'll be boy, girl, boy, girl', until the girls get to a level where they feel confident. Girls can be reticent to take academic risks. For example, if I ask questions in the room, the boys seem to have less fear of being wrong, so I try different ways to involve the girls. I find that if I work on this over a year, the kids do start to respond. The girls start to become more assertive. If I'm doing
history lessons or social studies, I make sure that I include as many women as possible as historical figures. I've got to do a bit of extra work, but it is possible to find them because they are there. This is where my husband, Nick, has been an absolute mine of information because he's a history fanatic and he has so much information.

Back in the 1970s we had to fight for every change that we achieved. Mixed sport was something I had to fight for. Instead of having limited sporting activities, where the boys went to cricket and the girls went to softball, I fought for a half-a-dozen different sports from which the kids could choose, whether they be boys or girls. We had to fight to get an equal opportunity officer into the Education Department, who then didn't have any back-up. Sometimes I get quite despondent, because I can't see any significant evidence of all this equal opportunity activism influencing schools and classrooms. I don't see anyone monitoring schools to make them accountable for what they're doing about gender equity. For example, one thing hit me the other day, when the Grade Seven kids at my school had just come back from a camp. At assembly they performed some skits they had made up at the camp. There wasn't one girl performing in any of those skits. Now I'm wondering what's happening in that class. Maybe the girls didn't want to do it – they were given the choice as to whether to perform or not – but something's happening there that's not giving them the confidence. Usually at Grade Seven level the girls are quite confident. I see this happening and I think, 'Well, something's missing somewhere. Gender equity is not being followed through or pushed'.

In the 1970s I fought all the time. After a while I became a bit of a butt of humour on the staff. I was very fortunate, when I was at North Morley Primary, that there were quite a few other people on the staff who thought as I did, so there was a lot of support. But I felt as though I was fighting battles all the time and after a while I began to back off. I should have been able to go up to one of the Grade Seven teachers after that assembly and say, 'What happened to all the girls? What's going on in the school?'. Maybe, I should have brought it up at a staff meeting. I'm not intimidated, but I feel like I've done it to death and I'm really exhausted. I just don't want to be in that situation again. That sounds like a real cop-out, I know, but you do get burnt-out after a while. You begin to think you sound like a gramophone record that's got stuck. I won't stand aside and tolerate injustice, but, as for initiating anything as a result of just that small incident at the assembly, I must admit I'm a bit slack these days.

The kids in my classroom have been the major highlight of my career. But, looking back, I think the 1970s were the most exciting time for me in teaching. It was a period, not just of change within education, but also there was a new political climate. People were beginning to break out of the sort of rigidity that we'd had in the 1950s and the 1960s. That wind of change blew into education so that there were lots of new ideas coming through which took a lot of the constraints off teaching. For example, prior to the 1970s, you had to have a quiet room, otherwise you weren't a good teacher! In the 1970s, it was possible to
have a busy, lively room with the kids actively involved in learning. That exciting period came to quite a nasty end when unemployment rose and everybody started running around getting authoritarian again – many restrictions have come back in. I think job satisfaction has certainly lessened since then because the demands are so much greater and teaching has lost status within the community. How other people perceive you ultimately affects how you see yourself! The fact that teachers are blamed for everything that occurs in society is a bit of a worry. So is the fact that more and more subjects are loaded onto them. I think my greatest disappointment is in having to come down from the 1970s instead of continuing in an upward spiral in education. On the plus side, teaching has offered me lots of opportunities for being my own boss. But, until it's given the recognition and the status it deserves, I just wouldn't recommend teaching to anyone. My guess is that if you ask any teacher now, 'Do you still like teaching?', nine out of ten will say 'No'.
Margaret Nadebaum. born 1942, became the first woman to be appointed chief executive officer of the Western Australian Ministry of Education. In 1992, she became principal of Methodist Ladies' College, Perth.

Until I was sixteen my family lived in a variety of country centres. My father was a school principal and we travelled from school to school as he was promoted. At the time, I thought it was perfectly natural to do that sort of thing. I now realise that moving almost yearly from one country town to another through most of my childhood, was not an experience that many people had. It meant that I needed to be very flexible and adapt to the idea that I would change my set of friends every year. I probably experienced more teachers than most other students, and certainly more school situations. Coupled with the fact that my family was very much oriented to teaching, this meant that most of my young years were spent in an education environment. It became part of my life at an early age.

There were disadvantages in travelling around, particularly when I was a teenager, because the peer group is very important, and when you're looking at re-establishing yourself in a different peer group every year, that does create some problems. I certainly noticed it when I needed to make the move, when I was sixteen, from the country to the city, and become part of a school where relationships were established, and expectations were different from the ones that I'd experienced in smaller country schools. In hindsight, I probably see those experiences as valuable, but at the time they were not without their strains. You learn a lot, though. For me, it contributed to the development of what I'd see as a strong independence, and a recognition that I needed to be able to get on easily with a wide range of people. At the same time, I had to feel comfortable with myself. I've always seen that as important. I'm now sure that those
childhood experiences had more effect than, perhaps, I would have seen at the time.

The family always supported me and my two brothers. We felt that we had support for whatever we were doing, but choosing what I did at university was very much my own decision. Although both parents had been to university for part of their education, I think that their knowledge of it was still fairly small, really, so they were guided by me. I look back and am quite appalled at why I went to university. I had always thought of primary teaching because it was what my family had done. I really hadn't thought of high school teaching and I hadn't thought of university. In the country, I didn't know many people who had been to university, so I didn't talk with anyone who had that expectation. For me it was a very late decision indeed — after 'Leaving' results had come out. I'd done reasonably well, so I did have the real option of going to university or not. I enrolled virtually on the day that enrolments closed and, I suspect, made a badly reasoned decision that I could go to university as well as train to be a teacher. Even then, I thought I had the fall-back position that if I didn't like university, or if I didn't like the idea of secondary teaching, then I could still do primary teaching. My decision was so quick, so short-term and so unconsidered!

I enrolled for Arts because I didn't understand how university courses were put together. I hadn't sought or received that sort of counselling. I hadn't read handbooks, and it seemed that I could put an Arts degree together which would allow me to study the things I was interested in. So, I chose the things I was interested in, English and geography, and some other things I thought I could cope with. So I had a very broadly based university degree! I've always seen myself as a generalist rather than a specialist but I wouldn't claim to have put any rational planning into it. I'm appalled at how I went into it, how unprepared I was, and how little thought I'd given to alternatives.

I really wanted to major in anthropology but, when I put that to the Claremont Teachers' College principal, I was told it was not possible because it had no use whatsoever for teachers. So, here was a study of human beings and the state of human beings, treated as not relevant at all! That highlighted the philosophy at the time. Secondary teachers studied at university what they were going to teach in school. There wasn't a tolerance of development of the wider person that could make a more effective teacher. I felt a bit taken aback and put an interim sort of course in place, that didn't mention anthropology on the admission form, but had me majoring in English and geography. That was what went through officially, but what I was hoping was that they might change their mind by the time I needed to start to major in anthropology. Only when I went out teaching and finished my degree part-time, did I actually finish my major in anthropology. But the happy thing about it was that I did manage things so that when I started teaching and doing my final, most demanding, unit it really
interested me. Doing that subject motivated me in a very difficult first year of teaching.

The situation was that we were at university during the university term time. We, typically, did teaching practice during university vacations, which tended to be at the beginning or end of the school year, which were not always the times when students and teachers really wanted training students coming in to the school. At the end of the year, particularly, you'd just finished university exams, you were absolutely exhausted, but you had to do three weeks' teaching practice. About a day before we went on 'prac' we'd front up at the College, be told where we were going and what we were teaching, and then we'd see supervisors who would occasionally supervise our teaching.

In the final year we spent more time at Claremont, maybe two days a week, and did what were called 'method' lectures. I can recall things like 'mathematics teaching method' and something called 'social institutions' which was really a watered down anthropology, but I wasn't allowed to be exempted because I wasn't allowed to major in anthropology. So we sat through 'social institutions' and 'English method', and I think we did speech and a wide variety of things that I suspect were supposed to supplement the in-depth study we'd done at university. My memory is that it was essentially fragmented and at a less intellectually stimulating level than university. I concede it was supposed to be practically oriented, but, I think that, because we'd had such little experience in school, and we'd had such inopportunistly placed practice, we never saw it as being an integrated learning experience.

In that year too, we needed to go to assemblies which university had led us to believe we would not be going to; very much like the school revisited. Subjects discussed at assembly were very much those relevant to full-time students at Claremont. We felt that we weren't part of that but we had to be there. We had to tolerate things like roll calls and other sorts of things not in the adult, university ethos, where we'd been for two years. It was very much a school situation and included a lot of routines we harshly interpreted as schools 'writ large'. There was a lot of reaction against this, though I was really very abiding and compliant with all asked of us. Many of my friends made judgments that, I suppose, were much more courageous judgments than mine at the time: that it really wasn't worthwhile fronting up on this particular afternoon; or 'Why should we go to swimming lessons down in the dirty Swan River at the bottom of the road?'. So I guess they made judgments which, for adults, were appropriate. For students who had been to university there was almost a 'them-and-us' feeling at Claremont. I got to know very few full-time, Claremont students and the people I kept contact with were those I'd been through university with. I wasn't aware of any university student who felt totally committed and enthused by Claremont. Because I'd been involved in university sport, I continued those affiliations. In any case, I was doing a unit at university at the time. My social group was still largely at university doing further studies, and I just found that we weren't involved (or, I wasn't involved) in the Claremont extra-curricular activities.
There wasn’t a men’s warden at Claremont, but the women’s warden was quite a legend. Women students would be gathered together to hear a lecture on how they should protect their morals; quite novel after a couple of years at university! It was all done in the very best spirit with the sort of theme being: ‘As women who are going out into teaching, you’re going into country towns, you’re going to be living away from home for the first time’, because that often was the case. For many city students it would be the first time they’d left home, while for country students many would be boarding in a family situation. There wasn’t the independence that occurs as early as it does now, and there was a real concern for welfare and decorum in the wider world. There were themes of needing to uphold the respectability of the teaching profession. To my knowledge, the Claremont men were not given similar lectures! Most of us thought moral lectures were a novelty. We kept being told by people who had graduated before us that we mustn’t miss them. They tended to be annual unless there was a mini-crisis in the College! I seem to recall a case concerning a College function, and some of the female students had become the worse for wear with alcohol. This was seen as not being responsible and if it occurred in a country town it would cast aspersions on the whole profession.

I had no doubts that I wanted to be a teacher – there was never a doubt about that. But I feel that I thought pretty short-term. I never thought in terms of moving into a promotional position. It was classroom teaching I was thinking about at that stage, and I think the sorts of things that were foremost in my mind were: Where will I be sent to teach? How long will I be there? What subjects will I need to teach? There were all those operational things. I didn’t think beyond that at the time. I was posted to Tuart Hill Senior High School, which surprised me because I had made myself available State-wide. I think it was quite atypical at the time, but I stayed there for six years. Generally, the pattern was a year, or two years, in the metropolitan area, and then certainly a country appointment. I don’t know what contributed to that, but imagine it was just fortuitous. I certainly never made any noises that I wasn’t willing to go to the country, and each year was somewhat surprised that I wasn’t transferred.

In my first year I wasn’t actually based at Tuart Hill High School but at an annexe in North Perth Primary School. There were four, first-year classes and four teachers, and between us we taught those four classes everything. It was a quite discrete annexe and we went to the main school only half a day a week so the students could do manual arts and home economics. That was our non-contact time – our only non-contact time. Otherwise, we were teaching English, maths, history, geography, French, physical education – the whole range, which I still think was an excellent grounding in teaching. We provided those students with a very stable first year in high school.

The conditions were far from ideal but you can imagine that a very strong concept of teamwork developed. I learnt a lot from needing to work very closely with three other people. We were all very different but circumstances forced us to get on amazingly well. I gained confidence to try ways of teaching better, or
to get superior results from the students. My commitment grew and my confidence grew, largely, I think, because of the stable environment. I got to know a lot of the students and they got to know me.

The main school had a fairly stable staff with a lot of experience but it wasn't easy teaching as it was a large school of seventeen hundred students. I was teaching classes of students that now we see as students with special needs, so I needed to become more skilled in working out what their needs were, and how I could adapt my teaching to them. When you've got seventeen hundred students in a school you've got enough opportunity to become aware of a wide cross-section of students' needs, and a wide cross-section of parental expectations.

Because it was the largest city school at that time, it meant that senior subject people were very experienced and quite senior within their own right. I didn't realise until afterwards how fortunate I'd been to have subject-seniors in social sciences, in English and languages, and that the advice they could give and the model and example they set, were significant. I was very lucky as I had their support and a lot of opportunity to teach progressively more senior students. Within those six years I taught a wide variety of subjects at all levels, from Years Eight to Twelve.

At the end of my sixth year I was transferred, on paper, to another metropolitan school. In fact there was a postal strike, and I didn't receive the transfer! Then, in the last week of the holidays, I was contacted to see whether I'd be interested in going to Bunbury, in charge of English, in an acting capacity. I didn't have to think too long or hard about the decision and, by agreeing, it also established a role that said, 'specialising in English'. Until then, I had deliberately not done that and had been teaching a wide variety of subjects. Once again, the die was cast for me in a fairly non-considered way.

The Bunbury experience was really interesting – being in a large country centre and in a large, established senior high school. I went into a position in charge of a subject and hadn't had any opportunity to talk to the person previously in charge. So there was no hand-over and I was faced with students from Years Eight to Twelve, a full timetable of English and English literature, an almost totally new staff (most of them first year or second year out), and all other subject-seniors were at least fifteen years my senior. Going into that situation with a day's notice was fairly challenging to say the least! The sudden nature of the appointment meant that I had to do an enormous amount of background reading, both for my own teaching and to give guidance to the younger staff. It was frenetic from that point of view.

I was the only woman, apart from the home economics person, who was a subject-senior. That, I think, was more noticeable to the others, to the men, than it was to me. At that time all of the subject-seniors shared the same office. We needed, for survival, to get on well and this was no difficulty. We also needed to be flexible. I needed to be prepared to learn from them and, in turn, to be aware
that I might do things differently all the same. I was not aware of discrimination. I found the group and staff very accepting.

I was enjoying Bunbury and when I saw an opportunity to apply for a substantive position in a new high school in Bunbury I applied and got it. It wasn't surprising because at that stage we needed a female deputy principal in each high school. Because women had to resign on marriage there just weren't enough women with the seniority and qualifications to be eligible. There were a number of high schools where the position of the female deputy principal was not filled; there just weren't enough applicants. This was the first position for which I actually applied. I enjoyed that, and it was about that time that I started to see quite strongly a career in teaching, and to think through the implications of marriage, which would mean that I would have had to resign and lose all my seniority. That's a pretty significant decision to make but I didn't see a lot of women providing me with a model of being able to marry, have a family, and still sustain a career. So even if there hadn't been that barrier, of having to resign and thereby lose one's seniority, I still would have found it difficult to work out a reconciliation between a family and continuing a career. In my experience, there weren't women I could relate to who had done both of those things, or were doing both of those things. A number of my friends had families and that was fine. Others I could see who'd made career decisions: they didn't have families and that was fine. I just didn't see an option to have both and, looking back, the sense of career became progressively stronger and I found that to be exclusive of marriage. I suppose, then, I started to gear my lifestyle more generally towards career, and less to family. I now see a host of women, not a lot younger than me, who have raised a family and gone back into successful careers. I'm full of admiration for how they did it. They must need enormous support systems to play simultaneous career and family roles.

I was only one year as deputy in Bunbury. The next year I moved to a senior high school; went overseas and taught; and came back to a large metropolitan senior high school, still as deputy, and years later, moved to Willetton. When that opened as a flexible-area school I was interested in seeing a new design and how that might work.

There was a capacity and opportunity for considerable mobility as a female deputy principal, but regulations precluded my becoming a principal at that stage. I accepted this in the early stages, but I really became very aware of it and saw it as an injustice when men of my age, my peers who had moved through the deputy ranks, were becoming eligible for the position of principal. I had nothing in front of me except continuing as a deputy. The sense of injustice really started to be aroused after I'd been a deputy for ten years.

I was active in the Deputy Principals' Association (a women's association). There was a separate association for men, and that was symptomatic of the time. I was president when we made representation to decision-makers in the Education Department. It was a major issue and there was a lot of discussion amongst women across the State. We worked through the Union. In the end
there was some access for women to the principals' promotion list. But it was still discriminatory because the regulations said that women placed on the principals' seniority promotion list needed to match the average seniority of men who went on it in any one year. While blatantly discriminatory it was a significant step forward in our quest for equality. Subsequently, but only quite recently, that has changed to merit promotion and equal access.

It was a legacy, still there from a time when women were paid less than men, and a manifestation of the fact that men were seen to have a right to career structures, and higher pay than women. When I started teaching, I got less pay than my male colleagues. Things had changed, but the legacy was still there. There were arguments that women may not be reliable employees because they may get pregnant and then not able to work in a school. There were all of those older attitudes but regulations, as we know, often change more slowly than practice might decree. At the time it was a critical barrier for me, so I looked for sideways moves where I could get additional experience. I applied for a position with Murdoch University when it opened, but there wasn't a willingness to second me from the Department of Education. I met with Dave Mossenson, the director-general, and talked to him about my career. I'd been a deputy for ten years but there was nowhere else I could go. He gave me a good hearing and asked questions that indicated he understood the situation and wanted to address it as an issue.

I see the discussion with Dave Mossenson as a quite significant point in my career. I surprised myself that I took the step of seeking an appointment. I'd never done that before. I'd never written to the director-general, and I'd never spoken one-to-one with the director-general, but I felt so frustrated when I'd applied for the Murdoch position as a supervisor of training student teachers, and had been successful in the interview, only to be told that, 'We couldn't second you because you're a deputy principal and that would make too much of a hole in the school'. I was so frustrated I rang the director-general, saying, 'Look, I'm really in a situation where I understand you've made a decision that you won't second me and I'd really like to come and put my case to you'. I'm still staggered that I did that, but to his credit, the next day he gave me an appointment and it was a long and very fruitful discussion. I think he felt I may resign. I had no intention of doing that but he had the superintendent ring me that evening indicating that he hoped I wouldn't resign, and that he felt that there would be some opportunities down the track.

I didn't resign, and later that year there were advertisements for newly created positions for secondary, regional superintendents. The advertisement said that it was hoped that senior women would apply, which I suppose was as good as a nod to us. It interested me, as it was a generalist position and was secondary. I was one of a number of senior women the Education Department talked to and generally encouraged to apply. Whether my discussion with the director-general had had any effect I don't know, but I applied and was appointed without interview. I look back now and think that Dave Mossenson significantly fostered
my career at that point. It meant that I resigned as an Education Act person and became a public servant, so it opened up for me a whole new career path and was a critical career point.

It was so different, for I think you get immediate gratification from teaching students. But I was lucky because the position of regional superintendent had me in classrooms four days a week. I felt I was in direct touch with students, teachers, and parents. I felt I had these broad role connections so I didn’t miss teaching, unduly. In this supervisory role, I became aware that there was a whole new set of skills I didn’t have, a whole area of theory I needed to know about, and that these weren’t going to be provided by my employer. So I decided I needed to look around the universities. This time I did some rational planning and I looked through many universities in Australia to see which offered the most relevant course for what I thought I needed. This was to provide me with insight into supervision and other related areas appropriate for a superintendent. I also believed I needed to undertake some in-depth research, something I hadn’t done in education.

I identified New England University and did some course work and a thesis. I thought it was very relevant and it allowed me to apply theory to the work I was doing, to look at how I might fill my role based on good practice the course work was drawing to my attention. The fact that I was at a university not in Western Australia, and one that provided strong external studies in educational administration, meant I was studying with international students, and that was also important. It broke that insularity of Western Australians lecturing to West Australians about Western Australia, and was a definite broadening of my perspectives, and an opportunity to see a variety of ways in which common issues and problems were being addressed in different systems.

It also made me look critically at the role of superintendents in our system. Once again, there was an absence of models. There was no other female, regional secondary superintendent. The position was new, anyway, so there were no men either. So, a new role, the only woman in that position, and the only models I had to look at seemed totally inappropriate. I suppose it helped me to see some solutions to some problems. But what it did, most of all, was allow me to look, in a positive, critical and constructive way, at how other people were filling the role and say, ‘All right, now how will I fill it? Are there some of those areas that I can take on-board or do I need to look for a different way?’. I think I probably did fill it differently from the three others appointed at the time.

This was the first time I think I really put my credibility at risk in relation to people with whom I had to interact every day. These were senior principals of secondary schools in the region – all men. There was no woman principal in any of the schools for which I was responsible. I also had two country regions where the schools tended to be smaller, and the principals younger, mainly ambitious, and men.
I had to make decisions about where my credibility lay, given that with principals in large schools I was very much their junior. I hadn't been a principal. Where was my credibility based? I resolved that it had to be through expertise, and it had to be through assuming a supervisory role that was very collegiate but able to offer insights into the way their schools were operating, given that I worked with some thirty schools. It was quite conscious, because I could see that if I didn't do that from the outset, there was a risk that we would have gone through the patronising stage, the 'keep the person at bay' stage, the stage of defensiveness, because this might be a feminist who was coming, and goodness knows what this equal opportunity thing is about! I mean, it could arouse all those things! I saw myself as needing to establish a role different from the way that I think a man may have acted, where interpersonal relationships would have been very naturally person-to-person. A number of those principals had never been in a situation where they needed to speak collegially with a woman peer, or, as in my case, a woman in a superior position, responsible for supervising them. Whilst I would always prefer to work in a collegiate way, there was a very observable variation, the whole spectrum of degree of comfort with which each of those male principals related to me.

At the same time I made a conscious decision about how I was going to foster women and equal opportunity. I gauged there was no mileage in coming out publicly and strongly about the need to have more women in promotional positions. But I needed to keep faith with women and genuinely be supporting them, so I deliberately chose to do that on a one-to-one basis. I never, at that stage, made any public statement addressing the equal opportunity issue. I had a number of long conversations with women encouraging, supporting and so forth, and with men, particularly principals and male deputies, about the general issue of equal access to curriculum, the fostering of able women, those types of things — but never publicly. I felt the timing wasn't right. Besides, there not being any mileage in it, I thought, in fact, that it might close communication channels, which if I were going to be effective, needed to be opened as widely as possible. So these were quite conscious decisions. When I look back, I think they were the most deliberate decisions that I've made in my whole career. That was really the first time I saw age and gender differences to be sufficiently significant to diminish some of my effect.

I believe absolutely in equality, but I've never seen myself as representing this in a strong way in public forums. If that's what feminist means well, then, I'd have to say that I'm not one. Yet I do feel my strategies were successful. I did establish a credibility and an acceptability, to varying degrees, obviously. But I think I managed to keep communication channels very open between principals, the senior staff, and myself. I think I managed to fulfil the supervisory role, but I hope I'm accurate in thinking I did so in a way that was empowering schools rather than empowering myself. I always saw it that way. It certainly seemed to be an appropriate way to continue to operate for some years.
Even so, there were still a couple of principals I couldn’t claim to have worked with highly successfully. They were always polite but I never thought I succeeded in genuine open discussion of school issues of interest to both of us. That probably sums it up, but there were the few awkward occasions when I needed to report on a principal in a case of alleged misconduct. I think that brings out any sensitivities a man may have about a woman in a supervisory position. I think that crystallises at a time when the person in question is feeling threatened and uneasy, as anyone would over alleged misconduct, and it’s a woman who’s investigating. In one case I had I felt that gender had perhaps complicated things, and made it harder for the person about whom I had to report. It was a sexual harassment case. I found it particularly difficult. I felt for the person who had, in a moment of indiscretion, done something he really regretted, and it had got into the public forum, and resulted in the need for a full inquiry. I found myself weighing things and thinking, you know, where is the line between one’s concern for the person as a human being, whom one was responsible for supervising, as against a person who, in fact, had committed an indiscretion and caused anxiety to other people. They become quite complex situations and, yes, I feel those very much on a human level.

It helps to be able to talk through such situations. Although, generally, I feel self-sufficient and happy with myself, I found in those cases a phone call to a discrete friend to be a wonderful outlet. The discretion of the friend needs to be beyond doubt. It puts a real onus on the friend, and I’m mindful of that. It does feel lonely sometimes, but not to an overwhelming degree. There will be occasions, for any person, where you just want to get home and get away from the public eye and just say, ‘God! I had a ghastly day and it was this, that and the other thing’. But I find those times not to be overly frequent and, generally, am not aware of what I call ‘loneliness’.

In 1987 the Education Department was restructured in relation to Better Schools. At the time I was regional director in Fremantle and the Better Schools structure abolished regions. Overnight, my former position was gone, regions to which I was very committed were gone, and I was brought in to act as director of operations in head office. When that degree of restructuring occurs, and it just changes one’s career options, I ask questions of myself that I would not have asked had I continued as a regional director. I would have been happy to have been a regional director for the rest of my career—particularly in the Fremantle region. I wasn’t sure I really want to be based in head office, because I always felt that if you administered education by remote control then you weren’t in daily touch with teachers, students and parents. I’d said that publicly and I really felt it.

Initially, the structure was filled with everyone in acting capacities. Ultimately, everyone had to apply for their positions. There was no guarantee that, had I applied for my acting position, I would have got it. There was that uncertainty, and the uncertainty of whether I wanted it. I thought, I can’t be passive about this and let fate take its course. I needed to be doing something pro-actively.
I started, casually, to look around for other jobs that maybe I could do. I'd never been outside of education, and I had become more critical of people who had never been outside education since they started school – including myself. At the time the government was establishing the Senior Executive Service, a group of some three hundred of the most senior people in all government agencies. There was to be a new department set up to put it in place. A director position was advertised with general management criteria. It was one of the few positions that didn't require in-depth expertise in a specific professional area. Given my general degree and general experience, I thought I could apply for it without seeming to be too preposterous. I thought if I got an interview that would be an experience in itself, which I hadn't really had. I was lucky enough to get an interview and absolutely staggered to get the job! Then I realised that, here again, it was a new job and I was the first person in it! So I thought well, there's no tradition, and no best way of doing it. It's up to me to establish it, so I moved outside education.

This position was responsible for putting in place a set of common procedures for the recruitment, selection, appointment and professional development of most senior people in government, to form a common management resource for government. I had to develop a system of performance appraisal for those people, and it made me realise how incredibly insular I was. I thought I'd been developing myself, but it was all within education. This insularity was the first thing that hit me. The second thing was my need to work daily with people in some hundred different agencies. This was an enormous opportunity to see a whole range of government organisations and how they worked, and to be talking with a whole set of chief executive officers. It also provided the opportunity to work under the supervision of a very senior manager, who had been in both private and public sectors. I had to learn about exemplary practices in human resource management, which was an eye-opener to me. I had to become extremely familiar with ways in which equal employment opportunity legislation was to be reflected in all practices. I needed to become aware of the different cultures of organisations and the common factors, and I needed to become very familiar with the management practices the government insisted be put in place. These were the rational management processes of performance appraisal, program management, and strategic corporate planning.

The agency was very small, and I had an opportunity of working with a small group of people to foster their careers and provide them with opportunities to grow. It was almost a microcosm of what I'd been working with elsewhere but a totally different perspective, and a totally different style of management. I found it all extremely challenging and valuable. In terms of my knowledge and understanding of what it means to manage, I learnt an inordinate amount.

Had I not had that experience, I doubt that I would have ever considered applying for the chief executive officer position in the Education Department. But I felt that I'd seen so many chief executive officers operating in two and a half years: I'd seen a variety of styles, a whole range of models – not many of them women
-- but a number of models. I felt there were challenges there and that I had some idea of how other people were addressing problems that I'm sure were common to education as well. So I thought, 'Yes, it is possible for a woman to be a chief executive officer'. That's a quite recent phenomenon in Western Australia! The reassuring thing for me was that it was possible for a woman to head an organisation, and I don't think I looked much beyond that because it hadn't been apparent to me before.

I agonised about whether to apply or not. I was really very ambivalent and went from strongly thinking, 'No, don't touch it with a pole', to thinking, 'Well, there are a lot of challenges and it's moving forward; it's an opportunity to expand horizons again'. A number of people suggested I would have something to offer, and that made me think more seriously about whether to apply. People who offered encouragement typically were classroom teachers I had worked with in various situations. None were particularly senior, but I had enormous support to apply from my own supervisor, and I guess I needed to take some heed about that. I don't think he wanted to get rid of me and in many ways I had a mentor there. So, in the end, I decided there's no harm in putting your hat in the ring. If successful, I'd treat it like other career moves. I was low-key and ambivalent about the decision, but I was successful!

The position was advertised at the height of an industrial dispute with teachers. I had a number of close friends who are committed teachers, and was very aware of how bitter, disillusioned and angry they were. I mean, if those people were feeling like that, then my judgment was that there was something fundamentally very wrong with the organisation. It was being manifest in distressing ways in the media and in public. I felt very distressed about that, even from the outside, and I felt that to go into the job I'd have to deal with crises and situations where there was real alienation, as far as I could see, between the schools and central office. I don't think anyone could have had an appetite to move into a position with such problems, and I just couldn't even see how one would start to address them. That was the overwhelming climate when the job was advertised.

I was in the Department in '87 and I know how strong were the forces to change quickly, but without the capacity to get the support needed for schools to respond. For secondary schools, it came right on the top of the new Unit Curriculum which hadn't settled down. People were still coming to terms with it conceptually, much less in practice. Unit Curriculum had put an enormous number of additional tasks onto teachers and, in the next year, Better Schools spoke of a devolved system, which planned to devolve another whole set of tasks to the schools. Teachers must have felt totally inundated with additional work, but without the clear guidelines needed. All of that was compounded industrially into quite direct salary claims, and a government unable to respond to the magnitude of those demands. All of these things came to a head.

I think schools' perception of central office was, 'You haven't given us the support; you're not supporting our request for dollars'. Everyone agreed there
needed to be salary rises, but I think central office people were in an awkward situation because it was a government decision and they weren't able to be very forthright. Central office was perceived, rightly or wrongly, as not understanding schools, as being uncaring and not coming-up with the goods in terms of reward or recognition. That then became a vicious circle, with central office not being able to have its senior people go into schools to talk through the issues. The situation had accelerated beyond that, and did a lot of damage to relationships, particularly between central office and schools.

Personally, I wanted to visit schools as often as I could, and get into open dialogue. What I didn't want to be doing was go to schools to preach central office philosophy. I wanted to be listening, seeing and hearing, raising important issues and inviting schools to respond. I wanted to be hearing first-hand, and to be seen to be listening. I wanted schools to feel supported by central office and to share a common goal of providing quality education for kids. I wanted to avoid giving messages that raised the level of cynicism or caused any more breakdown of communications. I am concerned about teachers as people, and I'm concerned about schools. I was concerned to find out about these first-hand.

I also needed to operate at a corporate level to ensure that management systems were in place to serve us well as educationalists. If we didn't get management systems appropriate for the complexity of our organisation we weren't going to do ourselves justice as educators, or be able to have our expertise brought to bear. A lot of effort went into assessing management systems and putting together a corporate statement that people in schools, districts and head office could relate to and feel committed to. That gave a common direction. Those two fronts are what I call the very human front, and the re-affirmation of the importance of people. On the other hand, we were in the 1990s, and into sophisticated management possibilities and strict accountability requirements. So it was no good our not addressing these in the most rigorous ways we could.

We made some changes at the second level of the organisation, by moving from two divisions to four divisions. Essentially, we flattened the structure to create a genuine devolution of responsibilities. This allowed central office to be more responsive to schools and I wanted to ensure our human resource area had the capacity to deal with the day-to-day interpersonal relations with teachers, and operational tasks like the mammoth school staffing exercise. Also, I felt that it was our responsibility as an employer to provide systematic professional development opportunities for teachers. This now has the much higher profile needed. The aim was to develop the capacity to stay at the cutting edge of educational thought and practice – nationally and internationally. We needed to be very sure as an education ministry that the basis for decisions were informed by the best practice.

The Memorandum of Agreement signed with the State School Teachers' Union essentially bedded down many of the changes of Better Schools. It identified the resources and established a time frame for change. Since 1987 there hadn't
been a document that brought together three things: What will happen? When will it happen? What resources will make it happen? The agreement provided the framework and also indicated issues to be negotiated on an annual basis. I believe strongly that our expertise and experience as educators will only be brought to bear on what happens to students in schools, and the quality of our education system, if we manage the process appropriately. This means ensuring that we make informed management decisions, and that resources are deployed in a way to the absolute benefit of the sort of student we want to produce. If we were managers without educational background and expertise, I believe we'd try and set up some sort of system more like a production line. That would certainly jar in education. If we were educators with no knowledge of exemplary corporate management practice, I think we simply wouldn't be up to the task of moving education forward. It's a very sophisticated management task with enormous resources to manage: a budget like a billion dollars, twenty-two thousand teachers, and an enormous number of students. That calls for the highest sophistication of corporate management. But teachers are our main resource in number and value. If it doesn't happen in classrooms, whatever the 'it' is, it's not going to happen. That's where education occurs. That's what it's all about.

In the early stages of my career I didn't think ahead. Things happened and were fortuitous, but those times are long passed. Today, people deliberately need to be thinking right through career paths and analysing early in their careers the skills and capacities they have, where they will be competitive, and looking at how to promote their careers. They must really drive their career chances. It's important that women seek mentors. That didn't arise for me and I didn't think about it until quite late in my career. I now see that, when I moved out of education, my development was fostered by my supervisor. I realise how important that was. I also think that over the last few years, when I've had the opportunity to mentor a couple of very impressive young women, how important that is from both sides. I have women's networks, but I think it's important that women also seek mixed networks – that's the reality of the business world. It's the reality of senior administrators. From men's point of view, it's also important that they interact with women as peers. I suppose I'd also say, if I look in hindsight, 'Put your hat in the ring for opportunities that might arise'. I mean, my career has been a whole sequence of 'taking the risk' and, probably, being in the right place at the right time.
Elizabeth Ann Davenport was born in Albany in 1945, one of six children of Madge (nee Moore) and Thomas Muir. She is a well-known, international fashion designer and political activist for the preservation of old-growth forests.

I had a country childhood. I grew-up with nature. It was part of my childhood. It instilled in me, from my earliest memories, love for the creatures, the ants, lizards, spiders, frogs, and birds. They were a part of my growing up. I had an intrinsic love and understanding of the bush. As a child, I really thought that I was something of a black sheep. I was quite different from my sisters. I was very independent. I didn’t need namby-pandying. I just got on with my own life. But I always thought that I wasn’t quite a part of my family. I felt a bit different, maybe because everybody thought, ‘Beth can cope. Beth can do things on her own. Beth doesn’t need help. Beth is self-sufficient’. That led me to believe that Beth wasn’t as special in the scheme of things. Maybe that caused me to try harder, to be more clever and more special, so that I could get praise. I was always top of the class at school.

I went to three primary schools: Gnowangerup, Dongara and Geraldton. My main memories of primary school are of running, laughing, missing the bus, being the teacher’s pet, not being able to do maths and having to break my pencil and go up to the bin to sharpen it, so that I could cheat and look at somebody else’s work on the way! I remember a wonderful teacher called Mrs Paisley. I was her pet. I adored her! She offered me a friendly space where I was important. This was special because I came from a fairly competitive family of sisters, where I was just one of the mob. I very rarely got into trouble at school. I was a bit of a workaholic. I was competitive. I couldn’t sing but I did love literature. The first book that I ever bought for myself was Blinky Bill. It was the most wondrous book.
Then I followed the family tradition and went to boarding school at Kobeelya Church of England Girls' School in Katanning. We used to catch the train and the bus from Geraldton all the way to Katanning. Well, boarding school was like a whole new world for me! When I got there I discovered that I was very much a leader. I was a conscientious person. I remember jobs, such as getting the morning sticks to light the water heater. I'd have all the sticks for the whole week done on the first day! But I could also be naughty – a bit of a class clown.

I loved sewing. That had been my hobby, even right back at six years of age. At boarding school I would leave the classroom at twenty past three, go to the machine room and put my garments on the only electric machine that the school owned, so that when class was let out I had already 'baggled' the machine and nobody could take it away from me. That meant that I became 'king of the pool', and won all the sewing prizes! I have fond memories of my sewing teacher, Mrs Slater. If it hadn't have been for her, I would never have had the design career that I now have. It was her encouragement and the way that she worked with her dressmaking students that gave me the inspiration to make all of my own clothes and become a dressmaker. I've since invited her to fashion parades and actually said to her, 'If it hadn't been for you, I wouldn't have taken this career'.

Miss Caris Williams also helped me to handle the career I had chosen. She was a fairly young, very bright, vibrant, English, speech and drama teacher. She treated her students as young women to be trained in the finer skills of presenting themselves. She was able to give me confidence, pronunciation skills, grammar and a manner of speech that has allowed me to be a public speaker, and to be quite comfortable with the way that I present myself in public. She was just a remarkable woman.

One of the things that was formative in those three years at boarding school was having a report that had 'first, first, first, first, first' right down the page. And then having at the bottom, 'Needs to show self-restraint'. My father took me into the lounge room before I went back to boarding school and, not saying a word about all of the pluses and the positives of being top of the class, gave me the biggest rousing and dressing-down because I needed to show self-restraint. That put a steel rod down my back that told me, 'I know I'm okay. I know that I can do well and it doesn't really matter what other people say'. As long as you know that you're right and you have a measure for your own integrity, then you can survive what other people might say, even if it is your father.

I loved Kobeelya. I just loved it. It was a great deal of fun. I didn't actually miss being away from home at all. In the boarding school there was a lot of kindness and motherliness. I remember all of that as being very formative. In fact, sometimes I'd go away to boarding school at the beginning of the year and I'd come home at the end of the year having gone to my girlfriends' places for the school holidays. I went to boarding school for three years, and then my father decided that he would like his daughters home for a while. So he brought us up to Geraldton to attend high school; but he couldn't cope with all the girls in the
house so he sent my two younger sisters back to boarding school. I had to stay at Geraldton High School to finish my Leaving Certificate.

At Geraldton High School I had to contend with boys for the first time in my life; and I also had to contend with male teachers. That was a shock because one of them was very rude to me virtually in my first class. I was so embarrassed and mortified that it really altered the way that I felt about being at high school. He just said something like ‘I can see your knickers’. He told me to sit differently because he could see my underpants. He said it in such a rude manner that I was mortified. But, generally, my school years were very happy and I really loved learning. Education is an enormous opportunity and gift and I think I came away from my schooling thinking that many people never realise their full potential because they never push the boundaries. I always pushed every boundary to see how much I could do and how much I could learn. Whether it was a game of tennis, a picture, making a garment, or writing a story, I always gave it my best shot. I always realised that success brings with it immense rewards of praise and self-worth and joie de vivre.

You could be a doctor, a nurse, a teacher or a librarian. They were the career options for girls when I left school. I had made up my mind that I was going to be a schoolteacher when I was about twelve. I was either going to be a schoolteacher or a doctor for children, but my maths weren’t good enough for medicine. I’m far more literary minded, so the schoolteacher path seemed a better option. I thought it was a very high ranking and respectable career. I never even considered anything but teaching young children. That’s all I wanted to teach. I geared my ‘Leaving’ subjects specifically to be a primary school teacher. Once I got my subjects I knew that I would be accepted into Teachers’ College. So all my decisions were right up front, very early. Then I geared my learning to achieving exactly what I wanted.

I enrolled in the three-year, junior primary program at Claremont. I thought it was a beautiful building. Claremont Teachers’ College was very highly regarded. You went to university or you went to Claremont Teachers’ College. To me, Claremont Teachers’ College was just as important as the university so I was very, very happy about going there. I was bonded. In fact, I was threatened by my father, at the time of him accepting the bond, to look out if I didn’t go on! I would have had to repay the money to him, although he was a very wealthy man. I don’t know why he put that burden on me but I certainly got the message! I boarded with my aunty in South Perth and travelled to Claremont each day by tram and bus.

I thought it was such an honour to be a country girl going to Teachers’ College in the city to become a schoolteacher. That, to me, was the most accomplished thing that anybody in my family had done! Nobody had achieved a Leaving Certificate in my family. My older sister was a nurse, so she was very highly respected as being very skilled. And now I was to be this very important person who went to College. It was a pillar of respectability in my mind. The first thing that people said to me when I went there was, ‘Oh, you don’t have to work’. I
had always been a very conscientious person, very naughty, but very conscientious. So I had this wonderful mix where people could never criticise me for being naughty because my work was always so good. But when I got to Teachers' College people kept on saying, 'You don't have to work', so I didn't, and I was called into the warden's office. I had failed! For the first time in my life, I actually had a fail in a subject. I was chastised and told to pull my socks up. I remember saying to the women's warden, Miss Marshall, 'But somebody told me that you didn't have to work'. I took it literally! After that, I made sure that I got all of my work done and went back to being my old conscientious self!

I remember Mr Montgomery; as an art teacher he taught me things that are still part of my life today. He was the best teacher I ever had. He was a magically talented person. He taught me not to try to emulate an existing image but to create my own image. He taught me how to get that image on paper. He taught me not to try to draw something that I had in my mind's eye as being real. He taught me how to create an imaginative thing. I can remember him saying, 'You are going to draw a moon flower', and I had to imagine what a moon flower looked like! Teaching people to visualise the unreal leads them to draw things that are so spectacular. But as soon as you ask somebody to draw a picture of something that they have a perception of they say, 'Oh, I can't do that!'. So, when I started teaching, I was able to teach my class to draw things that were just amazing. I've still got some of their art. Through their art I was able to draw them out of themselves to become the most wonderful people. Their art affected their music, their reading and their maths. It was just a joyous thing that everybody could do. It was fantastic!

When I graduated I applied for schools in Geraldton. I was happy when I got Bluff Point. It was a suburban school. I had an instant rapport with the headmaster, John Rollo, who was fantastic. I had a mixed Year One and Two class. When I taught the children I applied the principle that I had learned in my childhood: as long as you are successful at something then that colours your life. If people feel that they are not successful then that belittles them. So I always made sure that every child in my class was a champion at something. If a child was a shrinking violet, I just had to find what he or she was good at. Once I was able to show them how good they were at that special thing, then their attitude to themselves changed to such a degree that it changed other people's attitudes to them. Instead of being on the outer, that child became one of the group. I used this principle with every child that I ever had in a classroom. I remember one little boy so well. He couldn't achieve, wouldn't speak, couldn't read, couldn't do his maths, couldn't do anything! He was just a worry. One day he kicked a goal and won the football match. After that he could sing, he could read, he could draw and he was the class hero. He came with his guitar and sang for us. He was an Aboriginal child, and when he left to go on walkabout with the rest of his family, I said to him, 'I am going to give you a letter for your next teacher and you are not allowed to lose it. It's your special letter and you are not allowed to give it to anybody else except the teacher'. On the letter I asked the teacher to phone me when he got to that school. So I got a phone call from Meekatharra
from his new teacher. And I was able to tell that teacher his history because I just didn't want him to go backwards.

Teaching children to write stories – Oh look! it was just wonderful! I had them writing stories that would take pages, but they had to write about something that didn't exist. They had to make it up: 'We are going to write about the pots and pans in the kitchen and we are going to write about who is the king of the kitchen and why. And we are going to write about what happened to a stone, and what happened to a seed'. As a result, these wonderful and remarkable pages of stories that you could have published would emerge. Oh, I loved it!

When I was at Bluff Point Primary School we developed a rule in the classroom that, if the classroom door was open, you could come to school, whether it was eight o'clock in the morning, five o'clock at night or Saturday or Sunday. Saturday was sports day, so I coached the softball and the basketball teams, and thoroughly enjoyed that. In fact, I designed and made the uniforms if they didn't have mums who could make them. Well, Sunday afternoon at least ten of the students would all be down at the classroom getting ready for the week. And we would have our art and craft things all ready and all the walls decorated. It was just a wonderful thing!

I created this rule in the classroom that the children were not allowed to lift the desk lid and fiddle in the desk. They had to know where everything was. So they lifted the lid and got the pencils or the scissors without fuss because they were always in the same place. The interior of everybody's desk was perfection! We used to have this saying in the classroom: 'Don't ask dumb questions! Think before you ask the question!'. In other words, they would never say 'I've broken my pencil, can I sharpen my pencil?'. They would simply go to the bin and sharpen the pencil. Nobody questioned movement within the classroom because they all behaved themselves anyway.

I developed this strategy of my own for teaching children how to read so that they were never delayed. I could have children reading up to Year Three books at the end of Year One. I would give them a sheet of words that included all the new words in the next book. If they could come back and tell me the words, they moved on to the new book. I had to give them book after book until they stumbled. When they stumbled, then they were learning, but up until then they were coasting. So they came to school early to do their words before school. If they could read the words, and tell me what the word meant, and if they could read a piece of the book, maybe a page, and tell me about the story, I gave them the new sheet of words for the day. If they learnt those words by the end of the day they could have their new book. So I had some children doing thirty reading books in Year One.

I was married by that time. That's when I felt inequality, because I was not allowed to be a permanent teacher. I had to become a temporary employee because I was married. I was still teaching full-time, but I had this other classification, and I didn't like that. After six years of teaching in Geraldton, we
moved to Perth and I went to teach at Melville Junior Primary School. A lot of very strong, older women were teaching at the school. They made me feel very inferior. I didn’t get on with them very well, but it didn’t make any difference to my classroom. In fact, I think it used to irk them a little because they would be so strict with their children, and I didn’t have to be strict with my children. The children could be happy and free. My children didn’t cry at the gate but their’s did. Anyway, I was pregnant half-way through the year. But I didn’t know I was expecting a baby when I won ‘Fashions on the Field’ at the Perth Races! The prize was a week at the Melbourne Cup. I asked if I could have a week’s leave from school and they said I couldn’t. So I left. In any case, as it turned out, I was pregnant.

By the time my first child was about three months old I found I had all the household jobs done by nine o’clock in the morning. What was I going to do for the rest of the day? A friend of mine had agreed to look after the baby, so I rang the Education Department and said I would like to go back to work. Within twenty-four hours I had a job at East Fremantle Primary School where I taught Years Four and Five. It was a fascinating experience teaching older children. Many of the children had parents who couldn’t speak English and the children themselves had very broken English. Quite a lot of the children were from different ethnic groups that feuded amongst themselves. I had to bring them together in a classroom and teach them English. That was a really fascinating world. I worked there for a year and that was my last teaching experience. One day my husband said to me, ‘If you are going to work like this for somebody else, you should be working for yourself’. So I went and found a business.

I had an entrenched background in home dressmaking. I made all of my clothes, all my children’s clothes, all my sisters’ clothes and kitchen curtains. Give me a sewing machine and I just disappeared into another world. It’s an art form. It’s like painting a picture. I was a very good dressmaker. Making clothes was a great pleasure. So it was just a natural thing to move towards a clothing business, so I bought into a fashion agency and started to sell clothes. I became a commission agent selling Eastern States designer labels. I had never sold a thing in my life before! I would mould the things, make them look fantastic on the rack and then I would ring the boutiques and say, ‘I’ve got the collection for you to come and have a look at’. That went on until one day I had five different customers come in looking for grey flannel slacks and I didn’t have any in stock. None of my suppliers could help because these slacks were the red-hot item and they could sell all their stocks in Sydney and Melbourne. So I had to find out how to make grey flannel slacks. I rang my opposition, Bev Spargo, and asked if she could help me. ‘Why would I help you? You’re the opposition’, she said, and hung up! Then she rang me straight back and said, ‘I will help you, as long as you have them made in my factory and then I can make some money out of you, at least’. So I said, ‘That’s fine. Now tell me where I can find some grey flannel’. So off I went, got the grey flannel, made the pants, delivered them, got cash-on-delivery, and discovered that I could make a lot more money doing that than running an agency. I started making hot items.
What I called a ‘hot item’ was what people really wanted. And today, in business, the same basic principle applies. Supply the demand. Find the hot item and sell it to the people who need it. Then you make money. With the grey flannel slacks, the factory rang me and said, ‘What label do you want in these?’ I said ‘Label? Oh right!’ They said, ‘We’ve got some labels under the kitchen sink down the back of the factory. You can have those. They’re called Pia Dalby of Seventh Avenue’. I’ve still got some of the tags because it just makes me laugh to think of all of that water under the bridge and where it all started!

I never had any design training – none at all. In fact, I am not very good at drawing and sketching. But I was pulled into it. The next step that happened was that I was invited to exhibit my collection at the Sheraton Hotel in Perth by the Department of Industrial Development of that time. I didn’t even know that anybody knew that I was making clothes. I was just doing my own thing and supplying clothes to shops and having a great time doing it. So I had to create my first collection of samples to exhibit at the hotel. That meant that I had to find a pattern-maker because I didn’t have that skill. Fortunately, I found Frances Dragicevich, who had been at the top of her class from the year before. She was a very good designer as well. Before we could do the collection I had to find fabric. This costs money. When I went out to get the grey flannel for those first, hot items I took all the money that I had in the bank, which was $300. When I sold them I had money left over to buy the next fabric. That was how I built up the cash flow to develop a collection. I found the fabric in the back of the Roland Smith Warehouse on Murray Street. It was beautiful, jersey fabric in very pretty colours – plain colours – yellow, green, cream, red and navy. I bought it for two dollars a metre and it was sixty inches wide! It was very good value because they didn’t want it. So I said, ‘Keep it there and I will use it in stages because I can’t afford to pay for it all at once’. They kept it for me and I made a collection. We screen-printed that collection. Then I had to have a label because you can’t manufacture unless you sew in a label! I couldn’t cope with seeing ‘Liz Davenport’. I had been taught that you don’t have tickets on yourself and this was the ultimate ticket! It was very hard for me to come to terms with that. I hid the labels under the table and didn’t want to know about them! We went to the Sheraton with our new collection and got all the accolades. We went to the Daily News and we got into the Sunday Times and The West Australian. It was a knock-out success. It was quite remarkable.

Technically, I had become a designer. After the Sheraton exhibition, I started to work on collections rather than hot items. I gradually dropped the agency because my manufacturing-wholesaling business became bigger than that. It was a lot more fun and I was also making a lot more money – thirty per cent mark-up as against ten per cent commission. First of all I sold to shops in Western Australia. Then I took my collection to Adelaide, then Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. I would take my collection and sell to the boutiques in each city. It was an incredible journey. I had started as an agent in 1972. My first publicity in the Daily News was in April of 1975, and in 1976 we had commenced to sell in other States. By 1980 I had expanded to selling to eight hundred
accounts Australia-wide and it was a big business. In 1980 I won 'The Grand Award' which was for the top collection in Australia that year. At the same time, I won another award for 'Specialised Fashions'. Then I won the 'Advance Australia Award'.

I had opened a little shop of my own in Murray Street in the very early days. That was a product development exercise. It was absolutely minute but it gave me the interface with retail. Around about 1982 I began to realise that I knew more about how to sell my clothes than the people who were buying them. So I decided to open my own shops. First, I opened a shop in Claremont and then in Garden City, and discovered that my gut feeling was right. People did want to buy the clothes. The consumer wanted to buy the clothes the way I designed them, which was very much based on what we call the four-piece principle: long sleeve for cooler days, short sleeve for hot days, a pant for casual and a skirt for dressy — all in the one colour. That makes the basis for adding other pieces to the wardrobe. The idea grew from my own experience. One day I had a business breakfast in Sydney, a business lunch in Brisbane, and a business dinner appointment in Melbourne before flying back to Perth that night. So I had long sleeves for breakfast, when it was cool; no sleeves for lunch, when it was very hot in Queensland; I put my jacket back on that night in Melbourne; and, when I got to the airport, I changed from my skirt and my high heels to flat shoes and trousers that had been in my bag all day. That was the birth of the suitcase collection: the four-piece principle. We now have four-piece principles in all sorts of fabrics. We’ve got brochures we’ve drawn that are so scientifically balanced and researched it’s a joke!

We’ve developed a customer reward scheme. When people purchase their tenth piece, they get their first privilege card — gold. This gives them a ten percent discount. It’s important because, at ten pieces, clients have two, four-piece principles that coordinate, a shirt that ties them both together, so that the colours are all in a round-robin mix, and then another top that contrasts with that to give it more variety. When clients branch-out to the next level it becomes really fascinating. I worked out what a cabin-size, airline bag would hold. I then experimented to find how many garments could fit in it. You can actually fit eighteen garments in a case and you wear three others — the jacket and the skirt and the pant or whatever. I then worked out the best combination of twenty-two garments and what the most important twenty-two pieces would be. Then we created our second achievement privilege card — diamond — at twenty-two pieces. We actually help people to plan the perfect wardrobe from ten pieces up to twenty-two pieces. After that they virtually know the system. They go on to become a ‘Luxury’ card holder and then an ‘Order of the Coat Hanger’ and a ‘Galaxy’ and a ‘Kaleidoscope’ card holder. We have had to create another level of privileged card for our ‘Kaleidoscope’ ladies because they were up to two hundred pieces! In our shops we record every piece. So if anybody wants to know what they bought ten years ago, we’ve got it on the card.
Today, I have fourteen stores in Australia and I have a shop on Bond Street in London. One day, sitting around the breakfast table, my husband said, 'What's the paramount in fashion?'. My daughter, Jane, who had been working with me for some years, said, in unison with me, 'The Paris Catwalk'. And he said 'Well, why not?'. So we set about taking our collection to the Paris Catwalk. To do it we wanted to take our own audience. So we advertised a trip to 'Liz Davenport's Collection on the Paris Catwalk'. We were going to take about three hundred people. We had it all but ready to go when the French exploded bombs at Mururoa Atoll. It was absolutely inconceivable that we would take Australians to Paris at that time. So we had to cancel. I was devastated, but my husband, Terry, said, 'Well, instead of Paris let's do London! Why don't we open a shop in London?'. So we went to have a look to find the best location to open a shop in London and we chose Bond Street. It has made us improve our product and lift our game to an international standard. We have a product at international level, and it's made in Perth. How amazing is that? From downtown Gnowangerup through all of that passage of life to Bond Street!

Two and a half years ago, I had a sea-change. I was shown maps of the amount of old-growth forest that our State had had, and how much was left. I was so shocked I choked! I didn't only choke at the tattered remnants and the severity of the decline, I choked on the fact that a succession of governments, that had been entrusted with looking after our environment, had not only let that happen but had actively made it happen. It was a mixture of panic that there was so little left and fury at the injustice of governments. It was just a two-way dynamo that hit me. And I remember speaking to the television cameras and saying, 'This is a disaster and whatever it takes to stop it, even if that's sitting in a tree for a week, then I will do it'. And that's where my next journey began.

I went with a bus-load of young models to do a photo shoot in the forest and saw how they cried when they saw a clear-fell. Some of them had never been to a forest before. Then I spoke at a rally and I was challenged that I didn't know what I was talking about. The person who challenged me was a manager in woodchipping. I rang him immediately and said, 'Would you meet me tomorrow at nine o'clock and actually show me, because I really want to understand that the forest is sustainably managed. Would you show me so that I am educated?'. So, he met me and he showed me the forest — and he just lied to me! He showed me parts of the forest that there was nothing wrong with and told me that the forest was only logged on an 'as needs' basis. 'No wood ever goes to waste', he said. He feigned shock because there were logs on the ground that had been there for three months. He said, 'That should never have happened. Logs never stay on the ground for three months. They will be taken away from that site immediately'.

Then my husband and I drove down other roads and saw a very different picture. We saw big areas of devastation. So we said, 'Let's fly over it and have a look at it from above. That's always the best way to get your bearings'. So we flew over it in a chartered aircraft and looked down and saw this massive mosaic of
clear-fells, of mono-cultures, re-growths, man-made plantations. There was so little original forest left that it actually took my breath away. I was choking on the severity of what I was looking down on. I think the thing that shocked me most was that between each of these mosaics of clear-fell a different aged mono-culture had been planted. There were pathetically inadequate habitat strips. It was so wrong. I couldn't get over the wrongness of it. Then we flew over a woodchip mill that was full of huge logs. This was not waste from the forest floor. This was whole trees waiting to be wood-chipped! Any person seeing it knows that it's wrong and it really upsets your equilibrium because you know how wrong it is. It is our habitat as well as the animals' habitat. So we went straight from the plane to a protesters' camp.

I was struck by the educational standard of the protesters - the so-called ferals. They were highly-educated, young people who cared so much about the environment that they were prepared to put everything on hold to be there. They struck me as being really quite remarkable people - giving up everything. They were just living in the dirt, virtually, on nothing, had nothing! And people called them 'dole bludgers'! To me they were heroes at the frontline of trying to inform people of injustice. They showed me around the camp and we had billy tea with them. They had read the papers. They all knew who I was. While we were there, a young man came in very distraught and said, 'We have to have help over at Gardiner Block because they are going to clear-fell it. They're preparing the ground there. We have to stop it!'. So Terry and I looked at one another and said, 'Let's go and see what Gardiner Block is'. So we drove down a forest track and we found Gardiner Block. Nothing could prepare anybody for that, because it was forest on the ground for as far as you could see, and it had been there for months. There were logs and trees all over the ground, further than you could walk - all around. And they were going to log the next section of beautiful trees that were alongside it. In other words, they had all of that - they didn't need anything else. Why were they going to bring down the rest of the forest? It was unsustainable. It was scientifically flawed. It was wrong. It was just absolutely unjust. It was a crime against people. I was incensed. So I said to them, 'Don't move from here. I am going back to Perth. I am going to call a press conference, and I am going to try to show the media, and the people of Western Australia what is happening to their forest'.

Back to Perth we came, and I called a press conference. The media came and I said to them, 'You have to see it and I'm going back there tomorrow morning at half-past six. Please be there'. So they did. They sent a camera and they sent the news crews. I was talking to a timber feller asking him how it felt when a huge tree, three hundred years-old, hits the ground. He said, 'I love the noise it makes'. I was in a bit of a state of shock about it and somebody took me by the elbow gently and said, 'The protesters want to meet you'. I went to have a chat to them and I walked past somebody who had locked himself onto a tractor; and a young boy, the same age as my son, was up a tree without a harness. If he had fallen down he probably would have killed himself. A young girl, the same age as my daughter, had locked her arm into the base of a tree. I remember saying
to her, 'What do you do when you have to go to the toilet?'. 'Oh,' she said, 'that's just bad luck. Once we are locked on here, we have to stay here'. She was covered with March flies. The bravery was indescribable. They had had nothing to eat and I remember thinking, 'How dare we do this to the heritage of these young people. This is their world and we are destroying it'. It was very distressing. People in orange vests -- forestry worker people -- started walking towards the group of four of us. As they came closer, I had this overwhelming feeling that I had to walk away from it. The conflict was not something I wanted to be involved in. So I walked into the forest and once I got into the forest, I didn't know how to extricate myself. After a while I began to just enjoy being in the forest. I had no food and I had no water and I'd walked away from my husband -- he had no idea where I was.

The police came and tried to get the girl unlocked from the tree. Then there were men everywhere. I decided to stay in the forest because I couldn't confront the issue. There was a lot of noise. I could hear equipment -- chainsaws. I could also hear the birds all around me and there was a frog at my feet. Nobody had come anywhere near me during the course of the day. I hadn't heard anybody even calling me because I couldn't hear over the sound of the chainsaws. In the end, I thought, 'Well, I have to come out and things seem to have quietened down'. I then walked out and I was arrested and charged with 'preventing a lawful activity'. I was made to make a statement. Then I was put in the paddy-wagon and taken to be fingerprinted. Then started another whole world. I think I had thirty interviews in the space of forty-eight hours. I had thought of myself as a normal person and suddenly I was a high profile person. I hadn't intended that, but what happened as a consequence is that the whole State became aware of the destruction in the forest. People had to consider: If Liz Davenport with her credibility, and her background as a businesswoman, is prepared to stand up to that extent, then there has to be something wrong. People rallied and protested. Our whole State said they didn't want logging and clear-felling of our ancient forest. A survey showed that eighty-seven per cent of Western Australians didn't want any more clear-felling of the ancient forest -- and we had a government that wouldn't listen. So I went to see Premier Richard Court. I went to see the minister for the environment, Cheryl Edwards. I had to be able to convince them to see the reality. I was stunned that anybody would believe that what was happening was scientifically sustainable -- that we could trash the animal habitats and push them to the brink of extinction and call it 'forest management'.

It got closer to the election and the government wouldn't take any notice. In the end, I had to sit here in my office over Christmas and consider whether or not to stand against the premier to make him realise that he had to listen to the people. Eventually I decided to, which was very hard because I know Richard Court very well. I knew his mother and I know his father. They are wonderful people, but it was this policy that was the problem. So I thought, 'If I do this they'll change their policy. And if I don't do this, the logging is going to continue at the same rate for another four years and we will lose so much of our forest forever'. We can't have it back once it's logged. It takes a thousand to two thousand years for
bio-diversity to develop. In this State we could never have it back because our climate has changed. We don't have the same rainfall that we had when these forests developed. I couldn't bear to think that I could have made a difference but didn't. I ran a very serious campaign: 'My home will soon be gone', which featured the endangered South-West barking owl that was last heard in Berrarra Forest, which is now on the ground. A big issue! Together with a band of volunteers I had four weeks to campaign against Richard Court. We almost took the seat of Nedlands from the Court family who had held it for fifty years. We came within 4.97 per cent of actually winning the seat. I wasn't disappointed that I hadn't won it because throughout the whole campaign I had been conscious that the environment is a national problem.

I haven't just worked on the forest issue in Western Australia, I was actively involved in Bell Thorpe Forest in Queensland. One of the most remarkable experiences for me was going to Fraser Island and seeing how protests there stopped them from logging. Protest also stopped whale-killing. When they closed the whaling station, the whales were down to less than three hundred animals. Now they are more than two thousand and getting up towards three thousand. So now eco-tourism on Fraser Island is immense. They are fully booked all the year. The whale-watching season is an enormous industry. I was invited to go down to the Stix Valley in Tasmania. Despite the magic of Tasmania's forests they're being logged unsustainably. These are really federal matters. I have a national profile, so I've announced that I will stand for the Senate and my message to the prime minister is: Please take notice of the wishes of the people. They are concerned about their environment! It's really serious and, for the future of our nation and for the future of our children, we have got to learn to nurse it back to health and reverse the decline.

Should I win a seat in the Senate, yet another world will open up. I would be in Canberra for twenty-two weeks of the year and four days each week. It would mean a lot of travel, but I'm accustomed to that. I quite like sitting in aircraft. I love the peace and quiet, and I love looking down on the earth. I've been doing it for thirty years. I've been watching our country turn to salinity for thirty years as I fly over it. I never tire of looking down at the absolute wonder of the desert that you fly across between Adelaide and Brisbane. It's a desert and we've got a thin green fringe around the outside. We just can't wake up to the fact that one day that desert is just going to keep encroaching.

We've made tentative plans for the business. My husband has always masterminded the financial and legal side of the business and my children understand the business backwards anyway. So they are really looking forward to jumping in and putting their stamp on it. In fact, we've even thought of a
possible new name. Who knows, they might do better than I did! I've created a plank and they'll probably develop it. It's with their encouragement that I'm moving into politics. As my daughter said, "There are so few people in the world who have the opportunity to make a difference and you have been given the opportunity. To walk away from it would just be wrong". I think I can make a difference. That's a very big undertaking but it's about telling the truth, and about people being able to believe you. It's unacceptable for Australia to have the highest greenhouse gas emissions per capita in the world when we could lead the world in reducing emissions. If we all learn not to use resources at such an alarming rate, then our planet will be healthier.

Recently, one of my customers came to me in tears and said, 'I'm sure that God has put you on this earth for more than being a designer. In Scotland, my home country, we have cut down all our forest. We now have none. Don't let them do that in this country'. My school motto was: 'No man is an island unto himself'. I could not have done what I have without the amazing people who walked the journey with me. First of all, my husband, secondly children, and thirdly the most unbelievable staff. Some of them have been with me twenty-two years. It's just the most amazing loyalty. So too, with my customers. Some began to buy my clothes twenty-seven years ago and are still buying them today. Indeed, when I was arrested in the forest, I received a most precious card from a high profile Australian woman who said, 'I used to wear my Liz Davenport's with pride. Now I wear them as a badge of honour'.
Education for All: A shopping-centre display raising public awareness of domestic violence.

‘For me, an important future direction lies in education. There is a need to teach children about relationships and communication and how to deal with conflict. We need to start with very young children and stress all the way through their lives the need for respectful relationships and processes for dealing with conflict’. KEIY KRISTAL.
Kedy Krista was born in 1955 in Auckland, New Zealand, one of two daughters born to Odette (nee Congdon) and Ronald James. She came to Australia in 1973. She is a feminist activist who has developed domestic violence services in Perth.

I attended Murrays Bay Primary School in Auckland. It was a mixed school—a standard, local state school: we didn’t wear uniforms and we walked to school each day. It was quite enjoyable, but I was the world’s worst speller, despite the fact that I read voraciously as a child. I had very good language and comprehension but couldn’t spell for peanuts. I was always the one left standing as the person who got the least right in spelling tests! I was tortured by my teachers for not being able to spell! I felt humiliated, which stressed me out even more when I had to learn lists of spelling words. I went to intermediate school for two years before going to Rangitoto College for my secondary education. It was a co-ed school. I stayed until Sixth Form. I did my School Certificate and passed in five subjects. I also did my university entrance exams, but I didn’t go on to university. However, that qualification later enabled me to get into Claremont Teachers’ College after I moved to Perth.

I quite enjoyed Rangitoto College. I was in a good social group. The school had streamed classes. I’d always been top of the second-level class, but I had done really well in my School Certificate exams so they bumped me up into the top, Sixth Form class. It was a bit of a shock when I went into 6A because I found myself at the bottom of the class. I would rather have been top of 6B than the bottom of 6A! There was an expectation about the sort of people who were in 6A. Prefects were selected from 6A. I had a boyfriend at that stage (he was in 6B or C), and we left the school grounds one lunchtime during a sports day and went to the beach. Somebody spotted us and reported us to the headmaster. I was suspended for three days and I had to go around to all of my teachers, hand
in my text books and explain to the teachers, in the front of the class they were teaching, that I had been suspended. Then I had to front-up to the headmaster with my parents and apologise for my behaviour. They also threatened that I wouldn’t be allowed to sit the university entrance exam. My boyfriend got the cane, but he was never suspended. He was never humiliated in the way I was. That was really my first eye-opener about the different ways girls and boys were treated. In hindsight, I can see how boys consumed a lot of attention in classrooms, particularly in maths and science labs. There was also a lot of emphasis on girls’ appearance – how long our dresses were; and not wearing jewellery. Until then, I had generally just accepted the different treatment of boys and girls, but that incident was the start of my awareness of gender issues. That shaped lots of things I did after that.

My father is quite bright but he’d never gone to university – nor had my mother. Their idea was that their daughters should leave school and go to work. They never really encouraged me to go to university. They didn’t see it as useful for girls. Girls were going to get married and have children and really didn’t need an education! No, there was never a discussion about going to university, even though I had passed the exams. I was sixteen when I left school. I started a laboratory assistant’s course at night class and I worked as a laboratory assistant for a year before I came to Australia. I was doing things like testing blood, urine and sputum.

The next year, I still had the same boyfriend and, at the age of seventeen, I fell pregnant outside of marriage. In 1972, abortion was illegal in New Zealand and there was no supporting parent’s pension. It was a time when hundreds and hundreds of young women were put into homes to have babies who were put up for adoption. It was one of the great silences of that era. I remained at work until I was six months pregnant and then my parents allowed me to stay at home rather than putting me in a home for unmarried mothers. I spent nine months being pregnant at home and the fact that I was pregnant was never discussed. I had the child, who was taken for adoption. My parents were very clear: ‘If you keep this child you leave home. We will not support you. We’ll only support you if you agree to give it up’. That was November 1972, and by February 1973 I had left New Zealand. I left my family, left everything, and came to Australia. The process of losing a child, never having it discussed, never having it recognised, never having any counselling about that issue, continued to affect my life for a long time. It still resonates through lots of things for me now. It was fourteen years before I was reconciled with my first child. During that time my parents never discussed the existence of their first grandchild – my first child, Tamsin.

These are the threads and trigger points that led me to become a strong feminist. I now have clear opinions about adoption; how women are treated; how we regard children as possessions; the presumption of heterosexuality; and the notion of marriage. All these patriarchal concepts! It was the start of me reading, thinking and talking through a lot of these issues. I had a nice middle-class upbringing. I’d never questioned any of it before. It was a slow process. I
mean, no-one can go through those sorts of experiences and come out unscathed
and not start to rethink what they have been taught by their parents.

I married in Perth in 1973. I had two more children, Levi and Ishta. We travelled
around Australia, went back to New Zealand, and travelled overseas. That was
my hippy phase! Eventually, we came back to Perth where my husband's family
lived. We came back because it was very hard to live, financially, in New
Zealand at that time, and his idea of life was not to work. But he thought that I
should get a well-paid job – which teaching was at that stage. So a key reason
for enrolling at Claremont was to get a job that was going to earn some money.

I enrolled at Claremont Teachers' College in the middle of 1979, when I was
twenty-four years-of-age. My two children were aged five and almost two. I had
never aspired to be a teacher and I don't think I was terribly inspired about
it, but I had a fear of being a full-time mother and was seeking some mental
stimulation beyond my family. I don't remember a lot about it now, though I do
remember being taught about teaching maths by Shirley de la Hunty, partly
because she pops up periodically in the media as a famous, Olympic athlete. I
enjoyed learning to teach reading. I think reading and spelling were of interest
to me because of my passion for reading and my struggles with spelling. It
seemed to me that, in Australia, reading and spelling had been taught
phonetically. I never learned to read or spell phonetically. So, I really struggled
to try to understand the phonetics. Those sounds just didn't make any sense to
me at all.

I worked part-time while I was a student. Initially, I was teaching kids to swim,
after school. After a while, I got a job cleaning at Levi's school. It was an
alternative school. Life was fairly full-on! We were living in East Cannington, so
it was quite a trek across town to take the kids to their various drop-off points
and then get to Claremont. Then there was the journey all the way back again. I
think I was horrendously tired all the time. Things weren't fabulous in my
marriage, which ended about halfway through my time at Claremont. In theory,
he wanted me to go out and get a fabulously well-paid job, but he didn't want
me to spend the time and energy it took to do so. Every exams time he would
muck-up even more. We had the most horrendous fights. There was a level of
domestic violence in the marriage. After we separated, life was more peaceful.
We lived in a rented property. We didn't have anything, but I was able to get a
supporting parent's pension for me and the two children. It was pressure all the
time! As much as I was getting something out of it, it was bloody hard work! I
know I was handing in assignments. I did averagely well. I was passing.

Some of my motivation to enrol at Claremont was to meet other people. I was
quite isolated socially. Basically, I didn't have any friendship groups at that time.
The clearest memory I have is of another women, who was about my age and in
similar circumstances. I was able to have coffees and chats with her. I remember
a young man coming up to me once. He was in the year below me. He was a
Christian and he said, 'I want to tell you that I've been praying for you. You look
so unhappy all the time'. I had to go home and have a think about that! I must
have been looking appalling if someone who didn't even know me could identify that!

Special education was my major. I wanted to work in that even though it was a very difficult area to work in. It was something of a passion. I always seem to identify with the underdog – people I perceive as being most needy of support, recognition and acknowledgment. I did a short, teaching practice at the special education school in White Gum Valley, and I did a longer prac. at a school in Thornlie. The one at White Gum had been an observation prac. of about two weeks. That was a hands-on experience. A lot of the children were extremely physically and intellectually disabled. I remember going swimming one day with the teachers and several classes. I was in the water with a very young boy, and one of the teachers said to me, ‘He’s happy’, because he was doing a particular sign, which I’d been unable to understand. He was trying to communicate with me. It kept highlighting for me that, even though things were very difficult, I had two able-bodied, happy children at home and that the mothers of these children were coping under extremely difficult circumstances. I had a lot to be thankful for. The process of just trying to do work in class with these children – breaking everything down into minute pieces to pass information over to them – was very difficult. It was yet another real eye-opener!

I graduated in mid-1982 and began teaching at Quintilian, an alternative primary school in Subiaco. We moved to live nearby and my children attended the same school. That made life a bit easier. I taught Grade Two to Grade Seven in one class. There were about fifteen children spread across those grades, which was horrendous for a first-year-out teacher. In hindsight, it was probably unreasonable of them to expect me to be able to manage such a range, particularly given the special needs of some of the children. They sacked me – I suppose that’s the proper word for it – at the end of the year. My understanding is that they were going through a period of change. My children had been going there for a couple of years at that stage. It had a flexible and loving atmosphere. They taught English, French and Japanese and had a strong craft focus in the pre-school and upper-school programs. Children were allowed to explore for themselves and work at their own pace. Even those sorts of things were alternative to the State school system! There were also nice, small numbers in classes. However, things were changing, with parents moving onto the school board who wanted more structure in the curriculum. I felt that the school was moving from a free learning environment to an upper-middle-class, structured learning environment. Certainly the fees were getting more and more expensive. I wasn’t happy about what was happening.

I knew that I could never work in the State system as a primary school teacher. I also knew that as a single mum with two children I didn’t want to work in the country, which was necessary in order to get permanency. In any case, I couldn’t move because my ex-partner had an access agreement that stopped me leaving the city. By that stage, I had moved past being a feminist and had come out as a lesbian. I had a quarter of an inch of hair over the top of my head and a lot of
earrings, and there was no way I was going to get employment in the State school system, not even in special education! So, partly because teaching had never been a huge passion of mine, and partly because of the process that I'd been through in terms of my marriage, being a lesbian and exploring my sexuality, it seemed natural to change career and move into women’s refuge work. After a couple of months of having a holiday and a rest after Quintilian, I started working at Nardine Women’s Refuge, one of the first domestic violence refuges in Perth.

I’d already started to work in collectives, so when I saw the job advertisement for Nardine, which had a strong feminist, collective philosophy, I answered it. They were staffed twenty-four hours a day and we each covered a range of duties. I did a lot of shifts in child-care, took women to appointments, talked with them, wrote letters, answered the phone, and slept there overnight. We put in a lot of hours! Working in a collective was extremely emotionally demanding. There were lots of conflicts and disputes. Working with the needy women and children at the refuge was demanding. Actual working conditions were appalling. The conditions we worked in and the things that we did in the early 1980s are so far away from the way we work now in refuges in terms of the level of demand, issues of professionalism, accountability and the organisational structures. Back then, just about anything went. Workers would take women and children home to their own houses. Residents were allowed to drink and so women would often get very drunk in the refuge. That’s not allowed now. People would come and go. There was no real regard to safety. Workers would end up in fights with each other. Residents would fight with other residents. The whole process was very difficult at times. It was fantastically rewarding at other times, as well.

I learnt heaps and have on-going connections with the people I worked with — and the residents. For me it was a chance, after many years, to develop friendships with women workers, feminists, lesbians, and other women who had children. The notion that the personal is political is important to me, and working in the refuge movement meant that I could put that into practice. I could live in accordance with my beliefs and make a difference. I was able to contribute to the lives of women and children who had experienced abuse. One of the most important things for me was getting to know Aboriginal people. Even though I had been in Australia for quite a long time, my exposure to the Aboriginal people of Australia had been minimal. One family, in particular, has become part of my life now. Watching them grow up, and learning from them, has been an incredibly invaluable experience for me and for my children. It has exposed us to the issues that Aboriginal people face — the discrimination and the levels of violence and abuse that women and children experience in an Aboriginal community. I was very active in a range of organisations, in marches, rallies and newsletter writing. Through that process my children were exposed to a lot more things than I’d known about at their age. This has stood them in good stead. I worked at Nardine for about four and a half years. During that time, I helped start a single-women’s refuge. I worked there part-time as well. It got closed
down eventually. The coordinator ran off with all the money! By that stage, I was completely and utterly burnt-out with refuge work.

I went to live in the country for a couple of years to recover. I found a little farmhouse up on the hill in Greenbushes, which is just outside Bridgetown. I’d never lived in the country so that was a new experience. The kids went to the local country school, which was very good for them at that stage. I planted trees and made jewellery. There wasn’t a lot of work in the country back then. I went over to the Eastern States for a few years until my daughter was thirteen and needed to go to high school. She’d been away from her father and her brother and she wanted to spend some time getting to know them again. So we came back to Perth. In any case, I still had a house in Perth. So, we came back so that she could go to Perth Modern School and finish off her schooling.

Initially I did youth work – for about eighteen months, maybe two years. I worked with young girls who were either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. It was difficult, frustrating work. It consisted of trying to keep them alive more than anything else. There was not a lot more I could do apart from helping them stay safe in their sexual habits, their drug and alcohol use, and their transient behaviour. It was really distressing to see the issues that these young girls were dealing with constantly. They were basically the same age as my daughter at that time and they were out there on the streets having to fend for themselves. It was just very sad.

At first I stayed away from refuge work, but I wanted to come back it. I got a job at the Pat Giles Refuge in 1992. It was very small, so we worked in cramped conditions. There were only a few staff but for me it was much more satisfying work in the long run. Why? We moved to new premises in Joondalup in the mid-1990s. We doubled in size. We are still the only refuge in Western Australia that is built as individual, cluster-type units – as compared to the communal model. Most of the women coming into the refuge prefer the individual unit accommodation. By that stage I had become coordinator of the refuge. Money was starting to come into the centre. We were able to tender for new services. We started the domestic violence advocacy and referral service – which provides crisis counselling for women outside of the refuge. Then we got money to develop a domestic violence children’s counselling service, which provides counselling for children living in all the refuges in Perth. We also got money to provide a victim support worker for the domestic violence court project. In the space of about eight or nine years we’ve gone from being a tiny, twelve-bed refuge to being a twenty-four-bed refuge with four other houses and three other domestic violence services in addition to the refuge. It’s been a rapid expansion.

I have had a very good management committee and I’ve got excellent staff who pick up the ball and run with it. But my passion has been to tender for things and expand over the years. Now, in domestic violence work, there is a much stronger push towards professionalism in terms of the qualifications that are expected of people who work in the field. Looking back, Nardine had a very strong policy of not employing anybody with a social work degree. Now a social work degree is
one of the things we would look for when we’re appointing counsellors. We no longer work as a collective. We have a management committee that has overall responsibility for what happens. We have to be much more accountable for how we spend money, how many families we see and the types of service we offer. We are also much more accountable in terms of how clients feel about the service.

There is now much more structure around issues of safety and establishing some sort of boundary between client and worker than there was in the early days. One of the rules at Pat Giles is that women can’t drink or use drugs on the premises. So, what we say to a woman is, ‘If you want to go and see your friend and have a drinking session, you do it outside of the refuge and you come back when you are sober’. It’s a matter of safety, for the woman herself, if she is drunk, and the safety of her children, other residents and workers. Other women and children have escaped from violence and they’ve come to a place of safety. Also, when people are drunk, or really out of it, they’ll talk about important things, but you can’t work with them about those issues when they’re in that state. I think most of the refuges that have a feminist philosophy try incredibly hard not to be controlling of the lives of the women they’re working with. They’re conscious of trying to find that very fine line between safety issues and control issues.

The relationship between refuges and other workers associated with domestic violence has changed over the years. It’s now much less confrontational. Nowadays, there’s a lot of domestic violence training for police and other government workers. There is now raised awareness around the issue of domestic violence. Refuges and refuge workers are slowly gaining some sort of respect and acknowledgment. They are professional and know what they’re talking about and they are good advocates for their clients. There’s still a lot of work being done to put domestic violence out into the public arena so that it is recognised not only as a huge issue but also as an on-going and inter-generational problem.

For me, an important future direction lies in education. There is a need to teach children about relationships and communication and how to deal with conflict. We need to start with very young children and stress all the way through their lives the need for respectful relationships and processes for dealing with conflict. There is a need to recognise the diverse ways that people can be together in relationships that aren’t just the standardised, normal, patriarchal, white, middle-class ways of living. I would get them looking at issues of racism. We need this kind of education if we’re going to have any chance of moving towards a society in which abuse of women and children (and men) doesn’t exist.

One of the issues I’d like to address is the long-term support of mothers who have experienced violence that is now affecting their parenting. I want to get in there and do some work early in the piece, before those children go on to become parents themselves. Financially, it’s always a struggle for refuges to provide the services that are necessary. Most pay and funding rates for refuges
are poor. The money we get isn’t enough to do what we want to do. A lot of
refuges do a lot more work than they’re actually funded to do. They do it because
they see a need crying out and they are personally connected to the women and
children who have that need. So they just do it on top of everything else. There’s
still a burnout issue! Given the way our society is structured I don’t think it’s
possible to stop what’s happening. All that’s changed is that there is now more
awareness of domestic violence. There is some movement towards addressing
surface issues, but the fundamentals such as the land rights of indigenous
people in all countries of the world, globalisation, and the way men treat women
in a multitude of cultures and belief systems, have not been fundamentally
changed. If I start to look at it on that broad scale I just despair. All I can do is
make a small contribution to the change process.
The stories in Claremont Cameos can be stitched together to tell a tale that is bigger than each woman's life. Together they form a patchwork quilt that has remained folded and stored for the century since Claremont College became the first tertiary institution in Western Australia in 1902. The individual experiences of studying at Claremont and working as a teacher constitute the discrete patches, but the quilt also has patterns that may be explained by the manner in which each woman's life was shaped by the wider social and historical frames. This is the border of the quilt. This border goes beyond the individual stories to the social, political and economic contexts that shaped the system of education in Western Australia and its powerfully gendered practices. This concluding chapter explores the interconnection between the individual and the social. Between these reference points it weaves analyses of teaching which are informed by feminist insights. But this is done cautiously, lest the 'savage social therapy' inherent in judging the past by present-day standards render these stories politically naive, depicting the women who told them as victims of false consciousness about the structures which limited their agency.

Gender has always been central to the organisation of schooling and the national conversation about education, and Western Australia is no exception. The division of labour in teaching, the creation of curriculum content and the establishment of single-sex schools all attest to its infusion in policies and practices. However, though gender was central, the interpretations and outcomes of these policies and practices were not uniform.

The quiet acceptance by Annie Andersen moving aside from the status of her senior position as principal of Princess May Girls' School in Fremantle, so that her male counterpart could become principal of the newly formed, amalgamated, coeducational high school, indicates an acceptance of contemporary norms about the role of women. Not so her resistance to corporal punishment. She taught in accordance with her own values, which included acknowledging the dignity of each school child in her care. More often though, the stories in
Claremont Cameos demonstrate an active resistance to the official gender narratives embedded in Education Department policies. These policies remained in place until the late sixties and early seventies. Though women teachers outnumbered men they were barred from the headships of all but girls’ and Infants’ schools, they had to resign on marriage and they were paid less than men. Sometimes, the women in these stories generated their challenge from outside the Education Department. Nennie Harken fought through the WA State School Teachers’ Union for equal pay for women. Barbara Agocs worked with the Women’s Electoral Lobby for equal opportunity for female teachers. Others worked within the Education Department structures creating new styles of leadership and focus. Margaret Nadebaum became the first female director-general of education (at that stage known as the chief executive officer of the Ministry of Education), and Alice Myers was instrumental in starting special education in Western Australia. May O’Brien dealt with the double disadvantage of discrimination based on race as well as gender to become one of the most powerful spokespersons and activists for indigenous education.

Outside the Department many of these Claremont women charted their own path through life and challenged dominant narratives about women’s secondary role to men. Evelyn Parker became the first woman to be a city mayor in Western Australia; Dorothy Hewett and Julie Lewis became widely-published authors.

In this concluding chapter two themes are developed. The first traces historical variations in the social definitions of gender and teacher professionalism. The oral histories in this collection provide snapshots of these cultural constructions over eight decades. It was impossible for a woman teacher not to be touched by these restrictions, but this does not mean that the outcomes were predetermined. Consequently, the second theme examines the ways in which individuals interpreted and resisted social messages about being a woman teacher, and the meaning this then had in their lives and careers.

**Women’s work and teachers’ work**

One of the most distinctive ways that gender weaves into the fabric of teaching is that it is seen to be women’s work. It was an expression of the nineteenth century ideology of the family and the notion of ‘separate spheres’, whereby familial roles were recreated in the context of the school. For Annie Andersen, and many other bright young women in the early decades of the twentieth century, teaching was a professional opening which did not transgress traditional gender demarcations and was an alternative to nursing or secretarial work. Her comment, ‘There weren’t many choices for a girl’, points to an enduring theme in this collection of stories. Though Barbara Agocs was born half a century after Annie Andersen she still saw few options and remembers that she had considered nursing and teaching to be the only things ‘a girl could possibly do’.

For many, teaching was so inevitable as to be ‘genetically transmitted’! May Marshall’s family was a teaching dynasty, so when she started monitoring in
1921, she saw it as natural, for ‘teaching was in her blood’. Forty years later, Margaret Nadebaum made her career choice. When she reflected on it in interview she came to a similar conclusion: ‘I had always thought of primary teaching because it was what my family had always done’.

Even if teaching did not ‘run in the family’, families, especially mothers, were significant influences in career choices. This influence ranged from the support given to Halina Szunjeko by her Polish mother, who did not understand the Australian education system, but was determined that her daughter should receive as much of it as possible, to much more overt actions. Mothers were instrumental in seeking the important first step to teaching – securing a monitorship. The mothers of Evelyn Parker, Rica Erickson and Annie Andersen all made the initial move. Annie Andersen’s mother ‘just went ahead and visited the Department’ and got her appointed. These initiatives occurred in the first three decades of the twentieth century and, perhaps, reflected traditional and somewhat Victorian patterns of parental authority. But Lorraine Hale went to Claremont in 1948. It was post-World War II. Much had changed in the world, but she felt that her mother had chosen teaching as a profession for her: ‘She always told me I was going to be a teacher’. What is significant is that none of these mothers had been teachers themselves yet they seem to have been aware that, of the occupations women could enter, teaching was secure and prestigious. It was this same desire to give their children the opportunity for social mobility that had prompted Alice Myers’ parents to settle in Australia in the 1920s: ‘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’.

There may not have been many career alternatives for women in the first half of the twentieth century, but this did not mean that teaching was seen as the best of a poor lot, a kind of ‘Hobson’s choice’. Evelyn Parker and Mabel Guy remembered that they had always loved children and, as a child, Alice Myers had ‘taught’ rows of her old Christmas cards, and had announced after her first day of school that she was going to be a teacher. For many, school and teachers were high points in their childhoods. Rica Erickson saw all of her teachers as ‘little gods and goddesses,’ and saw teaching as ‘the greatest ambition I could achieve’. Margaret Hodgkin did not share this idolisation of teachers – she thought they were rude and oppressive – nevertheless, she always wanted to be a teacher and from the age of four she would tell her amazed parents this every time they drove past the College.

For these women, becoming a teacher was the fulfilment of life’s ambition. These ambitions might have been tailored according to the cloth available, but they were still centrally motivating. Within ideologically constructed career possibilities, people can still act with agency and purpose. For many women in this study, choosing to teach was informed by a variety of factors, such as the perception of few alternatives, family tradition, and a passion for teaching and children. However, not all of the women in the book saw teaching as a positive
or natural choice. Dorothy Hewett was both contemptuous and strategic. She had never wanted to be a school teacher and viewed College students with pity. Her ambition was to be famous - an actor or a writer! But she did recognise that teaching 'was something you did if you had to make a living', and that was precisely what she had to do as a sole parent in 1958. It was a strategic choice. Alas, it was not to succeed; not because she had been married, but because she was a divorcee: 'I was summarily dismissed as a person not suitable for teaching young people, because my moral standing in the community was so low'. Dorothy could see no reason why the College would tolerate widows as students, but not divorcees, and asked the principal to explain. 'There's no need to tell a woman like you the difference between a widow and a divorcee! Who was the guilty party?', was his response.

There are a number of strands in the history of married women's employment in teaching, and the cultural and organisational factors which supported their exclusion. Kate Rousmaniere maintains that, in the United States during the inter-war years, educational and popular writings depicted married women teachers as poor workers with high absentee rates, and also as neglectful of their familial duties. A real Catch 22! There were also suggestions that it was the sexualisation of women through marriage which was incompatible with the role of the woman teacher. A female principal of an elementary school in New York told her staff that she did not approve of married women teachers. She could not see 'how you can stand in front if a class after you've slept with a man the night before'. This was the basis of the discrimination Dorothy Hewett described.

Teaching may be women's work, but a lot of effort has gone into defining it as single women's work. So common is the historical stereotype of the spinster teacher that we forget that in much of the English speaking world during the nineteenth century, not only were schools run by married women, they were often family enterprises run by couples. As systems bureaucratised and rationalised, so married women were excluded from permanent employment. In the Education Department of Western Australia this was achieved through the 1895 Elementary Education Act. It was not rescinded until the acute teacher shortage of the mid-1960s. To an extent this regulation can be seen as part of the prevailing ideology of the family and its public-private dualism. Some of the women in Claremont Cameos express such views themselves. Annie Andersen was not in favour of 'working mothers'; and Mabel Guy did not want to 'undermine her man' by earning more than he did. In Australia, one of the strongest - and legislated - normative constraints on the employment and remuneration of women, married or not, was enshrined in the Harvester Judgment of 1907. This historically important decision set the minimum wage by utilising as the benchmark the needs of a married man with wife and three children. This justified lower wages for women because, ostensibly, they had no families to support - an assumption which penalised Evelyn Parker and many other single, women teachers.
In 1927 Evelyn Parker chose teaching because she had a family to support— in her case a widowed mother and younger brothers. She declined an opportunity to do the more prestigious two-year course at Claremont in order to complete the one-year course for rural schools. Time was of the essence and she had to get out and start earning money as soon as I possibly could. These stories demonstrate the strategic orientation of women's career choices in a world in which they had to earn an income. For many, teaching was the best avenue to financial security and also a means of social mobility.

Since the establishment of public education systems, teaching has been an important avenue of social mobility. Historical investigation has revealed how lower middle-class men and women—first as pupils, and then as teachers—used the opportunities afforded by the burgeoning schools of the United States and England to move ‘up to the next class’. The social backgrounds of the women in Claremont Cameos attest to this for, other than those from teaching families, they were mainly farming, skilled trades, clerical and mining. Though some went to Catholic schools, few attended the elite private schools. Social mobility aside, many of the stories in this book confirm the importance of teaching as a secure and relatively prestigious career for women—it was safe. In the mid-1940s, Julie Lewis was at Claremont and recalled that it was ‘practical and sensible to become a teacher’ because it was well paid and secure. The effects of the 1930s Depression were felt for a long time and ‘permanency was something people looked for’. Teaching was a secure occupation and it was one that did not require relative affluence for entry. May Knowles, for instance, would have liked to have been a doctor, but family finances precluded this.

The point is that until late in the twentieth century, when the Commonwealth government introduced the Higher Education Contribution Scheme, teacher education was free. In the early decades additional financial assistance was available in the form of a bonded loan, which had to be repaid. Annie Andersen recalled that in 1912, ‘the Department introduced an allowance of a pound a month which had to be repaid when we started teaching’. She was bonded to teach for three years, but thought that was both necessary and fair. The liberal bursaries, which attracted students to teaching after World War II, did not have to be repaid provided the graduate taught for the bonded period, generally equal to the period of training; but women were caught by the requirement to resign upon marriage and repay their bursaries. The bursaries and the bond were to cease in the 1970s. Though the repayments and the bond may have seemed burdensome, the bursaries did mean that many women had a chance to gain entry to higher education—for many, the first members of their families to do so. Alice Myers was eternally grateful to a teacher who had explained to her mother that if her daughter chose to go to Claremont the family would not have to pay fees. The opportunity of financial support was also a boon for families who came to Western Australia as Displaced Persons after World War II. While a student at Claremont, Halina Szunejko lived at home, and the Education Department bursary allowed her to pay her mother some board, as well as cover bus fares...
and textbooks. She said: 'I'm quite convinced that I wouldn't have made it without the bursary'.

What do these stories tell us about teaching and women's work? It is undeniable that teaching, and particularly primary school teaching, has been seen as a feminised occupation. Despite a concerted and historically persistent effort to recruit more men, the Education Department of Western Australia is no exception. However, while the apparently 'natural' compatibility of feminine attributes and teachers' work is clearly a factor in the choices these women made, it should not be forgotten that the structure of opportunity was an important determinant. To emphasise gender ideology at the expense of material reality when analysing women's career choices is to run the risk, as Marjorie Theobald maintains, of perpetuating the very gendered stereotypes we wish to deconstruct. Women chose and continue to choose teaching not necessarily because it is women's work but because it is work, with security and relative prestige.

The Claremont years: Creating professional femininities

Until the mid-1950s Claremont was the only teacher training college in Western Australia. For half a century Claremont and the Education Department of Western Australia set the standard for teacher professionalism. After 1955 there were other training colleges and, by the 1970s, they became free of Education Department control, but subject for a period to the Western Australian Teacher Education Authority. The 1980s witnessed the amalgamation of the autonomous colleges to create the Western Australian College of Advanced Education, which became Edith Cowan University in 1991. Throughout this period Claremont continued to train primary teachers. Its history is a case study of change in teacher professionalism — from an emphasis on training to more theoretical university-based preparation.

Life at Claremont remained much the same for the first three decades after its establishment. From 1902 to 1931 it was residential, coeducational and tightly regulated. The days were dominated by bells — always rung by a male student, known as the bell boy and appointed by the principal. Nearly eighty years later Annie Andersen remembered that during her College years the bell boy was Dave Baines. He and the bells were clearly an important feature of Claremont life! There were bells for rising, bells for meals, bells for lectures and, of course, bells for bedtime.

The regime under William Rooney, principal from 1903 to 1927 was paternalistic and familial — not unusual in training colleges of the period. Students sat in 'family' groups in the dining hall, with senior male and female students at opposite ends of the table. A carefully scheduled day kept them busy, and, after evening study, fifteen minutes of dancing was followed by prayers, and then bed. Lights were out by quarter past ten in the evening, and the senior student in the dormitory was issued with a candle for emergency lighting. For most students the prevailing order was not seen as onerous. Rica Erickson recalled the 'very
easy atmosphere' under Rooney, and that: 'You knew they expected you to behave decently'. When it came to dress, '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'.

Daily life abounded with practices and rituals that initiated the students into the culture of teaching. Some of these, like the dreaded 'crit' involved the transmission and demonstration of the techniques of instruction. Students gave a lesson on the stage in the hall while tutors and other students observed. Mabel Guy said that some students were so stressed by this that they 'went absolutely berserk' and one young woman 'stuttered out the first sentence, gave a scream and ran off the stage'.

Other conventions were concerned with the management of sexuality and the prevention of 'indiscretions'. The male and female dormitories were at opposite ends of the building, with the matron symbolically occupying the central, neo-Gothic tower. Any venturing into the other sexes' domain was forbidden, and the students were constantly scrutinised. When Mabel Guy's boyfriend persuaded her to show him where she slept, 'so I can picture you there', they were followed by a female tutor intent on seeing 'there was no mischief'! Teachers, like Caesar's wife, had to be beyond suspicion. They also had to be beyond sex! Willard Waller was writing in the 1930s when he suggested that teachers were the only group of adults who were supposed to reproduce through budding rather than sexual intercourse.9

While sexuality was contained at Claremont, the inculcation of sex-roles was integral to the socialisation of teachers as exemplars of model members of society. Sometimes this was achieved through curriculum selections. In the early years female students were excluded from some of the mathematics and science courses, but the continuing and clear gender demarcation was sewing! A failure in sewing could stitch up your career! Women could be denied their teaching certificate if they failed, and some were poor needlewomen. Alice Myers was amazed to find that, though she was so inept she had to do every sewing assignment twice, she received a credit in her final mark. As she put it, 'I must have done an awfully good written paper!'. Barbara Agocs also hated needlework, left her sewing file to the last minute and stayed up thirty-six hours to finish it! Liz Davenport, not surprisingly, loved it, and by 1980 her designer-label garments were available through fourteen Australian outlets and a Bond Street boutique in London.

Needlework and its centrality in the production of femininity in teachers and pupils deserves serious scholarly attention. It could be argued that, in the early decades of twentieth century Western Australia, families living in rural areas had to be as self-sufficient as possible, and the ability to make and repair clothing was essential. However, the 1936 needlework syllabus for State schools did not include practical aspects of sewing to any significant degree. The introduction emphasised that needlework 'is an essential part of a girl's education', and that 'it has undoubtedly helped to solve the problem of spending,
'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!'

ALICE MYERS
in a profitable manner, the great amount of enforced leisure at the disposal of so many of the girls'.

Neither does the 'needlework was essential for rural self-sufficiency' thesis explain why it was not dropped from the College curriculum until the early 1970s — well into the era of ready-made clothing. It had survived for seven decades! What happened in College was just the start. Women then had to teach needlework. In a one-teacher bush school this was an additional burden for female teachers. In the case of male teachers in similar schools the Department paid a woman, frequently the teacher's wife, to instruct in needlework. So essential was this subject and its sister, Household Management, to the official curriculum, that for the first four decades of the last century, the only 'inspectresses' were those of Needlework and of Household Management.

Why was sewing so integral to the female teacher's role? Marjorie Theobald has suggested that in the early years of mass schooling it was a 'symbolic marker of the domestic' in the state school curriculum, and that 'a sewing woman was a chaste woman, a woman in her place'. However, it backfired in many cases. The symbolic intention of the male-dominated administrators, as these stories demonstrate, was subverted by what happened behind their backs. Some women loathed needlework, completed tasks grudgingly, resented the fact that the men did not have to pass it and teach it, and did their best to teach 'handwork' instead. If needlework was the regimental standard of the armies of the administration, it did not always rally the troops! Far from producing prescribed femininity, it may well have raised the ire of many women and sown the seeds of perception about gender injustices in teaching.

Rooney's successor, R.G. Cameron, ushered in a more liberal regime in 1927. His was a joint appointment to the principalship of Claremont College and the inaugural chair in education at the University of Western Australia. He exemplified the modern, university-educated voice in teacher training: a 'cosmopolitan' to Rooney's 'local'. It was Cameron who initiated contacts with colleges in the Eastern States, and who tried to introduce more Socratic and enquiry driven approaches to the teaching at Claremont. These contrasting approaches to the professional socialisation of teachers were also manifested in the Teachers' Union's suspicion of Cameron's attempts to develop a more university-based course, and continued in the uneasy relationship between Cameron and the on-site principal, T.J. Milligan. Alice Myers described the latter as 'one of the "old school" who'd come up through the ranks', and who believed that the Education Department was all right until the university started 'mucking around with it'.

Cameron's efforts to move teacher education from a 'sitting by Nellie', approach to one based on the more overt inclusion of theory and research reflected a desire to produce professionals whose authority rested on expertise and evidence rather than tradition. To this extent it was a professionalism inimical to paternalism, since paternalism is a traditional form of authority. Yet it was still gender-inscribed, because the graduates of Claremont were going out to teach
in schools and systems where a woman's place was still defined by rules of employment and remuneration which were paternalistic and discriminatory. Women still had to teach sewing, and Claremont continued to demand that they pass the course long after it ceased to be an essential skill in the home.

The most striking illustration of the continuing emphasis on constructing a particular kind of femininity at the College was in the creation of the position of women's warden in 1952. Director of Education T.L. 'Blue' Robertson's intention that the incumbent be responsible for the women students, 'the conduct of the staff room and the general tone of the whole College' connotes a traditional God's Police role. Furthermore, many students perceived it this way. Barbara Agocs thought the position was about the regulation of sexuality. Margaret Nadebaum noted that there was not a masculine equivalent, a men's warden, and that the annual lecture the women's warden gave was about how the women 'should protect their morals'. Nevertheless, in Margaret's view, this was done with the best intentions: preparing women students for their first appointments — which would usually be in country towns — and upholding the respectability of the teaching profession. The message seems quite clear. For women teachers, sexual activity, the consumption of alcohol and any other 'fast' behaviour was a serious breach of conduct, and the warden was there to make sure they knew this, and were protected. Does the absence of a men's warden suggest that men's reputations were not sullied by these activities, or that they were more capable of looking after themselves?

The official expectations of the women's warden may well have been laid down with paternalistic intent, but the women appointed etched their own meaning on the position. May Marshall, the first warden: took the welfare of female students seriously, but she revolted over the tea duties, and many senior-mistresses in the State high schools followed her example! She was 'absolutely confident that [she] was also responsible for the introduction of paid tea-room staff into all the State's high schools' following her address to senior-mistresses at an in-service course. 'One of the senior-mistresses went straight away and hired tea-room staff'. Her successor, Mary Moir, was known for her impeccable blonde looks, and her red sports car! These attributes do not fit the God's Police image — in fact they have a distinctly glamorous flavour. Though subtle, they were significant inflections of the role of warden and may explain why, when Lorraine Hale was appointed in 1971, the first thing she did was to go to the well-known frock shop in Stirling Highway, Shirley's, and spend more on clothes than she had in the previous five years. 'I wanted to look the part', she explained.

The two definitive elements of the warden's job, as Dr Robertson had determined, were women's welfare and the 'tone' of the College. The last woman appointed to the position, Lorraine Hale, interpreted these responsibilities in a more relaxed manner than had May Marshall. Her philosophy was 'never to press anything', for she 'didn't want to intrude or impinge' on the privacy of the students. And she took the tea-duties revolt a step further! 'I was determined that I would try to support the social life of the
Graduation group, 1925, with Claremont Teachers' College Principal W. Rooney (centre front)

Graduation group, 1928, with Claremont Teachers' College Principal R. J. Cameron (standing third from left).

'I think Professor Cameron was more lenient than Mr Rooney. Cameron had much more modern ideas.' - MAIRE BLOY
College, make it look attractive, but not obviously muck-around with the flowers and tea'.

The stories of the three women who held the position of warden form an elegant miniature of the interplay between the border of the quilt and the individual pieces. Within two decades, the essentially conservative role Dr Robertson had created was occupied by a woman who delighted in stylish clothes, took her coiffure seriously and would not muck-around with the tea and flowers. While some would argue that this hardly constituted a feminist revolt, it does point to a deliberate rejection of the frumpy, plain, spinsterish and sexless images of the professional female educator. It was a mild declaration of women's right to have a full life – even if it was in teaching.

This exploration of the culture of Claremont, its practices and rituals, has been a sketch of how, over eight decades, the College reinforced particular sets of ideas about what it meant to be a woman teacher. It is also an account of shifts and changes in those ideas, some of which are directly attributable to individual women. We can discern a distinctly familial ideology in Rooney's Claremont, where young women were expected to adopt traditionally feminine behaviours and to become, in the main, teachers of younger children. The symbolic significance of compulsory needlework, and the requirement for the women to teach it is a telling marker of this ideology. The marker held for seven decades, but became a rallying point for rebellion against, rather than reinforcement of traditional femininity. With Cameron's regime we can discern a growing emphasis on the cultivation of rational inquiry, an alternative set of ideas which the young women at the College could use as part of the construction of themselves as teachers. So, teacher as 'dutiful daughter' is met by 'teacher as rational intellectual being'. Such meetings of potentially contradictory ideas can lead to Pauline insights!

We can also trace a rejection of the 'spinster teacher' imagery in the stories of the three women appointed to the position of warden. While this evidence may be somewhat thin, it is interesting to note that these shifts paralleled wider movements within the ranks of women teachers as they claimed the right to hold permanent teaching positions after marriage and to equal pay. Claremont is indeed a case study of how access to education, even one with conservative messages about women's place, may provide women with critical insights capable of challenging and changing those messages.

**Mistress of all she surveys?**

There is a paradox in the ideological framing of teaching as women's work. While feminine attributes may have been seen as both desirable and necessary to the task of teaching they were perceived as inimical to administration. But the reality was more complex than that.

The division between teaching and administration in Western Australian schools was, and still is to a large degree, along the fault line of gender. In the Education
Department, women could be headteachers of girls' schools and Infants' schools. In fact, these positions were held exclusively by women until the closure of single-sex schools, and the opening up of junior primary headships to males in the 1980s. Many women were also headteachers of the numerous one-teacher schools that were scattered throughout the vast Western Australian hinterland. However, the position of principal of co-educational primary and secondary schools was not open to women. Needless to say it was women who were inspectresses of Needlework and Domestic Science, but there were no other female superintendents until the late 1940s. Unsurprisingly, those appointments were to Infant education and to secondary school English - the former an exclusively female domain, and the latter with an overwhelming percentage of women teachers. May Marshall recalled that when in 1949, at the request of the director of education, she canvassed the Infant-school headmistresses about the proposed appointment of a female superintendent of Infant Method, the suggestion that a woman would take the post 'amused us all immensely'! The significant point here is that women teachers had no official authority over male teachers, and this was to persist until the late 1940s. For some, like Annie Andersen, this was perceived as entirely legitimate. She was acutely aware of the superior work done by women teachers, and justifiably proud of her distinguished career as headmistress of Princess May, a large, girls' secondary school. But when Princess May and Fremantle Boys' were amalgamated to create John Curtin Senior High School in the 1950s she accepted that the headmaster of the boys' school should get the post of principal of the new school:

I'm old-fashioned enough to think that there are certain positions that I think men are best for. I think it's a bit infra dig for the men to be bossed over by the women.

Evelyn Parker, on the other hand, did not share this view. In the 1950s when she was first-mistress of a large primary school she was angered to be told that she could not run the school in the absence of the headmaster and the male deputy. The headmaster told her that no woman could be allowed to head a Class One school and that, furthermore, 'any man on the staff can be head over you!'. Her response was to claim control in another way. She commandeered the school bell! As she put it, 'Whoever controls the school bell controls the school!'

How do we account for these differing reactions to the masculine administrative prerogative? One possible explanation is that rejection of these gendered practices and protocols had not been historically documented until feminist scholarship focused the lens on it. Perhaps resistance of some kind was always exercised by individual women teachers. Is it possible that, instead of dutiful acceptance of the roles demarcated by a chauvinist bureaucracy, we had a 'tribe of sullen and resentful lady-teachers' who, in their own way scratched and pushed at the constraints to exercise a degree of autonomy?

An additional explanation resides in the possibility that dominant ideologies of femininity are not deterministic. They are social constructs, incomplete and shot
through with contradiction. In the inter-war years, formative in the lives and
careers of Annie Andersen and Evelyn Parker, prevailing notions of gender were
undergoing intense and significant reformation. Connell points out that the
Great War had severely shaken traditional patterns of gender and authority,
producing challenges to patriarchy and the ideology of the family and 'separate
spheres'. The 'new woman' was out and about, with shingled hair, a short skirt
and often driving her own car! Annie had her long hair cut off. May Knowles not
only bought herself a car, she did her own maintenance, and many women
teachers took overseas trips.

It is just this kind of disruption to dominant ideology that created the possibility
of seeing things in a different way, and paved the way for change. While Evelyn
Parker would not necessarily have described herself as a feminist, she was
certainly seeing the administration of schooling from a much more critical
perspective than was Annie Andersen. This may have been because she was
exposed and sensitive to the counter-ideologies about women's place and
masculine authority, which were circulating in popular culture. There is also the
possibility that she was influenced by debate within women's associations and
the continuation of 'first wave' feminist themes in national and international
forums, such as the League of Nations, the Temperance Society and the
Women's Service Guilds. In addition, the teacher unions in Australian States
gave increasing attention to the equal pay issue, and Western Australia was no
exception.

The point is that no ideology is totally hegemonic, and that the gender crises that
Connell identifies create the conditions in which the contradictions and
anomalies are ripe for exposure. For women in teaching, an unavoidable
contradiction resided in the injunctions to be traditionally 'feminine'; but at the
same time to develop intellectual insights and a professional identity. To be
exposed to two apparently incompatible sets of expectations, suggests Marjorie
Theobald, may lead to an inexhaustible range of re-readings of gender regimes,
which a group of educated women such as teachers could work by means of
their access to 'the culture of critical discourse'. The culture of critical discourse
is a term used by Gouldner to label the 'speech act', which is part of the shift
from authority based on tradition to one that is based on justification. Alison
Mackinnon maintains that access to this discourse is a central aspect of
women's rebellion against patriarchy. Paradoxically, it was Claremont College,
with all its overtly transmitted messages about traditional femininity, which
gave the women of Claremont Cameos that access.

The most profound evidence of the deconstruction of traditional family ideology,
embedded in the practice and administration of State education, came in the
1970s with the rise of what was known as 'second wave' feminism. As this
created a more visible and influential way of framing women's lives and work,
the legitimacy of prevailing practices in the employment of women teachers was
consistently and sharply questioned. Finally, women won the right to retain
permanency of employment on marriage and to equal pay. Barbara Agocs' story
is told with a feminist consciousness and critique. She was a woman of her
times: involved in the equal pay struggle, and the campaign for accouchement
leave, and active in the Women's Electoral Lobby during the 1970s.

What these stories document is a persistent and increasingly focused discontent
about the gender regimes of schools and their administration. The consciously
feminist interrogations of these emerged with a robust voice in the 1970s, but
'the problem without a name' had been present in the lives of women teachers
since the inception of public schooling for the masses. That the early
resentments and rejections of the rules did not lead to rapid and wholesale
reform of the Education Department and its gendered bureaucracy is not
surprising, for most women teachers eventually married and hence, until the late
1960s, ceased to be eligible for permanent employment and promotion.
Consequently, they did not rise in sufficient numbers to create a seachange in
the executive.

The lack of women in senior positions was also a significant contributing factor
in the perceptions women held of the structure of opportunity available to those
with ambition. A key issue in the theorising of social and organisational change
is the complex equation of ideology and materiality. The ideology of femininity is
part of the explanation of why women chose and continue to choose teaching,
but the structure of opportunity is the material reality in which they do this.
Similarly, an ideological change, a 'new way of seeing', may be a necessary
precondition but is not a sufficient catalyst for major changes to the structures
of society and schools.

Doing things differently: Professionalism and the ethic of care

Barbara Agocs' story serves as a pointer to the importance of politically informed
action in the quest for gender justice. No amount of consciousness-raising will
generate change without this. The actions initiated by the women in this book,
and which broke upon the castles of masculine dominion, ranged from ripples to
serious surf. Not all were informed by clearly articulated feminist insights, but in
their totality they illustrate the effects of 'working against the grain', of
disrupting day-to-day practices, of highlighting the abnormality of the apparently
normal. An early second-wave feminist mantra, 'the personal is political', serves
to highlight the importance of even the smallest exercise of agency. Annie
Andersen's rejection of caning was one such ripple. Nennie Harken's courageous
and tireless campaign for equal pay was more serious surf, as was Barbara
Agocs' engagement in the creation of a powerful demand from women teachers
and a wider group of activists for legislation banning sex-based discrimination in
education.

In many ways, the progression of these actions can be seen not just as a growing
demand for women's rights in teaching, but as a reshaping of what it means to
be a professional. If 'doing the right thing' as opposed to 'doing it right' is the key
distinction between professional and bureaucratic practice, then these women's
stories chorus with instances of their attempts to do so. At the centre of many
of the examples in the stories is a 'concern for the client'. This rather fusty and technical phrase comes from the vast literature on the professions. When we breathe life into it by projecting it into these oral histories we see that it amounts to putting people, particularly pupils, first. This is not to romanticise these teachers, for not all were guided by this value orientation, but to emphasise what many of them saw as a prime motivation in the course of their careers. It is this which Nel Noddings has called 'the ethic of care', 'the primacy of the caring relation and of dialogue in educational practice'. Margaret Hodgkin's outrage about her own schooling experiences, and what she observed on practice, was a foundation for her commitment to the ethic of care in her work. She found support from one of her lecturers at Claremont. Thelma Jones supplied her with literature about alternative schools, but also modelled caring by supplying the cleaning staff with early morning coffee before she started her eight o'clock discussions with students on 'alternative stuff'.

However, it also possible that, in an overly bureaucratised system, the structures and policies of schooling, the regimes of truth created and supported by an almost exclusively male leadership become the priority instead of the pupil. The rhetoric of child-centred education had been present in the bureaucracy from the late nineteenth century, thanks to Inspector-General Cyril Jackson's passion for the New Education, but inevitably there was a gap between the reality and the rhetoric. It was classroom teachers, most of them women, who were aware of this. They worked in everyday environments inimical to individualised child-centred pedagogy. Whether it was autocratic headmasters, intimidating inspectors, class sizes or lack of resources, these sharply defined discrepancies between the ideal and the reality of professional work served to create a sense of discontent and frustration.

The principal of Osborne Park Primary School told Margaret Hodgkin that her belief in the development of the whole child was 'a lot of rot'. In the late 1920s Mabel Guy's inspector used bullying to break her down, then he put his arm around her: 'He was a bit of a ladies' man'. At her next school, the headmaster was an alcoholic! And so the list continues. Not all principals and inspectors were of this ilk, but there are enough examples in these stories to suggest that these sorts of experiences, huge classes and lack of resources were frequently part of the professional landscape. Even in the twenty-first century, with declines in real funding for State schools, class sizes are still a problem. This is a difficult terrain on which to make a claim for professionalism informed by an ethic of care.

If the ethic of care is seen as placing emphasis on the needs of the learner, taking it seriously can be dangerous for women teachers working in bureaucratic systems. Steedman goes so far as to claim that the child-centred pedagogy of the turn of the twentieth century helped to construct the ideal teacher of the young child as 'the mother made conscious', and this is the basis of the 'prison-house' metaphor she uses to describe what schools are for women teachers. The combination of male dominated, rigid and 'rational' administration and the
culturally created injunctions on women to care are madness-making conditions. They create a prison-house rather than a setting for professionally informed pedagogy; a prison-house from which many women escaped through marriage. For Mabel Guy marriage was a liberation 'from earning a living'. She had no options anyway, because in the 1930s she not only had to resign on marriage, but there were strong cultural expectations that this should be so. For other women the escape from the prison-house involved setting up their own schools, as did Margaret Hodgkin.

In trying to create meaning in their daily work many of the teachers in these stories were guided by the ethic of care. Working in less than ideal conditions, they did what they could to meet the needs of their pupils. However, these same conditions may also be the perfect ones for nurturing an acute understanding of the dynamics of power, and the ability to negotiate and organise resistance. More often than not this meant subverting or bending the rules rather than head-on clashes with authority – the way that women have often had to work within and against patriarchal structures of power. Even when women achieved senior positions in the Education Department, they had to create different ways of handling power. Margaret Nadebaum had no female role models when she became a regional superintendent, and did not want to do it 'the way a man may have acted'. She consciously chose to base her authority on expertise and collegiality so as not to alienate the male principals with whom she had to work. At the same time she fostered women and equal opportunity. This focus on the people in the organisation, rather than its structures and rules, is another manifestation of the ethic of care. In the late eighties she became the first chief executive officer of the Ministry of Education during a time of turbulent change and was determined to 're-affirm the importance of people'.

In the centenary year of Claremont's establishment we may ask ourselves how successful have been these efforts as to reinscribe professionalism by imbuing it with an ethic of care. There is no definitive answer, but the 'genie has been let out of the bottle'. This genie is a powerful and ever-present set of ideas about children, teachers, women and schools that is available as a tool and counter-argument in the battle with economic rationalism and managerialism. That these ideas are here and a legitimate basis for fighting the good fight is due, in no small measure to the Annies, the Evelyns, the Margarets and all those other women who went to Claremont College.

Whether they remained in teaching or not, whether single or married, the women in these stories remind us of the invaluable contribution teachers have made to the creation of social capital. The concept of social capital is a contested one, and Eva Cox's Boyer lectures appear to be the starting point for the Australian debate. For her, social capital is essentially about networking, norms and social trust which allow for 'co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit'. It is the bedrock of civil society. In this non-hierarchical setting, individuals feel "confident enough to ask", "resilient enough to cope with refusal", "imaginative enough to visualise the means", and "able to visualise a
successful outcome". Though these teachers worked in organisations which were far from non-hierarchal, they still demonstrated that they were confident enough to ask, able to cope with refusal and imaginative enough to visualise the means.

As the welfare state is rolled back, and the regions and communities of Australia feel the impact, social capital is touted by some to substitute for the disengagement of the state. The paradox is that the state is also disengaging from one of the key sources of social capital, teachers. The women in this book were able to contribute to the creation of social capital because of the initial investment by the state in their education.

The women of Claremont Cameos were community builders in the widest sense. They helped to create Western Australia's written history, multicultural policy, arts, fashion industry, sport, botany, conservation, trade unions, politics and welfare system. They challenged the status quo and brought into play different forms of social, educational and political functioning. In many bleak and isolated locations they were catalysts for the generation of projects which brought pleasure and pride to local populations and gave many more enriched lives. They also learned a great deal about managing people great and small; the benefits of persuasion and cooperation, as well as the strategies of resistance.

Claremont College was instrumental in providing generations of young women with educational opportunity and an entry to a career, but the story did not end there, and the contribution they in turn have made to the State is inestimable. Though we are living in changed times and a degree is not cost-free, Edith Cowan University, Claremont's grand-daughter, has made the connection to community and the fostering of social capital part of its mission, and continues to educate most of the State's teachers.

Conclusion: quilting is a political act

Quilting has long had political connotations. Women gathering to quilt not only had a chance to 'gossip', they have also made quilts with strikingly clear political symbolism. This book has done both. The sharing of stories is the gossip — the once respected term used to describe those midwives who talked women through childbirth. The gossip did not just distract the labouring woman from her pain; she also gave her a 'map', a picture of her progress, and encouragement to complete the journey. Individual cameos in this collection, when aired and shared form a myriad of minor maps; together they create an atlas. This describes and names eight decades of the terrain of what it has meant to be a woman teacher in Western Australia. It has put women teachers on the map of history, and that is a highly political act.
END NOTES

1. This analysis of how organisational culture and structure shaped the career possibilities of women teachers in Western Australia is based on the Education Department of Western Australia. The Department was the largest education system in the State, and most of the women in Claremont Cameos became State schoolteachers.


6. Ostensibly, this was in order to staff remote schools which were seen as too lonely and dangerous for women. However, there was also an officially expressed concern that too many women teachers in schools could generate 'a strange and indefinable feminine air' which would overcome the men and lead to 'a tendency toward a common, if I may so call it, sexless tone of thought!' Western Australian Department of Education. (1908) Annual Report, Report of the Principal of the Training College, Mr W. Rooney, p.69. Perth, Western Australia, Government Printer.


Participants in the *Claremont Cameos* Project

*Claremont Cameos* is a three-part, oral history project involving the development of a set of tapes and transcripts for archival purposes, the production of a series of radio programs, and the publication of the *Claremont Cameos* book. Edith Cowan University and the coordinators of the project, Associate Professor Lynne Hunt and Ms Janina Trotman, wish to acknowledge the contribution of the following people to the development of the project.

**Claremont Cameos Interviewees**

Pat Adamson  
Barbara Agocs  
Jill Aldridge  
Janice Alilovic  
Annie Andersen  
Florence Andersen  
Marjorie Bennett  
Jean Cairns  
Sister Declan Callelly  
Clare Casey  
Vera Coyle  
Liz Davenport  
Hanifa Deen  
Rica Erickson  
Dorothy Fox  
Jessie Gray  
Mabel Guy  
Lorraine Hale  
Nennie Harken  
Hilda Hearne  
Dorothea Heron  
Sally-Anne Herron  
Dorothy Hewett  
Margaret Hodgkins  
Delores Hyde  
Thelma Jones  
Violet May Knowles  
Kdy Kristal  
Julie Lewis  
Janet Lindsay  
May Marshall  
Edith May Moore

**Claremont Cameos Interviewers**

Liz Allison  
Rosemary Bailey  
Leanne Bowen  
Brenda Buchanan  
Barbara Campbell  
Pauline Carroll  
Beryl Channer  
Veronika Connolly  
Dorothy Fox  
Jessie Hardy  
Lekkie Hopkins  
Lynne Hunt  
Valerie Jackson  
Chris Jeffery  
Anne Jones  
Joanna Knowles  
Shirley Leahy  
Rene Michael  
Joan Moss  
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Etza Peers  
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**Transcribers**

June Davies  
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Shenagh Masterson  
Joy McGilvray  
Linda Poland

**Sound Recordists**

Jane Bremmer  
Louisa Holmes  
Georgia Worrall

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To all the following questions:

- Who taught Shirley Strickland to do a racing start?
- Who put Holm Harris on the stage at high school?
- Who started an Australian fashion empire?
- Who wrote Wild Card?
- Who started child psychology in Western Australia?
- Who recorded and documented rare orchids?
- Who was the first woman to be a city mayor in Western Australia?
- Who started 'Kids' School?
- Who secured equal pay for women teachers?
- Who worked in the first domestic violence refuge in Western Australia?

There is but one answer...

A woman graduate of Claremont College!

Claremont Teachers' College, founded in 1902, is now a constituent campus of Edith Cowan University, which celebrates its centenary in 2002. This book documents Claremont's contribution to Western Australian life and culture through stories of its women graduates.

The stories are an absolute delight. Riotous descriptions of cranky inspectors, powerful stories of political activism, gentle accounts of nurturing children, stubborn resistance to prescribed social roles, and significant achievements that have made Western Australia a much better place to live than it might have been without the contribution of women such as these.

I have always deplored the absence of a history of women educationalists in Australia. It is such a joy to now have this account of the women of Claremont College, which reflects the restrictions placed on women and at the same time the ways in which they questioned, rethought, refused, rebelled and created so much of the contemporary culture which seeks to extend the Australian value of a fair go to all members of society.

This is a beautifully crafted and moving account of women's growth and society's evolution through the documentation of women teachers and their contributions. It helps to fill a void in the history of Australian consciousness. It is a compelling read for all who have had the privilege of having been educated by women of Claremont.

Such a modest title for powerful stories, told with flair and passion by Nica Erickson, May D'Boon, to name only three of the women who were shapers of Western Australian society and its sense of place and future possibilities. And for those of us who experienced the College, 'Claremont Cameos' is truly...