CITY OF SYDNEY

COMMERCE AND WORK
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Annette Bennett

Date: 29 May 2009

Place: Potts Point

Interviewer: Roslyn Burge

Recorder: Edirol

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **RB:** **This is an interview with Mrs Annette Bennett at her home, **********in Potts Point on Friday, the 29th of May 2009. The interview is being recorded as part of the City of Sydney's Oral History Project, Commerce and Work in the City of Sydney. The interviewer is Roslyn Burge.**

So, Annette, thank you for your participation in this project and just for the record could you give me your full name?

AB: My full name is Annette Judith Bennett.

RB: **And your maiden name?**

AB: My maiden name was ********.

RB: **And when were you born?**

AB: ******** 1936.

RB: Whereabouts?

AB: I was born in Burwood Road, Burwood, a nursing home there, which subsequently became a convent.

RB: Were your parents living in that district?

AB: They were living at Concord.

RB: And what did your father do?

AB: He was in the bank, he was a bank Johnny.

RB: A bank Johnny.

AB: Yes, a bank Johnny for the Bank of New South Wales, yes.

RB: In which part of Sydney?

AB: Well, I don't remember because he worked in the country and then by the time I was born I don't know where he was working and then he went off to WWII. So, I don't know what branch he was working at.

RB: Did he come back from the war?

AB: Yes, he did, yes, and then he was at the head office, 341 George Street.

RB: And did your mother work?

AB: No, no. Well, actually it's a long story but my mother died when I was a baby and I had a stepmother, so no she didn't.

RB: Where did you go to school?

AB: Methodist Ladies College, Burwood.

RB: Very close.

AB: Now known as MLC School. Yes, anyway, yes.

RB: And when you left school what did you decide to do?

1.57 AB: Well, I was told that "You will work in the bank" so I did and then my cousin who'd always wanted to be a nurse said, "Come nursing with me" and I said "Oh, all right" and so I became a nurse.

RB: You must have had to do some training first.

AB: Yes, yes, we were ……. through a hospital in the good old days, the golden days of North Shore, yes.

RB: In the good old days?

AB: Yes, when Royal North Shore Hospital was the premier hospital in Sydney, known as the 'Country Club' in those days.

RB: Why the 'Country Club'?

AB: Well, it's so snobby but I think it was true. You had to go to a private school to be a nurse at North Shore more or less but they did take others – how kind of them. MLC Burwood might have been a bit low grade but I still went to a private school so I was accepted.

RB: Do you have a sense of that when you first went along?

AB: Well, until I went there and met some of the girls I had not thought about it at all but then when I arrived there it was "What does your father do and where did you go to school", you know. So, got over that one, the girls from Abbottsleigh and Meriden and all this stuff but there were girls from public schools.

RB: Did you enjoy your training?

AB: Oh, yes I did. There's all those days of, "Oh, no, I can't do it again, I'm leaving tomorrow, I can't stand it", but you got over that. But, yes, I enjoyed it and if I say so myself I became quite a good nurse apart from a very strange choice of career at the time. Thinking about your profession or career, making a decision like that was just, "Oh, yes. Well, I'll go along and see what it's like" and I enjoyed it.

4.04 **RB: When you finished your training did you keep working at North Shore?**

AB: No. By this stage my sister had married and she was living – married a foreigner, that's another story, you know, "the enemy". She married an Austrian and she was living in Vienna and expecting her first child and she had been to Europe many years before so I decided that I would go to Europe and attend the birth and help her. She had no one, apart from her mother-in-law, you know, so I went by ship to Italy and then caught a train to Vienna and stayed in Europe for five years. Well, Europe - worked in England then spent summers in Europe.

RB: Was your training in midwifery or in general nursing?

AB: Oh, no, general, general, I didn't do midwifery, no.

RB: So then you came back to Australia after five years.

AB: Yes.

RB: To Sydney?

AB: Sydney, home, back to Concord.

RB: Literally your family home.

AB: Yes.

RB: You're raising your eyebrows, it's obviously another story.

AB: Ooh, and dinner's on the table at half past six, all this, oh dear, those days.

RB: We're talking about the -?

AB: The sixties, early sixties, yes. Back to living with the family again.

RB: And you're in your thirties at this time, approaching, late twenties.

AB: If you don't mind, I was twenty seven, I think, when I came back, married when I was nearly thirty. So, yes, getting back into the routine with my mother or my stepmother and father and I was the only one there, the remaining daughter, and expected to behave myself.

RB: Was that difficult?

AB: Yes, it was really because I'd led an independent life and I think I came back with forty pounds after five years away, so I was dependent on them.

6.04 **RB: What changed had you seen in Sydney in that time that you were away?**

AB: Well, the thing I noticed most, it was the Cahill Expressway, that the gardens had been demolished almost to create this expressway; I couldn't believe that that could happen. What else? Oh, well there were cranes everywhere. That was the sixties and buildings were being pulled down and cranes were everywhere. People still thought – and when I came back they said, "Oh, well, you've had a good time but Australia's the best place, isn't it?" and I said, "Well, there are other places in the world" and that didn't go down very well. I probably sounded a bit pompous, I don't know, but it was still very insular here and I think anti-migrant and I found that when I was at David Jones.

RB: Did you?

AB: Oh, yes.

RB: We might come to that along the way but what work did you do when you first came back?

AB: Well, nothing. I came back the end of ’63 just before Christmas and picked up with my nursing friends and through that grapevine I heard about a job going at David Jones so it was on again, it was on, it was off, “Will I get the job, won’t I?” so I had to hang around.

RB: Why was it so difficult?

AB: I don't know - something to do with the matron. It was all that sort of in-house; you had to know someone to get the job, it was never advertised in those days.

RB: The matron of -?

AB: At David Jones. So, I think she had someone who was going to start and then that person didn’t, so then I think I got the job.

8.00 **RB: You got the job - - -**

AB: Through a friend, yes.

RB: Who was working at -?

AB: Prouds [jewellery store]

RB: And she too was a nurse?

AB: No, she was working in the jewellery department. At this stage she had married so she didn’t want to be working as a nurse but she used to be on hand if people fainted after having their ears pierced. So, that was her job, apart from selling beautiful jewels. So, she told me about the job and it was a girl from North Shore who was working at David Jones so it was all the North Shore Mafia, I think, that’s how I got the job.

RB: You started at David Jones when?

AB: Probably about January or February of ’64, yes.

RB: And you were interviewed?

AB: Yes. I was interviewed by the matron, given a physical by the doctor, Dr Russell, and then got the job.

RB: Who was the matron?

AB: Matron Fowler was her name, who lived at the Cross, she lived in Kingsley Hall. And Dr Russell who was an old Scotsman, very dour sort of a chap, ancient – oh, I thought he was ancient – but very brusque and the staff could never pull anything over his eyes, I can tell you, no.

RB: So, were there just the three of you or were there other staff?

AB: Oh, no. There as matron, the doctor, two trained nurses in Market Street, two in Elizabeth Street, one in George Street and one at Warringah Mall – I think there was a David Jones opened there.

RB: What about the men's store?

AB: Oh, there's Market Street men's. Market Street was the men's store, Elizabeth Street was the women's; that's the way it was in those days.

RB: And the Castlereagh, the store diagonally opposite Elizabeth Street now, that wasn't David Jones?

10.05 AB: No, they were both David Jones but one was called the Castlereagh Street store - I mean, we called it Elizabeth Street.

RB: The whole complex?

AB: Yes, the whole complex.

RB: I'm with you.

AB: And Market Street was the men's, George Street.

RB: And where were you located?

AB: I was in charge in Elizabeth Street in the women's, yes, or the Castlereagh Street shop, the women's wear.

RB: You say that with great emphasis.

AB: Yes, oh yes, oh yes, big time. My friends, "What are you doing?" You'd be spending your time with Band-aids. You know, "This is not nursing" but in actual fact it was.

RB: How would you say it was?

AB: Well, the first day I started a little boy was sitting on – they had one wooden escalator left in the store and he was sitting on the escalator and didn't stand up in time. He had the most shocking lacerations on his buttocks. So I thought, "A bit more than Band-aids here", and it

was like working in a small country town, really, because there were thousands of employees and a steady stream of staff and customers.

RB: Many customers?

AB: Oh, yes, customers could have – what did they have? – either migraines, miscarriages, fractures, death, vomiting. And then of course the customers who were the shoplifters who were having instant heart attacks, we had to go down and attend to them to see, you know, "Are they really having heart attacks or is it just because they've been caught?"

RB: What did you find?

AB: Oh, well, they've just been caught, you know.

RB: What about the deaths?

11.52 AB: I only was on duty, I think, for one death but it seemed to happen in the toilets. People would go in and then something would happen and they'd die for whatever reason, I don't know, but then of course there's the big kerfuffle of trying to get the door open and, oh, the whole tragedy of that.

RB: Were most of your patients women because you were located in the women's store?

AB: Yes, yes, mainly, yes.

RB: And these are just very sort of practical questions but whereabouts was your office?

AB: Oh, our surgery. Office, office! Our surgery on the fifth floor which was then school uniforms, children's wear and baby wear and we were out the back. We had a surgery, an office, a little recreation area for ourselves and how many beds did we have? We had three, we actually had beds, three beds curtained off so people could rest and recuperate, yes.

RB: Was there ever an occasion when all three were occupied?

AB: Yes, yes.

RB: Just going back to your square footage, it was really quite a sizeable area from the sound of it.

AB: Yes, oh yes, yes.

RB: And you did have an office. Was there support staff, secretarial staff or receptionist?

AB: Oh, no, no. Oh, no, no, we did everything. But we overlooked Hyde Park; it was on that side so it was wonderful, yes.

RB: And your recreation area, what did that involve?

AB: Well, that was just a table, two chairs, a kettle, of course.

RB: A sort of tea room as it were?

AB: Yes, yes. And that was next door to the – what would you call it? – our little ward, I suppose, with the three beds in it.

RB: So, would other staff members come and visit you in your recreational room?

13.59 AB: Yes. Well, staff, if they had been away ill they had to report to us and fill in a form.

RB: Even if they had a doctor's certificate of their own?

AB: Oh, yes, yes. If they were away more than two days they had to have a doctor's certificate but regardless they had to fill in a form and we had a journal and we'd write up everything.

RB: Would you check their condition?

AB: No.

RB: Or check to see that they really were ill?

AB: Oh, no, no, no, we had to take that unless it was quite obvious or anything. And that was another thing that I wrote down here. It's getting off the track a bit but on filling in the forms. I think there was only about two and they were kitchen staff down in the basement – I think they had cafés down in the basement – and I remember two staff and they would come up, women, and say, "Well, Sister, would you fill in the form for me, please? I've forgotten to bring my glasses". And after about the second or third time I realised that they were illiterate and I hadn't really come across people who couldn't read or write; in my circle everyone could read or write. So, that was just an interesting sideline of people who were working there.

RB: Were they people from another country?

AB: No, these were Australians, no.

RB: How did you respond when you discovered that?

AB: Oh, I didn't do anything, I just filled in the forms.

RB: You spoke earlier that there was a strong anti-migrant feeling.

AB: Well, I don't know about strong but there was all those snide remarks about, you know, "Mr So and So's English isn't very good" or just remarks and I'd say, "Well, can you speak Greek or can you speak - whatever language it was - Polish?" and they'd say, "Oh, no". But it was just there; it wasn't strong but it was just there.

16.05 **RB: Were most of the employees Australian born?**

AB: Yes, yes, apart from the ones doing the lowly jobs, of course, they were the migrants, you know.

RB: What would you regard as the lowly jobs?

AB: The lowly jobs would be cleaners, kitchen hands, you know, things that didn't really need much in the way of language, I suppose, although there was a dashing Polish former fighter pilot who was in advertising, Eugene Swartzinski.

RB: You still remember his name.

AB: Oh, yes, in the end I could spell his name because he was something.

RB: Was he an old flame?

AB: No, no. Oh, no, no, he was never a flame but they used to call him Mr Eugene and he said "Why can't they take the trouble to learn how to pronounce my name? I can speak English, why can't they try and say Swartzinski?" And that was the lazy – it wasn't anti so much, it was the laziness of people not even bothering to try and pronounce foreign names, that used to irritate me and I suppose that's perhaps because I'd been overseas and, well you had to get along if you weren't in English-speaking countries.

RB: You made these observations, Annette. Did anybody else you worked with notice these things?

AB: Not that I know of, I don't know.

RB: The doctor or the other nursing staff never noticed?

AB: No. Well, they may have but we never spoke about it but it used to irritate me. I mean, it's probably petty but it just irritated me, you know.

RB: Even in my time – and this is not my story – but I can remember there were, particularly in things like the smallgoods section of

David Jones there were a number of people, particularly Germanic sort of people.

AB: Oh, yes, yes.

18.02 **RB: Very talented.**

AB: Yes.

RB: Do you remember anybody of that sort – I think, Annette, what I'm really trying to work towards are those people who worked in the smallgoods section who were not Australian born, so there were obviously other people of different nationalities working in areas of the store that were not just the lowly jobs as you described then.

AB: Yes, yes. Well, I think I mentioned to you before she was a wonderful woman, Mrs Lucy Gershwin. She worked, I think with souvenirs, a marvellous woman, and she was the grandmother of **********, the famous Australian pianist. In those days she just loved her job. She had a heavy accent but her English was excellent and she adored her boss who was actually an awful woman – I still remember her.

RB: Who was she?

AB: What was her name? She lived down at Edgewater at Elizabeth Bay. I can't think of her name now - Miss Someone or other but Mrs Gershwin thought she was marvellous. So, there was Mrs Gershwin, Eugene Swartzinski – he wasn't on the counters.

RB: Why did Mrs Gershwin like her job?

AB: Mrs Gershwin, she was a very outgoing person, survived the Holocaust and after she retired became a guide up at the Sydney Jewish Museum. I think she appreciated life; always elegantly dressed, not a hair out of place and just the David Jones pearls but she enjoyed going to work and being with customers. She loved the customers, loved them, and gave them service; they loved her.

20.09 **RB: Did you like your job in the same way?**

AB: I did, I loved my job, I loved it.

RB: Why did you like it?

AB: Well, there were so many different people; every day you'd see different people and then of course you had your favourites who were coming up with supposedly having migraines but they just wanted a bit of a rest, I think.

RB: So, how would you treat them?

AB: Oh, well, they could have a bit of a rest there.

RB: In the bed, they'd have a nap?

AB: Oh, yes, yes, for a little while. And then there were the days – what was the? – there was two Australian singers, one became an opera singer, ********** - I did meet her many years later – she worked at David Jones, I think, in one of the offices and came up to the surgery. And she was a folk singer at the time, **********, at the Poet & the Peasant or somewhere or other and she eventually left and became a leading soprano and I saw her many years later and I said, "I remember meeting you at David Jones" and she said, "Oh, gosh, the days of David Jones". And the other one was a jazz singer, Kerrie Biddell, and in those days I don't know whether they were promotions or what they were but they used to have groups singing on various floors and she had her jazz group singing and she was on the fifth floor and at the time we did have someone who did have a migraine, a severe migraine, and she's doing a bit of – and she's a wonderful singer – and I had to go and say "Shh, could you turn it down a bit? We've got someone with a migraine out the back". And you always wondered why she was booked into David Jones' fifth floor with the children's wear, singing jazz, I don't know, madness. So, they were the days; I'd forgotten about them.

RB: Were they regular events?

22.01 AB: Yes, I think so. And then of course there were all the fashion parades.

RB: And were they regular?

AB: Oh, just for the seasons, I suppose, winter and summer.

RB: And where were they held?

AB: They would have been held on the fashion floors, which I can't remember what floors they were.

RB: What were your hours?

AB: Well, we worked, I think, it would have been eight thirty till five thirty and Saturday mornings but we took it in turns. I think we worked one Saturday a month – no, it must have been a fortnight, the two of us. We had two sisters on during the week and then one on the Saturday morning, because David Jones closed at midday, I think, Saturday.

RB: What about late night shopping?

AB: Oh, no. I don't think we had late night shopping then.

RB: Right.

AB: I don't think so.

RB: And there's a David Jones uniform, I don't imagine you wore that?

AB: No, no, we had white uniforms which we didn't have to launder, which was wonderful. What were they? Oh, that's right, I remember, they weren't too bad. They had a little white collar and buttons down the back with some sort of a tie because I remember when I was pregnant I just had to let out the tie or do something in the back. But we were supposed to wear veils, so we had our veils in the cupboard and then if matron was making an inspection we'd get the call from Market Street to say, "Matron's on her way. Put on your veils", so we'd do that. We were always caught out because one of the staff would come up and we're being very nice with matron and showing her around and then the person would say, "Sister, why are you wearing that veil?" and we'd go "Oh, no, you know, shut up. Shh, be quiet".

RB: Why didn't you like wearing your veil?

AB: Oh, well, you can't really work with a jolly veil on and it's the effort of starching the jolly thing and, oh no, no.

24.06 **RB: During your training did you wear a veil?**

AB: Oh, we wore caps and then when we graduated we wore veils but they were just a waste of – voile, they were and you had to starch them and I could never – mine was always a bit lopsided, I could never get it right, putting pins and things.

RB: And what about jewellery? Would you wear jewellery?

AB: Oh, no, no. I mean, no, no. A watch, that was all.

RB: And do you have a lunchtime?

AB: Oh, yes, we had lunch breaks, an hour for lunch.

RB: What would you do?

AB: Now, what did I do? I can't remember. Before I was married, I think I just sort of tootled around.

RB: What does tootle around mean?

AB: Oh, well, just go around, having a look in other shops and I didn't have to really do anything much; I didn't have to do any shopping or household things. I can't remember what I did.

RB: Would you take your lunch or buy it?

AB: Oh, yes, that's right. Oh yes, sometimes. I didn't go out all the time because I was a reader so I could just have lunch and read. After I was married it was getting household supplies but also in those days the Q Theatre was on down at the old AMP and I used to meet my husband for lunch and then we'd take a sandwich and go down to the theatre which was marvellous, wonderful, and they did sort of fifty minutes, always one act shows. I remember Chekov; I think there were two or three one act plays we saw there and then go back to work.

RB: We've skipped a beat along the way. You were living at home still - - -

AB: Yes, yes.

RB: - - - when you were first working there. And how did you meet your husband?

25.59 AB: Oh, gosh. It's an involved story but I'll just say that we met at the Astor in Macquarie Street, a mutual friend at a party, of course, a party at the Astor.

RB: So, was life different at David Jones when you were married?

AB: No, I don't think so. The funny thing was that we – well, I was nearly thirty, Richard was nearly thirty three.

RB: And was that old?

AB: I think it was considered old in those days and neither of us were into sort of weddings, wedding things.

RB: Was that uncommon?

AB: Yes, I think so, and we got married in February but we'd postponed honeymoons and things because we wanted to go the Adelaide Festival and that was on later in the year. So, that was another thing. I took a couple of days off and had a very quiet wedding down at St Peter's in Bourke Street with the church. The reception was at La Veneziana in Stanley Street, a crazy Italian restaurant that's a laugh there.

RB: Is it still there?

AB: No. It was a terraced house and they had the restaurant upstairs and a room that you could hire for functions. So, that was a laugh. And so arranged all the wedding, the menu – we only had twenty five people – arranged the menu and then when we got there they'd forgotten all about that. So, the restaurant's outside so they just handed as though we - "Here's the menu, just choose what you want". And then my father and my new husband they saw some rugby people they knew so they went off and joined them for a bit and, oh, it was crazy. Oh, got off the point there. Oh, yes, that was the thing.

27.57 So I took, it was Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday I took off and then came back to work on Tuesday. And then the staff on the fifth floor were waiting, they were waiting. So, they had to wait about four years before I had that child. I think they thought "There's some shotgun wedding going on here" but it didn't happen. That's it, I think they were, "Oh, how are you, Sister", and looking and looking and the body didn't change because it was, I suppose a bit unusual to not – they just thought because I only took a few days off that I must be pregnant and I had to get married but that didn't happen.

RB: Were there events for your wedding put on by your colleagues?

AB: Colleagues, yes, and they gave me a lovely casserole thing I still use forty-odd years later still use. And then with friends not so much. It was all very quiet, I think, with the staff there.

RB: Did you socialise with your colleagues?

AB: Yes, with one girl I worked with, Margaret, we did, as a foursome, married people. And then Barbara Gilroy who I got her the job at David Jones, she became my son's godmother and she's still a dear friend.

RB: What was her job at David Jones?

AB: Well, she was a nurse, she worked with me. Oh, that's right, I was operating – that's why I wasn't going out all the time and I remember. When I worked in London I worked for an agency and my cousin worked at this agency, nursing agency and when I came back the woman who owned the agency said "Would I recruit Australian nurses?" because they were highly prized, so I said yes.

30.00 So, I mean, absolutely disgraceful, but that's right, I used to interview, that's right, interview them in our little tea room. And that's where I met Barbara Gilroy, yes, originally. Oh, yes, that's disgraceful, isn't it? Shh.

RB: Well, you didn't seem to think so at the time, obviously.

AB: Oh, no. I mean, I just thought it was quite normal.

RB: Does that say something about David Jones being a focus of people's lives in a different way?

AB: Well, yes, I suppose it does but we were also the sort of Mother Confessors for a lot of the staff.

RB: How do you mean?

AB: Well, although I think I mentioned that they had the welfare officer, people would come to us with their problems of whatever the problem was, whether it was a broken romance or women, the old story of the dutiful daughter looking after the aged parents and trying to cope with a job and things like that.

RB: Were they assured of confidentiality?

AB: Oh, yes, yes, oh, definitely, yes.

RB: And they understood that?

AB: Mm. So, this was all in the course of treating them for whatever it was. They didn't come up to unburden themselves but the pretext could have been, "I've got an earache or a headache" or something, I don't know, but they were there.

RB: Did staff pay for the service?

AB: Oh, no, no, definitely not, no.

RB: You also mentioned when we met too, Annette, that you looked after Charles Lloyd Jones.

AB: Yes, yes. Yes, yes, when his Rolls Royce – as they always said about Rolls Royce – "failed to proceed" in Elizabeth Street and he lifted the bonnet and twiddled with whatever – the radiator or something and the steam came out and he had this shocking burn on his arm.

32.06 So, he would come to the surgery twice a day for dressings and the staff on the fifth floor said, "When is Mr Charles coming?" because they had to look busy and "We can't tell you". But he was a scream.

RB: In what way?

AB: Oh, wow, he was full of life. And, being nurses, I suppose we were not exactly his equal, but we were in charge. That's the thing, it

doesn't matter who you are: when it's the nurse and the doctor and you've got an injury, well, you're under the thumb there, I think, in those days. So, obviously, he had a wonderful art collection and there was one marvellous art gallery on the seventh or eight floor – fantastic – so we used to talk about art and things and after we cured him, we were so fantastic, Barbara and I, he sent us each a beautiful bouquet of – I can still remember the yellow roses each. And on mine it said, "Thanks for the dropped bandages", and he spelt "dropped" with one p, I remember that. But once I was sent up – I think he'd cut his finger. Not that he said "Come up and treat my finger" but his secretary must have had a fit and I went up, put a Band-aid on but, of course, I went into his office. The Rodin statue was there, all this stuff. So, I went "Oh, here's the Band-aid. Now, let's get onto more interesting things", and then we'd talk about this.

RB: Did you stay long doing that?

AB: Oh, yes, a little while. I was enthusiastic and he was interested to tell me about his pieces which I enjoyed.

RB: What did his office look like?

34.00 AB: Oh, I can't remember. I think it was quite large but I just remember that – and I don't know what the figure was on his desk but I recognised it as a Rodin. I think they'd recently had an exhibition at David Jones so I knew then, but, oh, and he had paintings, you know.

RB: You speak, Annette, about that you were on his equal.

AB: No equal but no - that sounds awful, doesn't it? It was just person to person with similar interests, that's what it would have been. Well, he didn't treat us as lowly people; he treated us as equals; that's more what it was, yes.

RB: Would he have treated other staff differently?

AB: I don't know. There was a woman, a Miss Hays of number seventeen department which was hosiery, she was about ninety with dyed black hair but she remembered Mr Charles when he was a baby. So, whenever he came into the store he always spoke to her. He was never pompous with the staff that I can remember though he was always Mr Charles and they were always keen that they were standing to attention and looking – you know, "Look busy, look busy", but I don't think – he wasn't any ogre or anything; he was quite bright and breezy as I recall.

RB: Was there any sense of hierarchy whether through the different jobs or different departments?

AB: Well, I don't know about that because somehow we were separate; the surgery was a separate entity. So, I can't say about the – I mean, there were some shocking buyers and they treated staff badly, I know that, but that's in anything, isn't it, there's always some bully around.

36.00 **RB: Did you transfer to the other stores at any time?**

AB: I think I did do relief work down in George Street but there's nothing doing down there, so boring, no one came near the place. I think just for half a day; Carmel, the nurse down there, she was off for a day or so ill, so I was down there. And, of course, the new face, they weren't too keen having a new – people who did come were not too keen with a new face. Of course, Carmel had been there forever and to see a new face, no, "Got to get used to this new nurse. I don't know who she is".

RB: Even though you'd just come from another David Jones store?

AB: Yes. Oh, no, no, different ilk.

RB: Was there a different atmosphere between the different stores? I'm thinking generally rather than just your department.

AB: I don't think I could – well, I suppose we saw Elizabeth Street as "the store" and Market Street seemed a bit stitched-up because it was the menswear and homewares and things which was not very interesting and they had personnel and all that stuff over there and George Street was an outpost, I think.

RB: You mentioned before when we met that there's an underground network.

AB: Yes.

RB: Could you tell me about that?

AB: Yes. I'd only been – I don't know how long I'd been there when that happened. We did get front page in the Telegraph, I remember. A chap went into the Commonwealth Bank and tried to rob it with some gun or other and then went into David Jones to buy a tie or something and someone tried to stop him and he probably hit him over the head or did something and all stations – so we were called from Elizabeth Street to go and assist.

38.00 And we went down to the basement or the sub-basement which was huge, where they had all their vans, they had petrol pumps and you could just run quickly through there to the Market Street store – I'm sure it would still be there because they still have their – I'm sure it's still there but it was just a huge underground area.

RB: It didn't run through to George Street?

AB: No, no, I don't think so. No, it's just from Elizabeth to Market, yes, yes.

RB: You also mentioned you shopped in David Jones.

AB: Yes, because we had the staff discount which was ten per cent. But when you shopped there I don't think you could take your purchases back with you unless they had the docket on because of the theft at David Jones - the internal theft was another story too. So, there was the staff entrance and you could collect your parcels from the staff entrance, I think, on your way home.

RB: I think you can still do that today, don't you, if you have large parcels?

AB: Yes, I think there is, yes.

RB: What was the internal theft like?

AB: Oh, massive scale. Well, it's all apocryphal but I always loved the story in the furniture department of suites of things disappearing, false invoices, you know, that sort of thing, going out to Haberfield or somewhere and never seen again. Or the society people – it wasn't theft, it was the days when you could return, "David Jones for service", so you could return things.

39.51 So, when the ball season was on or the Randwick Races, Mrs Cholmondeley and co with her daughters would go and put – oh, must have had credit cards then, I suppose – buy the beautiful ball gowns on Friday and then take them back on Monday. But there was one buyer up there who was very social; I think she was in charge of the beautiful evening downs and Mrs Cholmondeley brought back the daughters' dresses and said, "Oh, they didn't fit and they were shocking" - I mean, they were all sweaty under the arms and everything – and the buyer said, "Oh", she said, "Oh, I find that hard to believe. They looked so beautiful at that ball on Saturday night". So, there was that and then the hats and all these accessories women would just take for the weekend, wear to the races and bring back. Or the diplomats - that was another story – buying the huge dinner service, I suppose again for the big party and then, "No, it doesn't fit", so coming back and the story is that the food was still on the plate. I mean, that's ridiculous but still it came back. And it was all "Certainly, sir, certainly, madam".

RB: And never questioned.

AB: Never questioned until David Jones started to go broke, I suppose, when Adsteam took over.

RB: When was that?

AB: That was after I left. Yes, so I left in 1970, so some time after that.

RB: There were other significant department stores in town - - -

AB: Yes.

RB: - - - at that time, Farmer's. How did David Jones, not rate but was there an association between those superior stores?

AB: I don't know. I think David Jones was the top one.

RB: Would you interact with your fellow nursing staff at other stores?

AB: I don't even know if they had staff, other nursing staff at the other stores; certainly didn't hear of any.

RB: Did you continue any professional development or courses?

41.55 AB: No. Oh, no, no, we were just there. I could have been there – if I hadn't left I suppose I could have been there until they got rid of them and now, yes.

RB: Do you remember when that was, Annette?

AB: I don't know but last year I was in David Jones, buying something, and there was a chap there, a customer talking about, "Oh, when he was at David Jones thirty years ago it was different, blah, blah". And I said to the assistant, "Oh, do they still have the surgery up on the fifth floor?" and she gave me a look. She said, "I've never heard of that". I said, "Well, what happens when people are ill?" She said, "Oh, well, you can sit on a stool", so.

RB: Your look of horror.

AB: Horror! Oh, dear. Of course, we were also involved with workers compensation; that was another thing with staff injuring themselves on duty, so.

RB: What did that involve?

AB: Oh, well, they'd come to us and fill in forms and I think it's in that little thing there. (indicates visually) It doesn't mention compensation but the staff were told to report to the surgery immediately if they had an accident on duty and that. And we attended to them or sent them off to Sydney Hospital, yes.

RB: Of course, that was not far up the road in Macquarie Street.

AB: No, no.

RB: You showed me this little booklet.

AB: Yes.

RB: Would you like to tell me something about this on the tape, Annette?

AB: Oh, yes.

RB: This is your staff - - -

AB: Staff guidance card, yes, and in my position assisted.

RB: And was this yours?

AB: Yes, Miss A Lobb, yes.

RB: So, you weren't described as "Sister".

AB: No, not on this.

RB: What were you called?

AB: Oh, we were called Sister, yes.

RB: What was your impression when you were given this card?

AB: I don't know if I ever looked it quite frankly.

RB: So, one might suggest you didn't know how to behave in David Jones?

AB: No, I didn't know how to behave and I didn't know that I had – with the black dress and the pearls, I didn't know about that. "When you may shop in-house". Oh, I have to shop before eleven thirty or after three pm.

44.02 Also, "Where goods are specially advertised, members of the staff are not permitted to make purchases until after nine thirty and owing to pressure of business on Saturdays, staff who are on duty cannot be permitted shopping time on that morning".

RB: You talked about buying sort of household items at David Jones. Would you also buy foodstuffs?

AB: Oh, food, yes. Yes, that was good.

RB: Would that have been your first port of call?

AB: Well, mainly the cheese and all the delicacies in Market Street when I could afford them, yes. I didn't buy fruit and veg; that was too expensive.

RB: Where would you buy those things?

AB: Buy them here at the Cross, I suppose, or on the barrows. They had very good barrows in those days in the city.

RB: So, when you married you left Burwood.

AB: Concord.

RB: Concord, excuse me.

AB: Concord.

RB: And came to live here in the Cross?

AB: Yes, yes, in Macleay Street, Gowrie Gate, very well-known old building then.

RB: What made you choose that address?

AB: Well, my husband had a business in Bourke Street. He lived at Collaroy and was tired of travelling by car.

RB: What was his business?

AB: He had wholesale and retail souvenirs and it was called 'Bennelong Traders' and they operated at 128 Bourke Street. The house is still there, it's a darling old cottage, a darling old cottage.

RB: Would you ever have thought of living over his business?

AB: Oh, it was too small and only had, I think, two rooms upstairs and I don't think they – they didn't have a bathroom, just they had the toilet out the back, I think, in those days, that's about it, kitchen.

RB: You say "they". Was he in business - - -

AB: Oh, yes, he was in business; had a partner, yes.

RB: Who was that?

AB: His name was Robert Urquette.

46.00 **RB: And what was your husband's name?**

AB: Richard, Richard Bennett. Yes, so they were 'Bennelong Traders'.

RB: Was he there for long?

AB: They were there for quite a few years and then they got bigger so they sold that and took over another business and ended up - - -

RB: Sorry Annette, you were saying your husband -?

AB: Yes, they left Bourke Street and went to Hay Street at Haymarket. They took over another business. They still became Bennelong Traders, they were still Bennelong Traders but they moved to Hay Street.

RB: When was that?

AB: That was in the '80s, I think, '70s or '80s.

RB: And Chinatown had begun to change by that time.

AB: Yes, yes.

RB: What number Hay Street, do you remember?

AB: Oh, I don't know. It was an old building; I can't remember the number.

RB: And what sort of souvenirs did he have?

AB: Well, they had the agency for Brownie Downing [Australian illustrator] when they took over this business but the souvenirs they had were made by craftspeople, beautiful silver jewellery and all the things, the upmarket souvenirs and beautiful screenprinted things but of course they were expensive so they didn't really make a lot of money out of that because people were still – and they used to do tea towels. They had Neil Newman – if you ever knew of a person called Neil Newman, I think he was one of the first who did souvenir tea towels that were elegant and he started a kangaroo thing, Neil Newman.

RB: Where were these craftspeople based?

AB: I didn't meet any of them, I just saw their things but I think they were locally sourced in Sydney. Beautiful and lovely silverware and jewellery and hand-painted things, elegant, plus a few crappy things, of course. [break in recording]

48.20 **RB: Annette, we just were speaking off tape about your husband's work and how he interacted with the buyers. He also sold to David Jones.**

AB: Yes, he did sell to David Jones to the souvenir department and the buyer there was a difficult woman whose name I cannot remember. I think they were down in the lower ground floor, the souvenirs at that stage. And he was a man of integrity so he didn't know about gifts to the buyers but that was the norm. His partner always said, "Look, we've got to sling a gift here or we've got to do something" but Richard could never bring himself to front up with a lovely bottle of perfume or something but it was well-known that they're always open to a few gifts here and there. Not money or anything like that but a lovely bottle of perfume or a box of chocolates, things like that. Not all, I'm sure, but if the sale wasn't going according to plan I think they had to be – but I think Bennelong Traders they were a bit gauche in that area, they didn't know how to do it properly so he didn't do it, no.

RB: When you were at David Jones did you use your maiden name or your husband's name?

AB: Well, I couldn't get rid of the name of Lobb fast enough. I mean, Bennett somehow became Dennis for some reason but Lobb was just impossible.

RB: How does Bennett become Dennis?

AB: I don't know but when I married Richard said, "Well, if people call you Dennis – people don't listen". I don't listen myself, I suppose, and Bennett, unless you spell it out becomes Dennis.

RB: So people at work would call you Sister Dennis?

50.15 AB: Yeah. On the phone, it was mainly on the phone that was, or they'd ask for Mr Dennis because my voice is a bit low. Or Sister Dennis or Mr Dennis, oh, yeah, all right. But oh yes, Bennett, I preferred Bennett to Lobb. Wouldn't you?

RB: And you were also speaking about some of the characters at David Jones.

AB: Oh, yes. Well, there was a chap. I can't remember what he looked like but he was Lenny, Lenny from Lost Property and Lenny was the SP bookmaker. Oh, dear. So, on Melbourne Cup Day the queues down at Lost Property stretched – he was below ground floor somewhere. Lost Property, "Yes, we're here for Lenny". So, Lenny was there with some scrappy bit of paper and a pencil and I don't know what.

RB: Did you go down and bet as well?

AB: Oh, yes, yes, and I put a bet on for Richard and he won – I don't know what year it was – 'Rainlover', I think, the horse - he was quite pleased then with Lenny. I can't think of any – oh well she wasn't a character but the woman who was in charge of Babies Wear, she would have been in her forties or so but it was only ever whispered that she was actually an unmarried mother and her daughter at that stage was about fourteen or so and I thought, "Isn't that marvellous that she" – it was in those days – "that she had kept her daughter and had kept her career and was then the buyer for the babies wear – charming woman, I can't remember her name. And one of her staff was a singer; she had a wonderful voice; David Jones had a choir. She used to take lessons at the Con and I said "Are we ever going to have a concert?" and she said, "Oh, no, I just enjoy singing".

52.20 And those people, they're all different - I s'pose it's mainly with the women; we had more chats than with the men. Or there was the lift driver who was spurned in love by another lift driver and tried to commit suicide in a very pathetic way I suppose – I think he took a few aspirin, nothing happened; I think he just wanted to make a statement that he'd been spurned.

RB: Did you say he was spurned by the other lift driver?

AB: Yes, yes, by a woman lift driver that spurned him.

RB: It would be very hard for two lift drivers to get together very often.

AB: Yes. Oh, dear, those days with the lifts, God. Yeah, so he'd been spurned so he probably took about aspirin or something.

RB: Did he come to your surgery?

AB: Oh, yes, yes, so he had to tell us; yes, it had to be spread around that he'd been spurned but it didn't go any further than us, I don't know.

RB: Thinking about Lenny and the Lost Property section, how did you arrive at work, which entrance did you come into work by?

AB: In Elizabeth Street and there was the staff entrance there, so we went through there.

RB: You would never use the main public - - -

AB: Oh, we were not allowed to use the main – well, that's another thing: you could be whipping in and out with all your stolen goods, I suppose.

RB: So, was there someone at the door, watching as everybody left?

AB: Yes, yes, yes.

RB: Were bags inspected?

AB: No, because I think that any bags – oh, perhaps there were but if you'd made any purchases or anything they were left down at the staff entrance in pigeonhole things. I think you probably had to leave everything there – I really can't remember. Don't think I had any.

RB: And what about romances – were there romances in the stores?

54.50 AB: Yes, I don't think we were involved. I think the girls in the advertising department were a bit flighty - because there were a lot of gay chaps there who were in the display department so the girls in display didn't have much of a go up there but I think in advertising. I don't remember any marriages. Perhaps they kept it pretty mum, I don't know. But one of the chaps, I think a chap in display, he became a famous makeup artist – I can't remember his name. Then there was another person in display who was a transsexual - well, at that stage he was a man - and he became ******* the antiques dealer. He worked in display - he's very well known in Queen Street.

RB: Were you aware of that community within David Jones?

AB: Yes, yes. They were out there, they weren't pretending they were anything but window dressers, called window dressers.

RB: Were there people, perhaps, in other sections of the store who were not living such public lives in that way?

AB: Well, we wouldn't have known, we wouldn't have known, I don't think, no.

RB: And you mentioned the choir.

AB: Yes. I think they still have their choir but at Christmas-time they would perform.

RB: Only at Christmas?

AB: Yes, as far as I remember just Christmas, yes. And they also I did notice they had a David Jones newsletter that used to come out. Perhaps it was a quarterly – I don't know what it was – but about the news about the staff, if customers had written saying they'd had good service from the staff and things like that.

RB: Were there ever complaints about the nursing staff?

56.10 AB: Oh, no, we had wonderful letters, oh, personal letters about how fabulous we were; we ended up in the newsletter. There was just one: I think a girl I worked with, she was a bit brusque to the few of the staff - they were probably malingerers, I don't know - and the word went back to give her a talking to. Oh, and then another job we had: staff and their personal hygiene, BO. Oh, gosh, that was dreadful.

RB: Why was it dreadful?

AB: Well, they were sent up to us for the little talk about personal hygiene and about having a wash and a brush-up and using a bit of deodorant.

RB: Was that embarrassing to have to tell people that?

AB: Well, it was. I mean, I thought, "Now, how are we going to work this one out?" So, it was always the staff who complained about other staff and they said, "Oh, phew, you know, it's just too much". So, the person had been sent up and they were told that a customer had complained. So, I don't know what others did but my story was, "Now, there's been a complaint and I think perhaps the deodorant that you were using is no longer successful" or "The clothing you're wearing might be all synthetic and you should look towards cotton". And I don't know whether it worked or not but that was the only way I could go; I couldn't really say "You're stinking to high heaven. What are you going to do about it?" Had to be diplomatic but I think "The deodorant you're using is not successful. Perhaps you should change it" was a good one. [break in recording]

RB: Annette, when we spoke before you mentioned the salary wasn't that extraordinary at David Jones, even though you couldn't remember precisely what it was. So, why work at David Jones?

58.15 AB: Well, at this stage I was married, I wanted a nine to five job and I loved working there. It was just every day was different, really. I mean, some days were boring and we didn't have many customers – patients, I should say – but I loved it because I'm a sort of busybody person and I like talking, which is quite obvious, and there was always something going on. Always at David Jones, yes.

RB: You mentioned earlier that you were a reader as well.

AB: Yes.

RB: Was there time for you to read during working hours?

AB: Oh, yes, yes, there was and just sitting in our little staff room, I suppose we could have – that's what it was, a staff room, yes, a little staff room there – and just get through the odd book.

RB: Tell me about leaving David Jones.

AB: Oh, yes. Well, my dear friend, Barbara Gilroy, who then became the godmother of our first son, Hugh, we were working together and it was she who organised the staff to cough up for the gift. And I've got this lovely memory of all the staff with their names and the floors they were on and it's "From your many friends at David Jones". That would have been done from the Art Department there or advertising, I suppose. It's beautiful, isn't it? Yes. And they gave me an upmarket pram.

RB: What's an "upmarket pram"?

60.00 AB: Oh, it was some English model which was in Black Watch tartan, a huge affair, a hand-held Beta, a cooking thing which I'm still using, a George Jensen cake server, knife – it was beautiful. And Barbara said there was some money left over so she bought a George Jensen teaspoon which was just beautiful. And I still have those things and still using them apart from the pram which went its way in the end. But, oh, I was just overcome with their generosity and their friendship. But when I did leave one of the electricians – it was the head electricians there and I left, I s'pose, when I was about seven months pregnant and this electrician said to me, "Sister, why are you leaving?" I couldn't believe it. I said to him, "But haven't you heard about the birds and the bees?" you know. "Oh, you're pregnant!" Gosh, a scream they were, the electricians; they were another breed too. But they were all in-house – I s'pose they still have them now, the electricians and the plumbers and the tradesmen.

RB: Why were they another breed?

AB: Oh, they were a bit sort of naïve, a bit rough and ready and full of fun as well, yes. And old-timers, they were really old-timers – well, a few young ones; I don't remember any apprentices. But they were so different from the ladies in their black dresses and the ones in the kitchen or the cooks running amok with knives up in that restaurant and things, oh dear.

RB: Did that happen often?

AB: Oh, a few times, yes. There's a survivor living at Kings Cross, Mr Georgio - I've no idea of his first name - he's still Mr Georgio to me - he drinks up at the Vegas. And he was the victim of when somebody ran amok and got drunk on the cooking sherry, I think, and ran amok and tried to knife Mr Georgio. He ran down to the surgery, "Help, help!"

RB: Had they struck home?

AB: Who?

RB: Had they injured him?

62.20 AB: Oh, no. I think it was some minor thing but he was very upset. I think we had to calm him down with a bit of our special Aspro mix or something.

RB: You mention that you know him as "Mr".

AB: Oh, yes, Mr Georgio – no idea of his first name. We were not on first name terms with anyone.

RB: With anyone?

AB: No, apart from the medical staff. And Dr Russell was always Dr Russell, Matron was Matron Farmer but amongst the nurses we were on first name terms, of course, but no one else. No, Jimmy the cleaner and we knew – I can't even remember treating Lenny from Lost Property but he was always "Lenny from Lost Property, the SP bookmaker", he wasn't one of our patients that I recall.

RB: But even people you'd see daily?

AB: Oh, no. It was always, you know, no matter who they were, always.

RB: So, looking back on your time there?

AB: Oh, happy days. Probably looking through rose-tinted glasses as well all do but it's lovely going down memory lane. Oh, that's another thing when I left with a baby. Apart from these wonderful gifts, people gave me individual gifts and I received twenty three hand-knitted matinee jackets.

RB: Twenty three.

AB: Hand-knitted, and some beautiful baby shawls and things like that from the women. It was just beautiful.

RB: So, your position must have been a very special role within the store.

AB: Well, I don't know. I s'pose it was just different from – we were attending to people on a very personal level, I suppose, and it was a little sanctuary up there, I think. And, as I say, people were sort of coming, "Oh, I can't stand Mrs – I'll have to go and have a migraine or go up there for five minutes and take an Aspro or something", you know.

64.30 **RB: You've got your little list, Annette. Is there anything else on there that we haven't discussed?**

AB: No, I don't think so. I'll probably think of other things later but I think that's about it. We mentioned the social worker, yes. I think that's about it but when I see staff at David Jones today I just wonder what it's like for them. It couldn't be – it was a big family, really, and all the things that go along with big families. They were good days, yes, good days.

RB: Just as we close, you've had this lovely morning tea that you've made for me with this unusual sugar bowl from the Cairo.

AB: Ah, yes, the Cairo. That was an old hotel in Macleay Street which was demolished and the Chevron Hotel took its place. The Chevron was demolished and now it's the Icon Apartments. It apparently had a circular drive with magnolias; people would come from all over Sydney to see the magnolias and out the back they had grass tennis courts. So, those were the days.

RB: I think that's a lovely note to end on. Thank you.

AB: It's my pleasure, I've enjoyed it.

Interview ends