CITY OF SYDNEY

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

INTERVIEWEE: Loretto Thurgood

INTERVIEWER: Sue Rosen

PLACE: Yagoona

DATE: 20 July 1995

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **SR:** **This is the interview with Loretto Thurgood at Yagoona. It's the 20th of July 1995.**

Loretto, where were you born?

LT: I was born in Bedford Street, Newtown, at 1.00 pm on Saturday, the 12th of July 1919.

SR: **And did you grow up in Newtown?**

LT: No. That was my grandmother and grandfather Fergusons' home and we lived with them until I was around about seven and then my parents moved to Union Street, Erskineville. We lived in three houses in Union Street, firstly in Erskineville – to explain it, Union Street is the border and one side is Newtown and the other side is Erskineville. Firstly, we lived on the Union in Erskineville, more up towards Erskineville Road and we had a little cottage with an attic and the attic was my bedroom; that's where my brother Kenneth was born there. Then we moved across the street and I don't know for

what reasons why we left the second house but we moved down the street and my brother, Ronald, was born there. And I was nine years older than Kenneth who's deceased and I'm thirteen years older than Ronald and he lives in Adelaide at present. I went to Australia Street School when I first started school and I've got some funny memories of that. It's still an old-fashioned school, it's right in Australia Street, and it had a big back playground which had an immense peppercorn tree.

2.04 And the thing I remember most of that school was the kindergarten room which had a little dollies' corner which had a doll's house with a picket fence and an immense big rocking horse which the boys used to get on, wouldn't let us on it, and they were always pirates or dashing cavaliers at that age. But when we left and went to live in Erskineville I went to Norfolk Street School and from there I went to Newtown Primary School and then because my parents couldn't afford for me to go further, I've spent first and second year in Newtown School, which is now the performing arts school. We were never rich, let's face that. My father was a sign writer and coach painter, his father was a painter, and he used to do a lot of good work. I suppose you want me to tell you where he worked. He worked for James McMahon and Company in Redfern and he did the work on the tracks, did all the sign writing and the coach painting on their tracks. He also did work for Sanders Sutton and Whiteheads and he painted the first pantechnicon to come into Australia, which was showed at the Royal Show. I remember that distinctly because I had a new dress for that and it was champagne georgette with lace 'round the top and a new pair of ankle strap shoes, so I remember that very distinctly.

4.03 My father was a small man; he was a very quiet man in lots of things. It was unfortunate that a man that had his talents had to suffer so much and eventually he went blind. In those days you didn't buy prepaid [prepared?] paints. The only thing that came prepaid was the gold leaf, which they did in a special way on some of the work he had. Unfortunately, like everybody else, the Depression hit us when the banks failed and there was not only people like my father but everybody else except those that had a government job suffered. My grandmother moved from Newtown to Undercliffe and I developed whooping cough. So as I was having treatment at the Quay Street Hospital it was then, part of the children's hospital, I was able to see firsthand just what happened. Men used to have to go to the Benevolent Society in Quay Street to get one paper signed and then they had to walk right down George Street to a wharf to have it re-

signed again, then they came back. And on a Monday you got groceries, bread and meat, very few vegetables, and if you wanted eggs you could only get eggs on a special form and that had to do you for Thursday.

5.54 My mother was a very thrifty woman; she handled all the finances in our house. Even my brothers and I, nobody dared take their pay envelope home unless Mum had it first so you couldn't open it to buy even yourself an ice-cream. It was sad, those. I seen children – well, I didn't see them but my mother seen them – starving, that they pulled the middle out of hot bread. But it wasn't only just people in Erskineville that suffered; it was people all over. A lot of people were evicted from homes because they couldn't pay rent and that and that's how Happy Valley at Maroubra was formed out at Little Bay: people went out there and built shacks. My father, as I said, took to doing show cards and he'd make these cards and he'd walk all over Sydney and the main purpose was to get the money to pay the rent. There was very little electricity in the houses, mainly lights, or gas, and you cooked on the stove or a fuel stove and that. And I always had fond memories of my grandma's kitchen because it was immense and it had this immense big stove and the big wooden copper and everything so it was always children's dreams and that.

SR: What are your very earliest memories when you were living in Newtown, what are your first memories?

LT: My early memories of Newtown was the times we used to get taken to the school balls and everything. I think we went to school balls everywhere in Newtown.

SR: What are school balls?

LT: Fancy dress balls and that.

SR: For kids?

7.52 LT: For kids and that but …….. ……. …….. There were so many kids in the family, as my mother had four sisters and two brothers, and they devised these 'sets'; and we had the Eastern set and the water lily set; because my mother was very clever and so was my grandmother that they devised this Eastern set and beaded it and wherever we went we won the prizes. But the funniest coincidence was when I was in Australia Street School. They had this school concert and there was a nursery rhyme the teacher put to music, 'Three Little

Mice on a Pantry Shelf' and I was one of the mice. Because my mother wanted to make me look better than anyone else my tail was longer than everyone, with the result I felt into the audience. My uncle thought it was hilarious, but my mother was very annoyed. She's had me taught ballet but I had to give that away.

SR: Why did you have to give it up?

LT: I got pneumonia twice. And my mother was scared of that because prior to I was born she'd lost two children in two days, so I was the third child, really. And then I learnt ballet off Chrissie Royal in Annandale and I learnt tap dancing for a while at Lillian Skinner's in King Street, Newtown but we gave that all up because economic reasons in that time.

SR: What happened to the two children before you, what did they die of?

9.57 LT: Nobody really knows, but we really think – when I was born my mother had the pneumonic flu which was raging from 1918/19 and they seemed to think that Vera and Georgie might have contacted that and as they buried Vera, Georgie died so she lost the two of them within two days, so maybe that was a reason why she was a little bit bitter at times. But we had some good memories in Newtown. My grandma's kitchen, we had relatives over the North Shore and they used to come over and play cards every Saturday night and grandma'd cook and cook and cook and in one episode they must have been playing sevens because all us kids were relegated to the kitchen and one of these times they were playing this game. They said "Oh, take a piece of cake", you know, because we kids thought that meant "Take a piece of cake" so we ate the cake. Of course, we all got into trouble over the cake. But one of my fondest memories was the council picnics - not the council – all the unions and the councils used to have picnics once a year and they'd be ferry picnics to Clifton Gardens; and Clifton Gardens then had Sargents and it had a big dancehall called Dixieland and it's not there no more. But you went to Circular Quay by tram and you picked up the ferry and you went over to the wharf and when you got off the ferry you got an apple and an orange and a bag of lollies and a small toy – all the girls got the same, all the boys got the same – and vouchers for ice cream which, oh, that was a children's delight and hot water and ginger beer.

12.03 Well, the ginger beer, it was not like it is now; my version of the ginger beer was soap suds with salt and pepper in it. But they used to have highland dancing and races and of course the Mums and Dads did ballroom dancing, danced in the Dixieland and that's where I first learned to do other dancing, ballroom dancing. But they were lovely. All the kids in the school that went, we were always sick and that was the day we took off but they were lovely days. Unfortunately, they don't have those for children no more. There's lots of things that we had which didn't cost us anything but the children of today don't get it and I think they've lost the fairytale part of life, I think, the children of today. All the shop windows in the city'd be lights and that and pantomimes were the go and every year there was pantomimes and these shop windows would be either based on Beauty and the Beast and Cinderella. Grace Brothers used to have caves, Mark Foys used to have caves and things on the roof - and that's now the Downing Centre - and McDowell's and McCathie's and the whole lot, Horderns, they all had something, David Jones. You'd spend a whole day just walking around, looking at windows and children, even the poor children, got delighted. But when I was about twelve when the Depression hit us we didn't have much, none of us had much.

SR: Well, what kind of a place was Erskineville for kids in the late 1920s? You'd remember, what, from 1925 on pretty well, wouldn't you?

14.04 LT: In the late, yes, about eight year old I was when I went there and further up. Well, the kids, we used to play rounders and we'd play cricket and that. We'd have the rabbitoh used to come down the street, the baker and the butcher and the prop man and that and the man selling the wood and coal, and the bottleoh. We had all those things; you didn't get your milk in cartons or bottles; you had to go out with a milk jug to get your milk and they poured it out of a container on the back of a horse-drawn vehicle. And you had a very good priest at the Catholic Church in Erskineville – I never remember the name of that – but he was magnificent, Father Holland. He used to ride around on a motorbike and give kids rides on a motorbike, always had an apple for somebody. And the deaconess at Holy Trinity was Sister Rae. But I first started going to Sunday school at the Sydney City Mission in Gowrie Street, Newtown, which runs in alignment with Union Street. I don't think they bothered much; we all suffered the same. They played Knock Down Ginger - do you know what that is? - played that and my mother used to get real frustrated over that.

SR: How would you describe your family, your parents, what sort of people were your parents?

LT: Just plain working class people.

SR: Did your Mum work outside the home?

LT: I remember before my brother, Kenneth, was born my mother used to be missing a couple of times a year. She used to go and work in the cannery, in the IXL cannery in Forbes Street, Newtown, in the [Oak …?] cannery down in Camperdown, and I think she did that to boost some money and that.

16.14 But Dad was earning enough to keep us then, you see, but Mum was a very stern, straight lady – what would they call it now? – straight up lady and her views were right, always right and that and Dad, I think Dad'd do anything to keep Flo happy.

SR: Were your parents religious?

LT: No, not that religious. They believed in children going to Sunday school.

SR: What denomination?

LT: Church of England.

SR: Were they politically involved?

LT: No, I never heard them be political. Of course, they used to say that they vote for Labor, always did. But Mum used to do some work for the United Charities at times outside Newtown Town Hall on the chocolate wheel they used to have but I never heard them talk – they talked about things like that it was a case of "Little children should be seen and not heard" and you didn't listen to that conversation. And my grandfather Thomas, my father's father, was a very strict man but my mother's father, he was a pet. There was nothing wrong with my grandfather Thomas, it was just that he was a bit autocratic and that.

SR: Was your father ever involved in any union activities at his work?

LT: Don't think so.

SR: O.K. Well, what sort of discipline was used at home?

18.00 LT: Very firm.

SR: And what does that mean?

LT: Well, it meant my mother wasn't averse to giving you a good hard smack when she thought you deserved it.

SR: And who usually administered this?

LT: My mother.

SR: Were you expected to contribute towards the family in any way? Like some kids had jobs, selling papers or collecting bottles or things like that. Did you have to do anything?

LT: No.

SR: What about helping with domestic work at home?

LT: Oh, I had that to do.

SR: And what would you do?

LT: I had to do the dusting and I had to wash up the dishes and that. I used to have to light the fire for the copper; we had to light the copper to get the hot water to have a bath.

SR: How often would you have a bath?

LT: About four times a week, three times a week. But let me tell you: someone got in the bath and then they had to get out very quick so somebody else could get in there.

SR: While it was still hot?

LT: Yes, that's right.

SR: Well, what did the family do for fun?

LT: Well, sometimes we went with the families for a picnic. As I said, my uncle had a lorry. He was a carter for the commission agents at the markets, at Paddy's Markets, the fruit and vegetable markets, and sometimes he'd take us all – well, he did take us a couple of times until he got into trouble – on railway seats on the back of the truck and we'd go to different picnic areas and the ones that had cars,

different ones, they took us. It would all be a family event wherever you went.

20.00 Some of the picnic places we went to was Carss Park, Dolls Point, Palm Beach. In those days you had to go what they call the Serpentine Drive to go to Palm Beach – they didn't have that Pittwater Road then – and National Park, the long way 'round. But in my school years my grandma used to rent holiday cottages and take us away in the school holidays so in the school holidays I guess I was more fortunate than some kids. Nanna used to take the grandchildren with her and I'd always be missing because I was the one that read a lot; I loved to read.

SR: What were your favourite authors?

LT: Well, I used to win prizes and they'd always be books and that. I read all the Katie Dids and the Alice books and my bible – I read that a couple of times – and Pilgrim's Progress. I read my mother's Pear's Cyclopaedia, which I've got. That's why I was able to debate with one of the teachers the War of the Roses and that. And I was never – what can you say? – able to sew, I wasn't very good at sewing.

SR: And were you expected to be in those days – were little girls expected to be good at sewing?

LT: Well, I didn't have to do it. My grandma, what she ever did, she brought everything in bags, like flour bags, and they came in calico bags then, unbleached calico, and what my grandmother did with those calico bags nobody needs know.

22.02 I had aprons that was embroidered and had frills on them out of calico. I also had pants made out of calico with lace 'round them; she made pillow slips with them, she made centres. And they tried very hard to teach me the fancy work but she gave me the cottons and that and that's how I come to have a row with the sewing teacher when I was in second year at school, because I told her that my parents only had the money to pay rent, not to buy material for her to make a mess of. I was a very forthright child, I used to say what I think, and it used to get me into trouble a lot; it does even now.

SR: Yes. What would be a typical evening like at your home? What would you do in the evening?

LT: Well, normally it'd be just Mum and Dad'd be talking or they might read the papers. That'd be the *Herald*, the *Sydney Morning Herald,* or *Smith's Weekly* if you wanted to read it. *Beckett's Budget* they had but that never, ever hit our house – that was taboo.

SR: Why was that?

LT: That was a bit risqué at that time.

SR: *Beckett's Budget*?

LT: M'mm.

SR: Was it like *The Truth* or something?

LT: And *The Truth*, yes. I think that was the one that showed women's curves more than it did because those days if your skirt went so long and that you didn't – my father, I was never allowed to wear shorts, never allowed to wear them, and I'd read.

24.02 **SR: And you've said your Mum controlled the family finances - - -**

LT: That's right.

SR: - - - paid the rent and the bills.

LT: That's right.

SR: Did your Dad like his work?

LT: Yes.

SR: And that was local, wasn't it?

LT: Well, see, he did. Dad put a lot of effort into his work, it didn't matter what he did, although when he used to do the show cards in the Depression years we used to get old magazines and cut out pictures and we'd be sitting, cutting the pictures out for Mum to stick them on, like tomatoes; it'd be "Please don't squeeze me till I'm yours" and a few "Don't ask for credit because refusal often offends" and all those different things.

SR: Did your father in the Depression lose his job at McMahon's, did he?

LT: Yes.

SR: Gee. Did they put off all their workers? I mean, did they shut down or did they recover?

LT: I don't know.

SR: The Depression, what sort of effect did it have on your family life?

LT: I think like everybody else it was a very hard time for lots of people, very hard. If it hadn't have been for some of the agencies – well, I wouldn't say agencies – some of the churches and that, a lot of people would have been worse off.

SR: Did your Dad go to WWI?

LT: My father never went to any war.

SR: How would you describe your mother's working day?

LT: My mother's working day?

SR: Yes, how would that start?

LT: Well, she used to be gone before I got up. Well, I'd get up and have breakfast and then Mum'd go but then she didn't go to work, she gave that up when she had Ken and then she had Ron.

26.06 I think she did a bit of sewing to supplement the income. She was very clever; she was very good doing crochet work. I wouldn't say she was a very good knitter but she was very good with her hands other than that. She could sew, make dresses and things for people, but you never knew what my mother was doing and that; if she was sewing to make money, you didn't know that she was doing it for that; she never discussed anything like that with me. I was always taught "It's got nothing to do with you". Believe you me, I was thirteen year old before I knew – when my brother was born, both my brothers, I though the midwife brought the baby in the bag. That's how backward – my mother never believed in telling anybody things like that.

SR: So did you get any sex education at all?

LT: Not from my mother.

SR: So what happened when you started to menstruate, what did you think was going on?

LT: Oh, she told me then and her exact words was – in those days they used barber's towels, as they called them, smaller than hand towels, a bit bigger than a face washer and you got a piece of elastic, two pins and a barber towel and she'd put a bundle of them and say "Use these, one every day and keep away from boys" and that was your sex education.

SR: Gosh.

LT: I never knew why I had to keep away from boys.

SR: And what they had to do with it.

LT: I found out later in life.

SR: Would you describe her as a happy woman?

LT: At times?

SR: And what about your Dad?

27.54 LT: Dad was a man – how do I describe him? – he was the same height, same weight all his life; he only took a size five shoe. I remember in the dole years they found out that the men were getting boots, so Mum went down the wharf where they were giving them out and asked for a pair of boots for Dad and they said "What size?" and she said "Five" and they said – what was it? – "We've got Blucher boots here, lady, they're for wharfies, not for ants", that's right, "not for ants". Because he was a very small man and that, a man that never said much; you practically had to draw the words out of him. Very proud of his children but in a very quiet way. I think between my mother and my grandfather my father was dominated in a way.

SR: Did your grandparents live with you?

LT: No. As I said, my father was the only son and he had three sisters that I knew of and Dad, we'd go to see grandfather Thomas and what grandfather said, and as I said, "Do not speak till you're spoken to" and that's what it was and that included Dad but I think in his way he loved us. And he was a very talented man and I think that hurt him, that he never had the money. See, he could paint too if he wanted to.

SR: Did he ever paint?

LT: He painted a picture once which I gave to one of my family and they lost and I was very annoyed about it. But he loved to fish, him and my other granddad.

30.10 **SR: At home, was your mother responsible for all the domestic work, cooking, cleaning, washing up?**

LT: That's right.

SR: Did your Dad help at all?

LT: No, only me.

SR: And did they have any domestic appliances in those days to make housework easier? No?

LT: Well, do you want to know how I ironed my clothes?

SR: Yes.

LT: With a flat iron. You put it on the fuel stove or the gas stove, the gas ring, heated it up and then you had a piece of cloth and then you rubbed it on a piece of paper that had either candle grease on it or thing and you did your ironing with that. Could you try ironing your organdy evening frock with frills with it?

SR: Pretty hard.

LT: Well, we did it. It was a case of do or not do.

SR: Who were your friends when you were growing up in Newtown and Erskineville?

LT: Oh, I had some friends at school and church. I was such a bookworm. [break in recording]

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SR: Did you have a special place in your backyard where you would read?

LT: Down the backyard and if grandma took me away, we'd go away, she'd ask them "Where's Lorrie?" and they'd say "We don't know. Is

the book gone beside the bed?" "Yes". "Well go find a tree and you'll find her sitting under it" and that and I'd be down by the water because I'd love to sit by the water.

SR: And did you ever go swimming when you were on holidays near the water?

LT: M'mm.

SR: Yes.

LT: I couldn't swim – I still can't. I used to fish or go looking for oysters.

SR: When you were playing with your friends in the street, did you play in the street?

32.02 LT: We had to because we weren't allowed to walk down to the park.

SR: Was that a long way away?

LT: Yes, it was a fair way away.

SR: Well, what would you do with your friends for fun?

LT: Oh, we'd play cricket or we'd have imaginary concerts and that because we always had to keep down this end, away from up near the pub, we had to come down this end.

SR: What was the local pub called?

LT: The Imperial. I'm not going to tell you what it is now.

SR: O.K. Well, how free were you to roam around the area?

LT: Not very free, not me. My mother, right up till I got married, wherever I was going I had to tell my mother where I was going and approximately what time I was expected home. Because I had to go to choir practice a couple of times a week and that and different things when I got older - well, I was going to Sunday school from the time I turned eight.

SR: What sort of things did you do for fun with your friends? I mean, you played cricket and other games in the street.

LT: Played rounders and skipping and throwing the bottle tops, the very few bottle tops, but stones, little stones, flat stones. Played jacks and that; some of them I could master, some of them I couldn't.

SR: Were there places that you weren't allowed to go?

LT: Yes, lots of places. Some of the people's houses I wasn't allowed to go to.

SR: Why was that?

LT: Well, my mother had different ideas of people. She had her friends and I was only allowed to go to the people's places that she knew and I wasn't allowed to go anywhere else; a very strict lady at times.

34.08 **SR: Were there people that you particularly had to avoid?**

LT: I didn't avoid anybody if I could get away with it without my mother finding out, except one old biddy that lived in the street that knew what was going on twenty four hours a day.

SR: What was school like – did you like school?

LT: Yes, I liked school.

SR: How did the teachers treat you, what was the discipline like?

LT: Oh, some was funny. There used to be one teacher there, she was there when I my aunties went to school. Her name was Miss Ferguson really too but no relation to us and she had a wig. She came to school one day and the wig fell off; that was quite funny. We used to have Empire Day and Arbour Day. We all belonged to the Gould Society for Bird and Animals, which we formed the Red Cross, the Junior Red Cross. It was when I was in first class, first year – seventh class it was then – where I ran a concert – a penny in – and what we wanted for that was to get the cardboard and the red felt to make the crosses on the little girls' veils. I think you can guess what my veil was made of: unbleached calico.

SR: How did you celebrate Wattle Day and Arbour Day?

LT: Well, we used to have to sing songs, 'When the Golden Wattle kiss your eyes' and it was more like a lullaby and we always had them out in the schoolyard because we didn't have an assembly hall at

Newtown - we used to have some little things that we'd go over to the lower hall of St George's hall and have things in there.

36.17 But we had Empire Day which was the flags and all that and we used to have to sing 'God Save the King' and all that business, had that, and we had sports and things like that and races.

SR: Did you ever do physical culture?

LT: Well, they didn't call it physical culture, dear, they called it eurhythmics, and a lot of waving of the hands, something like tai chi and that.

SR: And did they ever get masses of kids from all different schools together and to do it all in order, like everyone do it together?

LT: No, not that I remember. We might have got a local school like Erskineville or maybe North Newtown School but I don't remember any other school.

SR: Do you know what it was meant to achieve?

LT: To achieve was tried to get the best out of what you could do.

SR: All right. Did you ever do maypole dancing?

LT: Yes, we had that once.

SR: Did you like it?

LT: I wasn't in it.

SR: Did you have Cracker Night?

LT: Yes.

SR: How did you celebrate that, what did you do?

LT: Well, we used to go up to grandma's for that, grandma Ferguson's for that.

SR: Did you buy lots of crackers?

LT: They used to buy them and we shared with them and that. They used to have Catherine Wheels and put a bunger in a tin and make a

heck of a noise. I used to remember once Cracker Night we didn't go and somebody put a bunger in our letterbox.

38.01 And they used to have what they call the Tom Thumbs, they'd light one end - and some of the kids in Union Street were pretty rough - and we had a Chinese family up the top and they put all the crackers in their place one night, and they all ran out. It was a horrible thing to do but we thought it was funny at the time. We were just kids.

SR: What was the ethnic mix of the neighbourhood at that time?

LT: Well, there were the Lum Tins up the top and then the rest were Australian. There was a few Italian but down further. I know the people that had the shop on the corner of Union Street and Harold Street, the grocery shop there, they were Jewish people but they were lovely people. We had a few darkish people but my mother – we had a gymnasium in our street too, Moss' Gymnasium, and that was for fighters, not to do aerobics or anything, that was for fighters then, and they had a pool hall. I wasn't allowed down that end of the street near them.

SR: Was that a den of iniquity, was it?

LT: Well, according to my mother it was.

SR: We were talking a bit about sex education. Were you aware of abortions at that time or unwanted pregnancies and what would happen or can you remember how people would deal with that situation?

LT: No, I didn't know anything about that. I didn't know anything about that till about 1940. No, I beg your pardon, I do know. I couldn't understand it but it was a deep, dark secret in the family. A relation of my mother's came and all of a sudden my grandma acquired another child, June, and we always was told it was so and so's child and Nanna was rearing her.

40.13 Well, Nanna reared her all her life and it came out later, when I was much older and much married, what really happened is that she'd had the child and he was a married man and she was working in service and she'd had the child in the South Sydney Women's Hospital in Gilpin Street, Newtown and that was a home for unmarried mothers. That's where the midwives came from, went out into the houses, and Nanna reared June and that and that was why, because if Nanna hadn't taken June that she'd have been adopted

out by somebody else and nobody would have known where she went. But as a child, no, I didn't know anything about it. I used to think it was strange that women would get a bit on the fat side and then a couple of days later they'd be slim and there'd be nothing to show for it and you'd wonder what happened, you know, and think "Oh, gee, that's bad"; never, never told anything. I guess I was a dumb Dora, I really was.

SR: Where did you think children came from?

LT: As I said, I thought the midwife brought them in the bag until my aunt told me "Your mother had the baby, Lorrie" and I said "Oh, is that why she was getting all those white towelling squares and the Lysol and why we weren't allowed there?" So I sort of worked it out but I was never game to broach the subject to my mother, never. And I might tell you this, that when I had my eldest son in 1940 I didn't know how he was going to be born.

42.09 **SR: You didn't?**

LT: No, and I was twenty one.

SR: And didn't somebody tell you?

LT: Yes. I was twenty one in the July. My sister told me because I yelled out for my husband and she said "He can't help you. Only you can help yourself" and she told me then and that's when I got a very quick, fast lesson in sex education. I didn't think many of the girls, except the very wise ones from some of the families that my mother considered beneath us, maybe they were wiser than some of us others.

SR: It seems like ignorance was associated with ……..

LT: Ignorance, yes. They thought they were doing the right thing. Instead of that, they were doing a very harmful thing.

SR: Well, how would you describe the neighbourhood, what was Newtown and Erskineville like? Was it residential or industrial or mixed; what would you say?

LT: It was a mix. Mainly King Street, Newtown was a large shopping centre – still is – but there was Sweet Brothers there and Hatte's Arcade and Brennan's and a few shoe shops, Gardiner's shoe shop. The jewellery shop is still there to this day, Woods'.

SR: What was Brennan's, what was it?

LT: Brennan's was a store that carried merchandise. It carried haberdashery, Manchester, ladies' clothes, shoes, and downstairs it had hardware.

SR: And what was the social focus of the area when you were growing up? Was there a place, a pub or a corner shop or a place where people met and talked?

44.05 LT: I think they mainly met at church or something like that or the dance at St George's Hall or Newtown Town Hall and the picture shows, which was at the old Hub, which before it was converted to pictures, was a vaudeville theatre. And then there was the Enmore Theatre which is up in Enmore Road, which is now used where they've had 'Wog-A-Rama'. There was the Majestic Theatre on the corner of Wilson Street and Erskineville Road which turned out to be the Elizabethan Theatre and then got burnt down.

SR: Did you go to the theatre or the pictures very much?

LT: Yes, we used to go to the shows there; sometimes my mother'd take us there. I remember Stiffy and Mo, Roy Rene and that, and I remember George Edwards. No, George with the big funny eyes – I forget what his name was. I know that my aunt won a black bottom [dance] contest at the Hub one time.

SR: What's that mean?

LT: That was when the Charleston was coming out. That's that one over there (indicates visually). She made herself a costume – well, she was seven years older than me – she made herself this costume out of black satin and with all black spangles on it and she got up in a top hat and it was like a small adaptation of a dinner suit with the tails and all and she won the prize. Then she came out in a frilly dress, did the Charleston and won that prize, so she was very, very good. We used to do that and the Tivoli because we used to always go to the pantomimes at the Tivoli. Mum used to save up for those or grandma used to take us to those.

46.05 **SR: Was it a safe neighbourhood?**

LT: Oh, I've forgotten. There was the old Victory Theatre in Erskineville Road which is now the Police Boys' Club. Yes, I'd say it was a safe neighbourhood.

SR: Can you remember any local crims?

LT: Well, one time we had Kate Leigh's visited us in Union Street, a place opposite. I don't know whether that was true or not. If there was any crims around there, there was the rough lot as my mother used to call them, the mobs, they'd have a fight. They'd go in the pub to have a drink and somebody'd say the wrong thing and then you'd find Dooley's mob or McLaughlin's mob fighting, having a brawl out in the street. The funny part about it was that if a woman come 'round the corner from Erskineville Road with a pram they'd stop and let her go through and then they'd start the fight all over again; but if Father Holland came 'round they stopped, all stopped, and they all ran inside to the pub because they thought Father Holland was going to convert them.

SR: Was he a Catholic priest?

LT: Yes. But he had no distinction. He didn't care whether you was a Catholic, Church of England, black, blue or brindle, he was a proper priest.

SR: And was there any prostitution in the area?

LT: There was. It was well under cover.

SR: What were the most popular newspapers?

LT: Well, there was *The Truth* and there was the *[Sydney Morning] Herald* and there was the *Smith's Weekly* and for those that wanted it there was *Becketts Budget.*

SR: What can you remember were the big issues of the time, what were the big issues?

47.58 LT: Most issues of the time was the Depression and people being forced out of their houses in Happy Valley. Another issue was when they started to build the bridge, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and Jack Lang and of course de Groot getting in before Jack Lang could cut the ribbons. I marched over the Sydney Harbour Bridge with the kids from all the schools. We formed up in George Street and marched right across the bridge, then turned around, about face, and marched back again. And they did have a big centenary parade and that. I remember the opening of the bridge, we were standing on Sydney Town Hall, one of them, and near Sydney Town Hall, watching them, and they had floats and Newtown's float was blue and white and all

the girls had big picture hats and big flowing dresses. They looked like signoritas more than they looked like ordinary girls from Newtown.

SR: Well, what did your family think of Lang and the politicians of the day – who can you remember them talking about?

LT: Oh, they used to talk about Jack Lang but I don't remember them talking about anything else.

SR: And what did they think of Lang?

LT: Well, I think politics in our house was never discussed. If my father wanted to talk about it my mother would say “Not before the children”, see, “Not before the children” and that’s what it was.

SR: What places in Newtown and Erskineville are still special and important to you now from your childhood association with it?

49.03 LT: Well, Holy Trinity Church because that’s where I was christened and confirmed, my confirmation photo, and because I made some fine friends. I made one fine friend and we renewed that association when I joined the pensioners down here. Sadly, she now has Alzheimer’s and she’s living at her daughter’s place. St George’s Hall in Newtown where I danced, where I met my husband. Newtown School will always hold a fond memory to me because I think I had happy days there. We had lovely headmistresses there, we had Zila Bocking was there and then Miss Aston and a couple of the teachers was very, very nice. I remember Sweet’s Brothers shop and that, walking up and down Newtown and that. You could walk up and down Newtown on any night in the week and never get hurt. I've come home down Erskineville Road into Union Street of a nighttime - funny thing, I'd walk down Erskineville Road, I wouldn’t walk down Newman Street and that and the tannery - I don’t say I had a fond memory of the tannery. We did have a markets in Newtown which where now Franklins and that area. But I've got very fond memories. I never, ever say to anybody that I grew up in any other suburb; I’ll always tell them I was born in Newtown and reared in Erskineville.

SR: And what was the reputation of the area?

LT: Considered rough, although there was parts of Erskineville which is very nice and parts I’m surprised to see in one of the newspapers where people are paying three hundred thousand for houses which must be older than I am.

52.18 **SR: Was that considered a better neighbourhood or a worse one than Redfern or Waterloo or Chippendale or other places?**

LT: Well, I used to say Redfern and Waterloo was rough and Darlinghurst was rough at the time. Well, there's some parts of Darlinghurst which are absolutely beautiful, some parts the homes there, but the point is there's good and bad wherever you go.

SR: What smells can you remember from when you were growing up?

LT: The tannery in Newman Street, Newtown.

SR: Was it good?

LT: Stunk to high heaven and the tip that we used to cross over the river, when we used to jump over the goods train line when we went right 'round the border of Kingsford Smith Aerodrome which you wouldn't be able to do now, of course, when we used to go swimming. Why we did that, we used to only have enough money for our fare home on the train.

SR: And where would you go swimming out there near the airport?

LT: Kyeemagh.

SR: And that's out in Botany Bay, is it?

LT: M'mm.

SR: What can you remember of the establishment of the airport?

LT: I remember Amy Johnson coming there and they gave her a diamond brooch and that. The airport grew like topsy. Really, my idea is that you cannot blame the governments now for the airport. What they should have done was blame the former governments that didn't the foresight to know that aviation was going to be bigger than what they thought it was going to be and make allowances for it because nobody knew then we'd be having jets of the class that they have now. We used to have like Smithy's [Kingsford Smith] plane – oh, that was marvellous.

54.24 **SR: Did you ever go out to the airport when people like that were known to be landing?**

LT: No.

SR: Did you have a bike or anything as a kid and go out there?

LT: No.

SR: Did you have any toys?

LT: I had a doll. My cousin pushed me down the steps and broke it. But I had a rag doll, I had a teddy bear, I had my books. I had a paintbox – I wasn't very much good at that.

SR: Did your father try and teach you to paint?

LT: Tried very hard. And my brother had a billy cart and I wasn't allowed to ride in it; it wasn't ladylike.

SR: Gosh. It sounds like you had a pretty traditional upbringing.

LT: M'mm.

SR: What was your happiest memory?

LT: Sunday school picnics and Sunday school lantern slides. My happiest memories were always with my mother's family. My mother couldn't understand that. My grandfather Ferguson used to be a watchman at Eveleigh [railway yards] and it's strange that a son-in-law and a father-in-law could get on so well as what my father and my mother's father got on. But pop, grandfather Ferguson, he always had liquorice in his pocket and we always had liquorice; I'd always get into trouble for eating it.

56.00 But you could always talk to him. They'd go fishing and I'd be sitting in the boat, reading a book with the hand line and that. There's lots of little things, there's nothing really big. I remember once when I was at church and we had a Christmas thing, a Christmas service, and of course I was in the choir and all the rest of the family went for a picnic down Stuart's Park at Wollongong and I had to go after church all the way down to Wollongong dressed up in my best bib and tucker, looking absolutely ridiculous in white shoes, stockings and gloves - which you had to go out in those gloves – handbag and a picture hat and that down there because my mother said so and they brought me back - I only had my ticket. And seeing 'Firefly' with Jeanette MacDonald, Allan Jones, in the old Victory Theatre. I don't think I've told you, sometimes in the Depression years things'd be

that tough and Christmas time the local butcher, Mr Woodham, on the corner of Rochford Street, if you saved up the price of the ticket - so you got your ticket and that, saved them up - once a year he used to pull out the numbers and if you were lucky – everybody tried to get this big Christmas stocking and I remember one year I won a little tiny doll, a kewpie doll, and a ball and I thought it was Christmas. Another time I got a spanking because I lost a ha'penny.

58.00 **SR: Times were tough.**

LT: Times were tough.

SR: I think I've asked you just about everything that I can think of.

LT: I've talked a lot, haven't I, too much?

SR: No. Is there anything else you wanted to say? It's been wonderful.

LT: Newtown, I'm glad to see that Newtown's getting some recognition. My grandfather told me "Never be ashamed of Newtown, girl, because at one stage people there people had carriage and pairs and the wealthy lived in Newtown". Up in Albemarle Street a Dr Katie Arthur-Bryce was there and there was this immense house – I don't know whether it's still there – and that's called 'Albemarle'. I used to like to wander around – I still like old buildings – wander 'round and look at things. But Newtown will always have a special place in my heart.

Interview ends