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# TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A

This is Ed Stokes with Pam Squirrell, evacuee children, tape one side one.

Pam, could we just begin with your date and place of birth.

Yes, I was born in March 1926 in London.

Fine. And what was your maiden name?

Palmer.

Pam, your earliest memories of your family or the memories of your childhood as they were in the year or two before you left to go away – what do you remember of your mother and father?

They were happy in as much as previously they had lost a son, and for, I think, possibly the first time in their married life they had a complete home that they could, we could all live in as a family. I remember my delight at having a room that was *my room* rather than sharing it with my brother, as it had been, and subsequently a younger sister.

Yes, you were telling me before about the brother who died. Perhaps just tell us about that and how it affected your mother. I think it might bear on the story.

Well, it was a tragedy as far as mother was concerned, because like most mothers, she'd sent me and my brother away during a bad measles epidemic – to stay with her sister in the country. And my brother then aged five had pined dreadfully for her and he felt – Or at least she brought us home. But she felt that because of the separation this is possibly why he became ill and caught the diphtheria which was the cause of his death.

And it had quite a severe effect on her?

Very severe effect on her. And also did the fact that she herself contracted the diphtheria from him and was at death's door herself for quite some time.

Right. Your father, I think, through that in fact – he had been a chauffeur – he got a job as an ambulance driver.

Yes. This of course was following the depression years. I'm talking now about 1933 and it was while visiting the hospital that the matron mentioned to my father a job of ambulance driver was coming up and suggested he applied –which he got – which was a great relief to the family, because up to then he'd been unemployed for something over two years.

How bleak had those years been for the family? Do you remember?

Um. No, I think possibly I came to realise later on that. – I can remember occasions when we'd had meat on our plate, mother had a lot of gravy but not the meat. You know like most people in those years, I think times had been pretty hard.

Let's move on a little bit to the period in the year or two before you went away. How close were you as a family? How would you remember that?

I think we were close. Subsequent to my brother dying, two years later my sister arrived and although there was a nine-year gap, I didn't have a very close relationship, but it was due to

that age because I was sort of growing up while she was still virtually a toddler. But as a whole, we did things together and ...

What sort of things do you remember doing as a family?

Long walks. We did. – Although my father had made his living as a driver, we didn't actually have a car of our own so we did long walks, particularly Sunday afternoons – weather permitting – you know, thermos and some sandwiches went into the pram, invariably.

Was this heading into London or going out?

No going. – In those days we had a sort of green area within walking distance of where we lived.

The neighbourhood that you grew up in or prior to the war was near Harrow I think. What sort of area was it?

It was a developing area. At one time it was the end or the terminus of the London-Piccadilly underground station, which subsequently went on further. Um, the usual just main street, homes around, some open country quite close by.

(5.00) Right. So it was quite a pleasant area.

Hm.

The house that you had – or I think it might have been a flat – how do you remember that?

The flat that I lived in was prior to my brother's death in '33. We were rather cramped there because there was just the one living room, one bedroom, bathroom and kitchen over a shop. But I remember the house that we moved to – which was in the hospital grounds – and because it was a house with three bedrooms. And that's where I spent most of my childhood.

That childhood home, the house, its colours, its smells, those sorts of things – do you have any memory?

Oh, I can remember knowing that my mother was going to hate it when she came out of hospital because it was the old council dark green and mucky cream. But of course it changed as mother's health improved and father did all the decorating – and it became our home. And I can too, I can remember the joy of my parents being able to furnish their own home. I can remember – I know it had to be paid off sort of two shillings a week – the thrill they had getting their first dining-room setting for the place.

You had a bedroom of your own, I think. How important a place was that to you?

Well, I thought it was a sign that I was growing up as much as anything. I liked it. I liked. – It was somewhere I could go if I did want to be on my own, not that I did very often, but it was somewhere I could go to.

Growing up, adolescence and puberty and so on – this must have begun for you before you left. Was that something in your family that could be talked about openly or not?

No, definitely not. No, it was very much taboo.

Right.

I mean the fact that I'd had a sister when I was nine years old. I mean I did notice that mother's figure was changing shape but I was never given the explanation why.

Right. So the closeness that you remember in your family was in a general sense but it didn't extend to talking about these deeper ...

No, no, no.

If you had to say what home meant to you in the period before you left, how would you summarise it?

I suppose it was the place where I lived; where I was free to have my friends come and visit, as did my parents. I suppose it was just to me like everybody else in those days.

Were there lots of friends? Was it a coming and going house, or more a private home?

Yes. No. Friends and family. There was always coming – in fact there was one little story that my mother told me subsequently when I was about ten. This one Sunday I was very miserable and crying and mother asked me what was the matter and I said, "Oh, you know, nobody's coming." and my grandmother who was with us most of the time says, "Well, I'm here." And I said, "Well, you're nobody". You know, I expected somebody to be calling and this day nobody had. We did have a lot of relatives who came in and Sunday afternoon – Sunday high tea – was one of the main features of the week.

Right. Well let's move on to the period of the war. Do you remember in the months, or perhaps year before the war, any real awareness of the build-up to war – wireless, newspapers, did your parents talk about it?

Yes, I think probably the most significant thing I can remember was coming round when we were sort of assessed for what size gas masks we would need. Um ...

Was that before the outbreak of war?

Yeah, we did. Yes I'm pretty certain al[most] – immediately before the outbreak of war. I can remember shelters being dug in the school grounds. We did talk about it. My father fought in the First World War and that was supposed to be the war to end wars, and nobody sort of really. – They did believe that it was possible but obviously didn't want it to be possible.

(10.00) Sure. Do you remember the actual declaration of war and where were you? Were you with the family?

Yes. It was Sunday morning and we'd been told early about Chamberlain making the broadcast at eleven o'clock, so everyone was indoors, you know, ears to the radio, listening. And of course the announcement the war had been declared was no sooner over than the air raid sirens went. And preparations had already been made. I mean we'd sand-bagged the front of our house; the sticky paper was stuck on the windows; and I'd been allocated the job of filling the bath with water and some buckets with water, and also mother had made a cupboard in one of the rooms as a safe place for my younger sister and we sort of knew where we were to go and what we had to do at that time.

I was going to ask, that sort of personal discipline of knowing when and what to do – did that increase with the war, given the sense of threat, or were you just extremely well disciplined children anyway – of that period?

Well, I think in [inaudible] case, I was well disciplined, because my mother had been a nanny, you know, she had obviously learnt. – You know, a lot of the rules that she had applied as a nanny; she applied to her own children. But also I think mother saw it as some – We were better having something to do than looking skywards to see if planes were coming over – at that time. Of course with the phoney war that subsequently came, like all these things, the reality seemed a little more remote – one didn't rush to fill the bath thinking "Well, it's just another one of those."

> Sure. Did you father's work or your mother's – did that get affected by the war in terms of wartime activities?

Well it. – My father as an ambulance driver was of course on call. He still worked as a fever ambulance driver but he was also available for ambulance duties if called upon to do it. So as soon as air raid sirens went, father was not with us anymore. He had to go and report.

> The general social pattern if you like – how people related to one another, the warmth or distance in their relationships – do you think that changed, in your memory, or not?

Um

> Or was there a camaraderie of a kind of shared threat?

I think it probably did bring people closer together. Family ... Well, when there's a threat I think families do tend to close ranks. But I can't remember any particular instance that I could quote. It was just a feeling.

> You were talking about gas masks before, Pam. Do you remember the colour, the smell?

I remember the smell – that horrible rubbery smell. And the first time having one on feeling as though you wanted to rip it off – feeling that you might choke. But at the same time I suppose I was old enough to realise if you were, there was gas around, you would be much more sensible to keep it on. It became part and parcel of our lives because going to school, for example, we had to have them with us at all times, even when we moved from classroom to classroom or to the laboratory or music room – we had to take our gas mask with us.

> What happened if you forgot or –

Oh well you, if you had left it at home you were discharged back to get it and probably had a hundred lines to write out "I must not forget my gas mask." And I can remember on one occasion I found it rather embarrassing. I wasn't very good at French. I found that a very difficult subject at school and I was in one of the lower grades and we used to be separated into different classrooms according to the grade and I'd left my gas mask in our own form room which happened to be the room being used for the top grade of French. So I went in and said, "Excuse me please, I've forgotten my gas mask". And the teacher sort of rattling her cane saying, " En Français, en Français". And I thought, "How do I ask for my gas mask in French?" not having a clue, looking very bewildered and having to repeat it after her, in French, about ten times. I didn't forget it again.

> Well, just going on Pam, the period of the blitzkrieg, April into May if you like – Belgium's invaded, France and Holland fall, Dunkirk. Do you remember that real build-up in the war?

(15.00) I remember Dunkirk. We did discuss it on the way to school. I mean we were old enough to hear the news, read the newspapers. But it was an incredible thing. I remember that life went on almost normally, despite what was going on. School life did. There had been one or two arrangements made at school because apparently our school was one that could be commandeered at twenty-four hours notice. So instead of keeping books in lockers, we had to keep them at home and instead of having individual desks, we'd been paired up so that we had to arrange between the two of us who would take books. But other than that life – other than air raid drills which we had at school – went on, I think, very much as before.

Was there any sense amongst you and your friends or perhaps with your parents that there was a real danger of invasion?

I think with our parents, definitely. And I think in due course that this was one of the main reasons that influenced my mother, in particular, in letting or deciding, you know; overseas evacuation might be a good thing.

Excluding the Liverpool period – we'll come to that in a minute – do you remember anything of bombing? Do you remember reports of bombing in London at all?

No. No. I remember the sirens going and possible threats of air raids but not actually any air raids at that time. My first experience of an air raid as such was in Liverpool.

When the air raids went at home, what did you do? When the air raid warnings went.

Well, if we were home – I mean if you were at school we had prescribed drill to go into the air raid shelters. If I were home – went into the one room that had been made safe within the house and sort of listened for the all-clear. But again, I don't remember too many of those because we had a period of almost a year of what was called the phony war.

Yes sure. Well let's go back to CORB itself, Pam. I think in your case, you took some kind of information home from school. Do you remember being talked to at school about the scheme?

No, not at all. It was just something that was handed to us and told to take home to our parents.

Right, so you took it home. What happened then?

Well there was discussion at home about it and also there was discussion amongst we girls at school, you know, "Is your mum going to let you go?", or "Do you want to go?", or "Would you like to go?" I think there was probably more discussion between classmates than there was at home.

Right, so when you took the notice home, you were quite clear about the implications of it?

Yes, yes. There was a lot of talk on radio, of course, about evacuation – although mainly within Britain itself – and just references occasionally to the fact that, you know, overseas evacuation would be a possibility.

When you were talking with your friends, perhaps overhearing your parents' conversations – what were the main pros and cons that were raised?

With my parents, age. I think the fact that I was fourteen – [they] thought I would be at a very vulnerable age, particularly if there had been an invasion. I think that was one of their fears.

Are you talking here of sexual harassment?

Yes, probably – being taken away or something like that. I remember mother sort of ... Perhaps she said to me, perhaps after the war rather than at that particular time, but that was definitely – the threat of invasion was one of the things that influenced her to let me come.

Rather than the danger of bombing?

Yes. I think possibly we'd all got a little bit – well the feeling that it was going to happen but it might not because of this very long period when there hadn't been a lot of air activity.

If that was the pro side of it for your mother, what was the con, the not such good side?

(20.00) I think giving up her family because at this time my younger sister was to have accompanied me, and the thought of actually letting the whole family go, or at least her children go.

Yes, we'll come to your sister not going, later. And what about amongst your friends, what was the talk there?

Well, I had two very close friends at school and we'd decided that we three were going to do the three musketeer act and come along together. But of course that wasn't to be, although both my closest friends' parents did apply.

Right. And what was the motive there? Do you remember?

What, from their parents' point of view?

No, from you three girls talking together. Well, why did you –

Ir was just that we were all good mates at the time but we all said we would like to go. In fact, I don't know the numbers but I know there was quite a large percentage of applicants ...

Yes it was ...

... parents thought it would be a good idea.

Oh yes. The numbers were very large indeed. Was there at all an adventure side of this to you, travelling to the other side of the world?

Oh yes, definitely.

Could you tell us about that?

Well for one thing I loved geography at school. It was one of my favourite subjects and I subsequently remember landings, say in Cape Town, and seeing what I had learned in books actually happening. Oranges growing! And things, you know. It did make a great impact on me. It was an adventure because it was something I never ever dreamt I would be doing, so from that point of view, I think I was very impressed.

There was a great deal of secrecy I think about the whole issue. How do you remember that?

Oh I can remember initially the letter confirming that I had been accepted was delivered by

hand by special messenger. Also the school had been informed and I was summoned to the headmistress's office and again this business of "I mustn't tell anyone", which of course I did. My two closest friends knew but it was part of the wartime propaganda at that time. I mean if you went into a restaurant or on the trains there was a sign "Remember the enemy has ears". I think it was all part of that, early months of the war.

Right. Well I was going to ask you about the other two musketeers. So they did get let into the secret?

Oh yes. They were the only two.

Right. If you any knowledge of how long the war would last, do you think your mother would have let you go? Would you have wanted to go yourself?

I don't know because as a child time has a different meaning, I think as you get older. I doubt very much – well in fact I know my mother subsequently mentioned that if she'd thought I was going to be away five and a half years, she might have thought differently about letting me go.

And Australia – why Australia? Was that a choice of yours or was that chosen for you?

No, it was my choice and I specifically made that choice because we were – The forms as I recall offered evacuation to America, Canada and Australia. And I chose Australia and I know at the time that the decision was influenced by the fact that I'd met distant relatives of my mother's, who had visited Britain in '35 and '37, had liked them and liked what they had to say about Australia, so I think possibly that's what influenced me at that time.

Right and I think they were actually contacted during this period and agreed to take you, didn't they?

Yes, well I think the government did all that – arrangements – because that was one of the questions on the form, "Did we have relatives or friends living in Australia that perhaps would be prepared to offer homes?" So that wasn't an arrangement my parents made. It was something that the governing body arranged on our behalf, I think.

Sure, moving on a little bit, Pam – the final confirmations come. I think you had very little time after that to when you actually left.

Five days. It was a hectic time for mother. They were given the specifications of the size case we could have, the sort of limited amount of clothing that could be done and of course for the younger children, or ever we older, any treasured toy or possession was suggested it would be good to accompany the child.

(25.00) I was going to ask you that. Did your parents give you to take any practical gifts or any more personal family mementos?

Mother gave me photographs which she thought I ought to have. My bible – which incidentally had been given to me by the couple from Australia, as a previous Christmas present – I remember bringing that. But mainly the photographs were the most personal belongings. School uniform, I had to bring. Um.

Did your little sister do anything for you?

Well no because Mother at the same time was packing her case and it wasn't until the day before we were due to depart that actually Mother withdrew her, feeling she'd be too much of a responsibility for me and also that she couldn't part with both of us.

Well let's actually come to that. I think there was a story too involved in this, of a photograph falling from a mantelpiece.

Yes.

Tell us about that.

Well mother had photos of the three children, including the brother who died a few years previously, actually on the wall in the lounge room and she was looking at it and it crashed to the floor and she saw that as an omen that she oughtn't to let her go.

Ant was that then a clear-cut decision?

Yes, yes. I mean my sister, Ann, was only five so she didn't have any say in the matter. But Mother said, "No." She wasn't going to let her go.

Did little Ann say anything to you? Was she happy or –

No. Because I don't really think she had understood that she was even going, or if she was going, she had no idea of course of the distances involved or time or anything. She was too young, I think.

You were saying before, Pam that your mother had thought that your brother had pined very much when he was sent away and that this might have led to his diphtheria. Do you think that might have had any bearing on this last decision?

Yes, I think his death might have really had a thing and I think it was the fact that Mother couldn't bear the thought of losing us again, although it was only going to be a temporary thing. The fact that she'd really lost a child, I think, having to give us up, even for a period of time, would have been very difficult for her to let both of us go.

So in that sense, your mother's decision, and it seems it was your mother rather than your father ...

Yes. Yes, it was.

Your mother's decision was quite a selfless one – about your coming to Australia

Yes I think so. Yes.

The final preparations – clothing, cases, all these things – do you remember anything else about that?

No, 'cause again Mother was doing it all and the timing was such that I actually continued on at school to the day before I actually left. It was the end of school term and this had been suggested would be a good time for me to go because it the break for the long summer holidays and by the time I returned to school and everybody said, "Oh, whatever happened to Pammy Palmer?", I would've been well and truly on my way. So I actually stayed on at school until the term out which was just the last day before we would have left.

The last night at home, do you remember what you did together?

Well, we took some photographs in the backyard. Um ...

Of course, this would have been a summer evening really, I imagine late –

Yes. It was really the last day of July.

So it was still quite light ...

... light 'til ten o'clock at night. I can't remember anything about a special meal. I think it was sort of much as before. I did go out with friends to the cinema early in the day, because we'd left school at – in those days I'd left school at lunchtime – so I'd had the afternoon at home, sort of checked through the packing but I can't remember doing anything especially that night.

Right, but there'd been these photographs and so on.

Yes.

The two musketeers – how did they feel at all this?

Well, they'd sort of been sworn to secrecy, so I virtually said goodbye to them on the way home – because we used to walk home from school and I lived the furthest – so that I'd said goodbye to each of them as we'd arrived at their homes. I didn't have any further contact with them that night.

I don't know if it is possible to remember but I'll ask you. The family have gone to bed and you're in bed – were you buoyed up by the sense of adventure or was there a nagging knowledge of your departure, too?

As I remember – excitement –

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

This is Ed Stokes with Pam Squirrell, evacuee, Tape One, Side Two

Pam, yes, you were saying that ...

Excitement was the greatest emotion I remember feeling at that time.

The next day, the farewell – where did you say goodbye to your parents and how was it?

I said goodbye to my father at home and he went to work like any other normal day. And my sister, sort of saying, "Goodbye", I don't think it meant very much. The first person to really show a great deal of distress was my grandmother who was at the house at the time. She was very, very distressed which worried me a little bit, because Granny always seemed to be an old person, I don't – She wasn't all that old now, in years, but I was a little bit worried. But Mother was getting agitated because we had to go on a bus to a station about five miles away and so Mother accompanied me on the bus and we got there where I was handed over to a VAD lady who escorted me from the station to the main terminal of – I can't remember which one – but we were to catch a train that was to take us to Liverpool. So I'm not sure. But Mother of course was trying to be brave. I think I was trying to be brave. I remember saying to this VAD lady, "You will take care of her". And she left and this lady took me under her wing and we proceeded – I think it would probably be to Euston station, I'm not sure.

Right. Well, the exact station doesn't matter. The journey on from London to Liverpool, do you have much recollection of that?

No, other than I sort of felt at the time that it was the longest train journey I'd ever done, which in fact it was. I'd never been north in England and I – other than looking out at the countryside going by – I haven't a great deal of memory of the actual train journey. We'd been told we were going to Liverpool. It was a train just full of children. We didn't stop anywhere or –

Did you know any of the other children?

None. No.

Did you know they were going to the *Batory*?

No. We just knew we were going to Liverpool to board a ship. We had no idea of what ship it would be.

But I mean, did you know you were all to go to Australia?

Yes, because I can remember thinking it was rather strange we had been sworn to this earlier secrecy but on meeting at which ever London Terminal it was, we were given a name tag to pin on to ourselves with *Children's overseas reception board* written right across it.

Well, obviously there weren't too many spies around at that particular station. Fortunate isn't it? Liverpool – do you remember arriving there and what do you remember of the general physical set-up of the school where you spent a few days?

I haven't clear recollections of getting there because it was later in the day and we were all getting rather tired and I can remember we were put into coaches and driven to this school where we settled down almost. – We were given something to eat. I can remember for the first time having to sleep on a palliasse, 'cause we were just sort of crowded into this school and thinking, "Oh, I'm going to miss my bed tonight". But right from the Day One we'd no sooner settle down than the air raid sirens went and we had to spend the rest of the night in the shelters.

(5.00) Well I know there were quite a few raids during the time there. How vividly do you remember those and could you perhaps talk through from when the sirens went and what was going through your mind, to getting to the shelters.

Well again, of course, we were told almost immediately where the shelters were and which one we had to go to. I can remember I'd been asked, because I was amongst the older children, to look after another little girl, who – incidentally, her name was Pamela too, so we were – we came to be known as big and little Pam. And I was asked to sort of make sure that she'd got her coat with her and something on her feet and get her to the shelter, and having this awful difficulty in trying to get her awake. Obviously, being younger she was very, very tired. And I can remember the first night I physically carried her into the shelter and she hardly woke up at all.

In that air raid shelter, Pam, were you most conscious of what, of fear, of worry for this little girl, excitement? What was your main emotion?

I can remember hearing bombs dropping in the distance, because this was the time of war when the ports were being bombed rather than the cities; a little apprehensive of course and

occasionally, you'd feel a slight shudder. Being aware of searchlights in the sky; leaving the school buildings; crossing the playgrounds to the shelter. But no real fear because everyone was in the same – you'd been disciplined to do this, I think.

Was there ever any panic at all or not?

No, no, I can't. – I didn't see or experience any panic.

Homesickness in these first few nights away from home – was that an issue or not?

Yes I – Well when you say homesickness I wouldn't say it was amongst the happiest time of my life. I think too this sleeping in classrooms on the floor, remembering you'd been told not to wear your best dress except on Sundays, and worried about that being in the suitcase it was getting creased, and silly little things of that nature, rather than any great decisions, or . –It was just the little things. The younger children were crying and they wanted Mummy if they had a pain in the tummy, or they'd been given something to eat they didn't like, and I think it was more evident amongst the younger children.

Right how much of the mothering of, given by the older children such as yourself – how much of that was organised, how much of it was just spontaneous?

I think most of it was spontaneous. We'd been asked, as I said – the older ones – because during the day we just were in groups or in the playground. Other than being told about the air raid drill we were left – supervised – but to our own devices. Some would curl up with a book wherever they could, others, you know, the little ones had their dolls and. –The girls and boys of course were separated in different parts of the school at this time. There was some sort of playground games organised for us and at this time we were still with the people that had brought us from our homes. We hadn't at this time met the escorts that were to accompany us on the ship subsequently.

I was going to ask you that. Where did you meet your ship escort?

As I recall – I could be wrong – but I think on the ship.

(10.00) Right, well let's move on to the ship. There had been a number of day trips I think that had been aborted. They were perhaps trips to the ship and there were security reasons for not leaving. Do you remember that to-ing and fro-ing?

Er. No. I can remember being told to be ready to go and then we didn't go. The day that we actually did go, I can remember arriving at the dock and seeing this, what to me seemed an immense ship, but we had a very, very long wait, because priority was given to the troops that were to board her as well. I mean basically it was a troopship, not a ship especially providing accommodation for we children. And the troops were put on board and we were all getting tired and hungry because we had an early breakfast. And it got round to lunchtime and we're still waiting, and in most cases standing in file and the little ones were getting restless and also hungry. And it was a miracle because somehow the dock workers realised all we children were there, and got messages home to their wives and other things, and suddenly sandwiches and cakes and soft drinks appeared which made us feel a lot more cheerful. Because I remember being on that dock for hours before we actually boarded the ship.

And the cakes and so on that really was organised spontaneously by the –

Oh yes. By the local women.

Right.

They did a marvellous job.

Boarding the ship – you got on at the gangplank. What's your first memory of being in the innards of the ship?

Well, the first thing, we all reluctantly had to give up our gas masks. These were taken from us actually as we boarded the ship. Although by miracles some did reappear on board ship, so some people got away with it –

Was this at the foot of the gangplank?

Yes. That was the first thing. Things that had been part of our everyday life for so long – we had to take them everywhere with us – were removed. And then going – and then this, I'm sure, is where we met our escorts. My escort was a lady by the name of Miss Appleyard and were a section of twelve all coming from the county of Middlesex. And then we were led to our accommodation on board ship.

You were saying that even – not only on that first day - there was some bewilderment amongst the ship's corridors and so on. That of course the signs weren't in English. What do you remember of that?

Being very confused. It took quite several days to be able to find your way. You know, initially, we had to be taken to the dining room because we weren't sure which directions to go to - but it became home after a while.

I think you were given numbers. Tell us about those.

Yes, we were given little - well they were Perspex in those days – discs round our neck with our cabin number on so that if we really were lost, because most of the crew had very limited English at this time … So if we wanted to be pointed back in the right direction for our accommodation or cabins, we showed them the number and they would point us the way we had to go.

The smells of a ship are very distinctive, I think, perhaps the sounds too. Do you remember anything of that?

Yes, the constant movement of the engine. You know, that pounding. That was –I can remember the smell of the diesel.

Right. Well let's go on. The ship pulled out, think at night. I don't think you children were on deck.

No. No.

What's your first memory of the ship being in motion or of leaving port?

We left obviously at night because it was, as I remember, late afternoon when we went aboard initially and after an evening meal we were all settled down for the night. And waking in the morning – aware that the ship was moving. Although I can't remember it actually starting to move, and sort of being led initially to the dining room for our meal, and then we all went up on deck and being aware that there was land on either side of us. So I thought, well, we're obviously heading up north and Scotland on one side and Ireland on the other.

That's interesting, although they're a long way apart. Perhaps there are other, other ...

At this time I can distinctly remember seeing land on both sides, be it on the horizon. But I …

The other ships in the convoy, the sea itself, the atmosphere of it, the mood of it, how did that affect you?

Oh, initially I wasn't aware of the convoy, I think it was, you know, 'til we got into open waters, and then realising we were surrounded by ships, which gave me a personal sense of security thing - 'right, we're right in the middle', and we could see ships lined up as far as the eye could see.

(15.00) Was seasickness much of a problem?

Er, not for me personally, but for some people it was a dreadful problem.

Was it something that you were aware of and dominated your life through smells, and the mess of it all, or not?

I personally wasn't seasick, but I was aware of the others who were seasick because the numbers that were turning up for the meals were reducing by the hour, and I can remember the steward who gave me my first meal - and I can remember eating it – and he said, "I don't think I'll see you tomorrow morning", but I did turn up. The younger children were dreadfully seasick, and like most children, you know, when they are being ill it was distressing for them. And I think this is when the escorts were extremely busy. And for many of them – they too were being seasick.

Yes of course. The meals – how do you remember meals, both where you sat and how you were organised to get in and out and so on, and the meals themselves?

Well, I think I remember feeling it strange to be served by a steward, and admired the way they carried so many plates on their arms even when the ship was rolling. And we each were allocated to spaces within the dining room and sitting at long tables. I can remember one of the things, I think a lot of us found strange, was that we were given beetroot as a hot vegetable, whereas we'd only known it as a salad vegetable - and not liking it overmuch. But otherwise, I mean it was like most children, there were things you liked, there were others that you disliked.

The stewards - did they make a special fuss of the children, or not and were there any little treats or that sort of thing?

Yes, I think so. Occasionally you'd get, you know, a little bit of cake and things like that, and they seemed to be especially good with the younger children. In many cases of course they were missing their own children and I think the Poles, as a whole, loved children. They were a very family conscious people and, yea, they looked after us very well.

Water I know was short on the ship. You were telling me a rather lovely story about phosphorus in the bath.

Yea, well, children being children. The bathrooms were usually in groups and the lighting was controlled from outside switches, and I can remember – it was one of the pranks – usually it was the boys turning off the girls' to hear them shriek I think, would

come along and turn the lights off and you were plunged into complete darkness. And I found it quite frightening the very first time thinking "Well I'm in this bath of water, but what are all these little lights in the bath with me?", and jumping out, opening the door, switching on the light and then wondering why I couldn't see what I had seen before, and of course we made enquiries and this is what we were told. It was the phosphorous glowing in the dark that we saw. And realised of course then, it was salt water we were bathing in, not fresh water.

Right, and of course with salt water soap.

Well no - most of us had ordinary soap which proved rather difficult.

So when did the penny drop about that?

Well it didn't really because most of us had the soap and, but I think, as our supplies ran out and we were supplied by the ship, it was salt water soap. But our parents just packed soap for us.

Naturally enough. The activities on the ship – what do you remember of that and in particular the [lifeboat drills].

Well initially of course it to perhaps a week or so for most of the people to overcome their seasicknesses and because again this affected escorts as well as children. And then we used to always have morning assemblies in the dining room after breakfast where we were told of activities during the day. But initially it was getting to know one another, again, of course, great emphasis on lifeboat drill once a day at least – sometimes more.

(20,00) Tell us about the lifeboat drill in a bit more detail. How thoroughly was it carried out?

Very thoroughly. It became an important part of sort of everyday life, Again we always had to have our life jacket with us, at all times during the day. We were each allocated lifeboat stations, and again it was the responsibility of the older people to look after the younger ones to make sure their lifebelts were tied on properly and. – And we would assemble at these points and the crew of course had their duties to perform as well. And it became a routine like it had been at school in England, of making your way to the shelters. We were thoroughly instructed on how to get to our lifeboat drill stations.

After the morning assembly where you had your activities for the day outlined, and occasional boat drills etc., what were the main things you remember doing on the ship?

Well, I think you asked me previously about the singing. Well, this again was the time when we were instructed about Australia. One of the initial things we learnt was the words and the Australian national anthem, which started on to the singing. Songs were specially written for us, and of course we sang the patriotic songs of the day - *Rule Britannia* and *There'll always be an England* which subsequently had to be changed to *There'll always be a Britain* because from various corners of the dining room would be *There would always be a Scotland*, *There would always be a Wales* and *an England* - so It was decided that the word 'Britain' would be substituted. And we did have talks on Australia, you know, to try and educate us a little about the country to which we were eventually going to arrive.

Just on the singing. I think you were also sang often the Polish national song.

This became a favourite of us a little later in our journey outwards.

Did you sing it in Polish?

No, no. The captain assisted in translating it into English and we learnt it. And I think it gave the crew a great deal of pleasure for them to hear us sing it.

Could you sing it now?

Er, no. I couldn't. I mean my singing voice is such - I can remember it was called *Rota* [?]. And I think the first words – "Never we'll leave the land we love, our, home relinquish never" is how it started. And we sang it with a great deal of fervour, I can assure you.

Were there any combined concerts with either the crew or the sail – the servicemen on the ship?

Yes we did. This again developed later on in the thing, the trip because there was talent amongst the children. There were some good musicians, nice little dancers and little plays were done, and we did it for both the crew and the troops that we were carrying.

Right. Pam could you tell us a little about your escort - how well you got to know her during the voyage?

As I previously said her name was Miss Appleyard and she too was an Australian teacher going back after having done an exchange period in Britain. She was one who as long as we behaved ourselves, left us reasonably well alone. She wasn't constantly telling us what to do. We saw her of course, she was always present at meal times, checked on us at night to make stare we were all tucked up in bed. But I think - I don't know whether other people have heard this - but CORB, of course, stood for the *Children's overseas reception board*, but we liked to (inaudible) *Chasing officers around the boat-deck* which we said, you know, applied to our escorts, and think she did spend quite a lot of time following her own pursuits.

(25.00) Right. Of course you were a bit older than some of the children, Pam, but was she still able to give you some of the part of mothering that you did still need or not?

Um, I'm not aware of it. I mean I didn't seek it from her, so – but I wouldn't be certain of what her attitude was to the younger members of the section.

Right. The crew, the Polish crew and the servicemen, besides concerts and so on – how much mingling with them was there.

The servicemen more than the crew, because the crew had their duties, and our main contact with the crew were those who manned our lifeboat stations doing drills, and the stewards at the table. The troops were more free to move about the decks. Also at strategic points throughout the ship guards would be posted. That would be in case of an emergency. They were usually near hydrants, hoses, axes, places like that. But the crew were very good because they too were missing children – their own families – and they became uncles to most of the young children. You know, if they found a child crying, It wasn't long before they'd found some knee to sit on and be told a story and given a hug.

Mm. That's lovely and were they any crew in your particular case that you were especially close to.

I got to know two of the younger members of the crew, because in one of these concerts we decided that we would like to, perhaps, do a little surprise thing. And we shouldn't have done it because it meant we did go to the crews' [inaudible], but we learnt to do the mazurka and

four of us did it at a concert and it went down all right, and nobody seemed to think to ask us how we learnt it (laughing) which was fortunate. But not a lot of contact because they were busy all the time – it was their work – but again we did meet at the concerts.

> Friendships on the ship with other children – how easily, how quickly did they develop or otherwise?

Um. In our case we did make friends, but I think because we were one of the smaller groups. I think I've said there were only twelve. We were very fortunate – and I didn't realise this at the time – that we had cabin accommodation, whereas a lot of them were in dormitory accommodation, at 'lower decks' to us, and because of this, because we were away from the main group, other than at meal times, we were inclined to stay in that little group. But I did make friends. One of the girls became very friendly with; we corresponded during our time in Australia and actually travelled back together – a girl from Yorkshire.

> So the general pattern as I hear it is that during the days, excluding meals, your group would generally be doing things as a group.

Well, very. – Well in the afternoons invariably we had to have a two hour rest. This of course was in case we did meet with misfortune at least we would do that, and the younger children. It was quite a long day and so after the midday meal we used to have to have two hours on our bunk. Usually we elder ones found something to do – games and things – but the little ones invariably used to sleep quite readily at that time of day.

> Right. That's interesting. Pam as the voyage continued of course you entered different climatic zones and so on – what do you remember of that – of the tropics at sea?

Well the one thing, the beautiful blue skies after the somewhat greyer skies of the northern hemisphere, and also the beautiful sunsets and flying fish, seeing porpoises –

> Tell us about the flying fish.

Well we were absolutely fascinated because, although we were on a big ship, they used to plop on the deck and the poor things would – If you could get to them quick enough you might save them by throwing them overboard, but invariably they'd hurt themselves on landing on the hard deck. This was absolutely incredible. I mean you'd heard about them but never actually seen them. And I used to love watching the porpoises coming along in our wake or going up either side of the ship.

> Did you find the sea endlessly fascinating or endlessly boring?

Perhaps neither. I was fascinated in the changes of colour.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

> This is Ed Stokes, evacuee children, Pam Squirrell, tape two, side one.
>
> Pam you were talking about the colours.

Yes, as the ship cut through the water you'd get these beautiful greens with the white spray, and then looking further you'd get you'd go from that green to a dark blue and then in the distance, even a darker blue. And of course one had the rough weather together with the smooth. Fascinated to some extent, but you can get bored day after day looking at even something that was beautiful.

> You were saying early on that you knew quite a deal about geography – did any of you have atlases? Were you able to follow the ship's route through some awareness of the sun's position and so on?

I don't know about atlases because it wasn't until we arrived at Cape Town where books were brought aboard because, I think, primarily we had left Liverpool as a troopship there wasn't all the facilities for the children on the ship. And it was only through the generosity of the people in Cape Town that games, toys, puzzles, books were brought on the ship. But again we talked to troops, some of whom were regular army people who'd been overseas and we'd hazard a guess in which direction we're going and what was likely to be the next port of call.

> Did you take much interest in the zigging and zagging of the ship as it made its way across the ocean thinking of the submarine threat?

Um, no. I think personally I had a sense, maybe, of full security. You know, being in the middle of the convoy and being surrounded by ships – that gave you a sense of security. Also we were aware of warships that were accompanying the convoy. You'd see the cruisers and destroyers doing their patrols up and down. The only time I really felt fear was on one occasion they gave us boat drill in the middle of the night It was only once that they did it and I think it was necessary to do to see how we would react, being woken out of sleep and doing it in the dark because of the blackout.

> Did you know it was to be a boat drill?

No, no. We didn't and the fact that it happened in the night – one wasn't sure. It wasn't 'til we sort of got up and they told us that it was alright – but we had actually get to the boat decks and go to our stations – that we were told that we could go back to bed. It was only a practice. And it was the fact that it was because you didn't know whether it was the real thing or not. I mean before they would tell you it was a boat drill.

> Right. Let's move on just finally on the ship, and we might have to be a little bit brief on this section here, Pam – the ports – Freetown. You didn't land there. Do you remember it?

No. Only seeing it from the distance. We'd had to get more fresh water, but the water tank tenders came out to us because there was a lot of malaria. At the time and they thought it better for us to stay out and the tankers came out. But I can remember a sort of emerald green coastline with this huge waterfall cascading down. And also the native boats came out and people were diving off them for pennies and things that were being thrown overboard from the side – but that was only a brief visit, just enough to take on fresh water.

> It still sounds quite exotic.

Oh yes when you're virtually on the equator there, and then Cape Town after that.

> Tell us about Cape Town. I know Cape Town was a big experience.

(5.00) Well Cape Town – of course there was the generosity of the people that we had to thank for all the goodies that they were able to bring back on the ship. But I remember the first thing is – we tied up alongside the wharf g being literally bombarded with oranges and they were just throwing them down onto the deck to us from the roof of the warehouses alongside. And then we were allowed to get things from the shops. Again people were extremely generous. I was allowed to go with a shopping list and some money to get things like hair ribbons and kirby grips and cottons and things that – just general things that we needed. And when we got into Woolworths, which I headed for, which sort of had a familiar ring about it, it was realised that we were off the evacuee ship and we were told that we could have whatever we wanted from the store with absolutely no cost to us.

Mm. So there was this real opening of the community. I think you went to some little function where Smuts' wife was.

Yes, well we went to Newlands, you know, the cricket ground where they'd laid on a picnic day for us with sports and other activities, and we were each given a memento of the occasion –a toy or book or something. And I was given a book. And also amongst the dignitaries that were there welcoming us to South Africa was Governor Smuts and Mrs Smuts, and I managed to get her autograph.

Do you remember what they said? What was the tone of their welcome?

Well, welcoming us as young people. The emphasis was on our youth and as ambassadors of our country, both from where we were leaving and where we were going to. And we subsequently were invited to Government House where we were given a party in the actual grounds of Government House. My one disappointment. – Governor Smuts used to climb Table Mountain almost regularly and we were, the older ones of us were to be given the opportunity of going with him, but the day that was put aside for this was one of the days when the 'tablecloths' descended and we were unable to go. And we had to sail before another visit could be arranged which was a pity.

That's most interesting. I have heard it said that there was some possibility in at Cape Town, of the children transhipping to a different ship – what do you know of that?

Ah well, this was so, because I can remember being told to pack my case and we were told that we were going to be going on to the *Stratheden* – I think it was – which was the ship which was alongside us in the convoy – and we all thoroughly objected. The *Batory* had become our home by this time because we'd been at sea three weeks, or thereabouts, and we just didn't want to go. We, of course, weren't given any reason as to why this was happening other than that our ship did need some repairs and they were going to withdraw it out of the convoy. But in the end this didn't come about.

Was it true that the crew and/or the servicemen intervened in the whole issue?

That I don't know because being children we weren't made fully aware of all that were going on at the time.

Right. Well let's move on. I know you went to Colombo, but we might just pass over that.

Yes, well Bombay first and then down to Colombo.

Right. And I think you were saying Bombay was not a particularly ...

Well, it was fascinating, but it's not one of the places I enjoyed as much as I had in Cape Town. And Colombo was very beautiful but again we were only there briefly where some repairs were done to the ship.

Right. Singapore of course was different and in particular because the troops left. Did you know about that beforehand?

No. Well the troops knew that their destination. – I think they were informed once they were at sea that their destination was to be Singapore. But our greatest feeling was a sense of loss. We were losing a lot of our friends. We'd only went ashore for one visit in Singapore because most of the time was taken up with unloading the troops and the equipment from the ship.

And during that time you were mostly on the ship were you?

Yes.

Once they – Or did you get time to say personal farewells to any people you were close to?

Well we sort of farewelled them again. We sang them off the ship. You know they'd got so used to our singing that we were singing when they were. – That was our means of saying farewell to them.

Do you remember the songs?

Well the usual *There will always be a Britain*, as it was, and *Wish me luck* and *Auld lang syne* because there were some Scottish troops amongst them.

(10.00) And of course they faced a very – or what was to a very sad fate – many of them at least. You went back to Singapore some time ago, you were telling me, and that was, I think, rather difficult.

I found it difficult on my visit to the war graves there, because I knew if I kept walking I was going to see names of people I had known because I saw names of the regiments – none at that time I'd recognise – but I felt if I kept going I would have seen names that I recognised.

Well as you continued south from Singapore, Pam, do you remember the mood of the ship? How different was it after this?

Quiet. Much quieter. Because we'd lost, oh, probably two–thirds of the numbers on board ship, because we were then down to just the children plus, of course, the crew and some limited number of passengers. So the ship was very much quieter and too, we found the days longer and more tedious – no more concerts. And in fact we older children asked for classes – some sort of schooling because by this time most of us had been away from school getting on to three months, because of leaving in July.

What did you do in the classes?

Well we were allowed to choose whichever subjects we liked and one of the teachers would take us. I happened to choose maths.

The voyage south through the archipelago Pam, the Indonesian archipelago – do you remember passing those islands?

Yes and particularly passing Krakatoa because we had been told you know of its earlier, well the eruption in the – what was it? – 1890s I think it was. And you know we were very inspired. And again I've always remembered the extraordinary movement of the ship going through those waters. In fact a lot of people became seasick again, because the surface appeared like a mirror, but because of all the islands apparently there were a lot of undercurrents that pulled, and the ship was sort of screwing around all the time – a rather unpleasant motion – and it did make a lot of people seasick again.

Mm. That's most interesting. I've never heard of that before. The islands that you passed – did you come close enough to really get a glimpse of life or …

Well no. Greenery was the main thing one saw. They were so lush – green – and of course we weren't certain exactly which islands we were passing and …

There's something mysterious, I always think, about tropical islands at sea.

Yes. Well I found even, subsequently, flying over them – particularly when you come along through Sumatra going into Singapore you follow a coastline around – and I found that very fascinating – even now.

Let's move on to Australia, Pam. Just one final question on the ship. As you were coming to Australia, was there a sense of excitement? Did you have any preconceptions of what life would be like in Australia, or not?

Not preconceptions and we had been given a lot of talks and lectures and on what to expect – certainly in aspects of climate. Um, I think it was. – I found it sort of exciting anticipation. In many ways beginning to realise that we were thankful that we had got there safely, I suppose was one of the things and looking. – In my case I was looking forward to renewing relationship with people I'd previously met, I think.

Right. Well let's move on to that. Your recollection, I know, is that the ship came into harbour at night. Did your relatives. – Or first of all do you remember the general hubbub on the ship of newspaper people and so on or not?

There were lots of people on the wharf waiting as we disembarked. Again we were asked to sing the songs because this reputation of the singing ship had obviously come ahead of us.But in my case I was taken off fairly early before the main bout, together with the others that were meeting relatives in Sydney. So I didn't hear a lot of the farewell speeches and goodbyes that I understand took place after we'd left the ship.

I see, right. Well the meeting with your relatives – what were the first impressions then, and how did it work out?

(15.00) Well I recognised them, although I wasn't very certain that they had recognised me because I had grown and looking back I must have looked very much like Orphan Annie on my arrival because I was eight stone four when I left England – I was ten stone twelve when I arrived in Australia some eleven weeks later.

Let's just pause on that for a moment. You really had gained weight.

I had gained weight and also because of my age I had developed considerably, that I really hadn't got any clothes that fitted me. You know the clothes that Mother had packed for me I had outgrown in that time. So I can remember sleeves sort of creeping up. I had split several of my dresses down the back and was feeling – Mother had told me exactly what I was to wear on my arrival – and of course I wasn't able to do this because the things she'd nominated no longer fitted.

> Mm. The sort of thing that is difficult for a, well a child. That thing about weight gain incidentally – do you remember that being common with other children?

No I think a lot of it was partly due to my age and also the fact that we were eating pretty well on board ship and also, although we had some PT on deck, it wasn't compulsory as I remember it. You know we spent a lot of time laying around doing nothing very much.

> The family that you did go to I think lived in North Sydney in a fairly affluent situation …

In Killara. Well yes on the North Shore.

> Just tell us about the life there, but perhaps briefly because I know you moved on.

Well they were retired people and reasonably affluent and had lived in a private hotel in the city of Sydney, but decided this possibly wouldn't be a good environment for me, and they had rented this rather nice home in Killara to provide me with a home. And I was not unhappy there, but it was a totally different life to what I had experienced before. They led a very social life and they felt even although I was fourteen that I'd need a baby–sitter when they went out at night. And perhaps were a little over–protective, not ever having children of their own. Any decisions about who I might be able to have home – they had to be sort of vetted first before they could come home.

> I think it's an interesting point that your father was a chauffeur, but here you were being chauffeured. Tell us about that.

Well we. – There was a man who did a lot of odd jobs around the place, you know, the gardening, cleaned the car and when necessary acted as chauffeur and was sort of, on occasions, asked to collect me from school rather than allow me to travel home by train with, which most of the – well all the others did.

> Right and so you felt a bit cut–off through that.

Well yes. It wasn't a question of making me sort of I was superior to the others; it was just being over protected.

> You then went on to another family, and again let's talk about this briefly. What was the story there?

Well it was decided that I'd probably be better living with a family where at least there was one person of my own age –in this case a girl – and I moved there. And too – this was at Eastwood, which meant that I could continue on at the same school I was attending in Hornsby, because I was in what was then the Intermediate year – so it was decided the continuity in schooling would be a good thing for me. And I was there just from October to

the following January which was the Christmas period when I left school.

Well again I think here things didn't work too well, in this case because of a particular issue about correspondence.

Yes. It was a rule of the house in which I lived that correspondence received by the children, not just me, but their own children were read by the parents first and I objected to letters from my parents being, you know, being read in this way. And it was agreed then that I could have my letters unopened, but I then found that they were being taken from my drawer and read and I did create about this.

I think you were saying one night you actually …

Yes caught them read – well the lady reading them – which upset me rather a lot.

And I think what happened then was you were deemed, supposedly, uncontrollable, but the authorities –

Well I was referred to as an uncontrollable child by the lady of the house, but it was also said – because this was the time that Japan entered the war – that she didn't wish to be responsible for an English evacuee and it mutually worked out that it was better if I left them and found, went to another home.

(20.00) Well let's go on to this last family. Because here of course you did stay and I think have a happy time. Who were they and where did they live?

Their names were Jean and Bill Jones, who were living in Manly at this time, and I don't know for a fact, but I believe it had probably been arranged that Jean Jones and I met without knowing who each other were. We'd both been summoned to the Education Department, who were then responsible for us, and we were each told that we would have to wait. So we had about a half an hour together in a waiting room when we had talked and she'd said she'd come to hear if there was a child available for her, and I told her I'd come to see where I was going to be sent and eventually a lady walked out of an adjoining room and said "Oh, I see you two have met". And on reflection I'm quite certain this was a deliberate accident and when I was then asked, "Oh, you know this is the lady who's come to see if you'd like to go and live with her". I said "Oh, yes please", because somehow that half an hour we had jelled. You know it was just one of those things.

Mm, that sounds like a fairly subtle ploy. So there was an immediate rapport. OK so you went home with them. Tell us about the first week, settling in.

Yes, I moved in with them just early in January and one of the things on reflection – I wasn't quite so aware of it at the time – but it was a lovely way of not fussing over me. I was shown which was to be my room and all the furniture was in the middle of the room, and I was told they'd done that deliberately so I could put it where I wanted it. And I thought that was rather nice, because it made it my room and, well she went on – and it was a Monday morning – and went on with the washing and left me to sort of … I was there – She was there if I wanted her, but at the same time she wasn't fussing me and saying, "Oh you want to do this", "You want to do that".

Had you, incidentally, gone straight back after this first meeting, or had there been …?

No, no there'd been a couple of weeks where everything was tied up again, and, of course, with transfers of the home I had to have medicals and things like that …

Right well that's…

…so it was just a matter of perhaps ten days.

OK, so you were given this option to settle in on your own terms so to speak. What happened after that? How quickly did you become accepted as part of the fam –

Very, very easily. And too, they had a son who was four years younger than myself, and I was amazed at the way he accepted me because he'd been an only child. Arid he introduced me to his gang as his big sister, which I thought was rather nice. And he seemed to accept my presence in the family very, very well. And Mr. Jones, Bill, was a traveller and he was away and I didn't see him until I'd been in the house for a couple of weeks and the first thing he did was to give me my five shillings pocket money which I thought was very nice as well. You know I was immediately treated the same as their own son.

Right. During the time you spent with the family did a real closeness or intimacy develop, or were you always, did you always sense, despite this hospitality, that you were not part of the family?

No, I became part of the family, so much so that they even asked me if I would like to call them Mum and Dad and I said, "No", because one only has one Mum and one Dad, but I called them aunty and uncle. And Aunty Jean used to confuse other people because she'd ring up and say "Oh, do you know I've got a daughter?", and then when they asked about how much I weighed, thinking that she'd had yet another child, you know, they said, "Well she's sixteen years of age". There was quite a few smiles in the family about that. But I mean they accepted me and referred to me as their daughter.

I would guess from what you've said already that the discipline that the house had would have been of a fairly relaxed style.

They were a very loving family to one another. Initially I found it a little embarrassing that people that had been married as they had, about fifteen years, could still cuddle up on one chair, which was different to the more rigid relationship of my own parents. It wasn't exactly a non-caring attitude, but they didn't display their affections in the same way as Jean and Bill did. I mean I wouldn't dream of going to bed without kissing them goodnight. Whereas with my family it was a called-out "Goodnight", rather than you know physical thing – goodnight. And the embarrassment soon disappeared and I probably behaved in much the same way.

(25.00) Did you do lots of things together in weekends and so on?

I went out with *Aussie* Mum a lot because at about this time Bill got called up for the forces – although he was in his forties at the time – and of course she missed him dreadfully, so I became a sort of companion as well. And, well, we still did our Saturday morn – Saturday night, trips to the cinema, together with the son. But other things we did too in – We did a few little things with making camouflage nets and going to servicemen's canteen and things like that which we did together.

Tell us about these wartime activities – the camouflage nets and so on.

Well again it was sort of 'doing your bit'. You could go down and make camouflage nets for half an hour in your lunchtime if you want to and then move on. And in Manly they had a canteen, just a hut arrangement on the foreshore there, mainly for hospital patients that would have a day – some of them had their arms in plaster and we'd write letters home for them, or perhaps they'd bring in half a dozen pairs of socks to be darned, and where they could have a cup of tea and bit of companionship – and we used to go down there.

That must have been rather good I'd imagine, especially knowing what was going on in England, feeling that you were ...

Contributing a bit, yes.

How conscious were you of the war in Britain, of the terrible destruction that Britain had suffered, and how did it affect you?

Well I was aware by seeing it in newsreels, because like most Australians at that time we all seemed to go to the cinema on the Saturday night. It was the outing of the week, with all the newsreels, not only of what was going on perhaps in New Guinea but the war in Europe, so I was aware in that. And I used to feel very saddened, say, in seeing Regent Street on fire thinking 'Well, you know, I've walked down there'.

Did you ever feel guilty, in some sense, that you should have been there, that you should have been there to help or to suffer with them?

Well, not initially because I was still young. I was hurt once or twice as a schoolgirl in that people had told me I was a coward – that I had run away – but then you'd get other people who thought you were very brave to do this without your family. Um, awareness – yes. Saddened at the time, but I suppose I was lucky to have the security of that family around me which got me through these times.

Let's just go back to the family for a moment, but to the house. The atmosphere of the house – its smells, colours, could you describe that?

Um …

And how was it different to your original?

To my home in England? Well, initially I lived in a semi-detached, but only very short while before the family moved – I of course moved with them – and that was a weatherboard which was a very new experience to me – a weatherboard one with a tin roof, after a sort of old brick, tiled place. Again the things in the garden were different – citrus trees growing, which of course wouldn't have grown in England, and kookaburras coming down and picking off bits of meat off the clothes-line, which was something new.

Do you remember the flowers of Sydney?

Yes, I was, I think, most impressed with the vivid colours many of the sort of sub–tropical flowers that were different to. – But then again missing things like roses which didn't seem to – well they did grow but didn't flourish in the same way. I loved, and still do, all the flowering shrubs and trees. There's so many and so colourful.

Yes they are, aren't they? The food you ate both in terms of quantity and the actual kinds of food, the ingredients and the preparation – how did that compare with Britain?

Well the greatest impact I think was the tropical fruits, because in England it was basically apples and pears and plums and the berry fruits. You don't get as, perhaps, as many gooseberries, raspberries, that type of thing. But I can remember the first time I tasted pawpaw ice-cream and passion fruit and it was absolute heaven and also the more flavoured ice–creams I'd sort of –

END TAPE 2, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B

This is Ed Stokes, evacuee children, Pam Squirrell, tape two side two.

You were just saying about the ice-creams

Yes, all the different flavours, because I'd have grown up on just strawberry and vanilla, and perhaps chocolate

Do you remember other things being different in terms of the goodies of eating, the sweets and so on, the brand names?

Um.

If you were going to the newsreels what would you buy?

Maybe toffees, I think. I've never been a big sweet eater, and not a sort of big chocolate eater, but I do like a bit of toffee now and again.

And what about clothes, of course the climate was quite different and as you were saying before you were growing quite rapidly. How were they different?

Well, I don't think of – Well, I suppose they were different in that the styles were more adult, but of course I couldn't then compare them with England because I'd been away for two years and it wasn't 'til I went back that I realised that I'd a lot better wardrobe than most girls of my own age had that had remained in England.

How did you finance buying clothes while you at school?

Well that was the responsibility, of course, of the people who were our guardians at the time, and then when I started work I contributed towards my upkeep within the house and saved, and with presents. People used to make me presents of clothing for birthdays and things. I managed.

Your school life, Pam, perhaps without going into the details, could you just tell us if generally you fitted into the educational pattern, but more particularly, was it a socially good experience? Were you somebody a bit special or were you an outsider?

I was treated as someone a little bit special. I was one of three evacuees actually in the

school. There were sisters in the lower form than I was. But mostly I was made very welcome. I mean I was immediately made a prefect. Also the staff were most accommodating because starting school at the age I did, with the Intermediate looming up at the end of the following year, there were some subjects of course I hadn't done. Others like mathematics I was about three years ahead. So I had a timetable peculiar to me in as much as I chose to do the commercial subjects and I'd done no typing, shorthand, business principles, book-keeping. So when my year was having maths I would go to a lower year to try and catch up on this and it was then arranged for me to miss out on sports afternoon – Friday afternoon – and I would have one teacher to bring me up, you know, the two years I had to catch up on, for things like Australian history which I hadn't done. I'd done chemistry and I had to do physiology. I dropped languages which I was very pleased to do. And gradually I caught up that way by having these separate lessons on a Friday afternoon. And they were very, very accommodating of me. They did help me tremendously through that time.

> Just going on, Pam. After you left school you got a job in a bank – how did you get the job and how did you fit into it?

(5.00) Well, for a very brief while I worked at Moran and Cato's[?], a chain grocers of the day, doing the book-keeping work and the bank – I used to do the banking and one day when I was in the bank the bank manager came out and said to me, “How would you like to come and work for me?”, and I'd had my leg pulled quite a lot by Australians at this time, you know, I'd been told about crows flying backwards to keep dust out of their eyes and other similar things. And I thought, “He's pulling my legs”. And I jokingly sort of said to him, “Yes, when do I start, next Monday?” And I did. It was all arranged and I actually did start work. I was offered the job just like that.

> Mm. He must have seen something in you. What did you do there and generally – how was it a good or bad experience for you?

Well I started off as the junior doing the mail and all the messages, making teas and the usual things that juniors do. But at the same time it, It was the time when men were being called up rather quickly and although I think we were a staff of seven – six or seven when I first started in the bank – very quickly there was a period of ten months when we were reduced to the manager and myself, because all the men were going and they hadn't got the women trained up you know to take all these men's things.

> So you must have shouldered quite a lot of responsibility.

Well it was a question of, bit of being thrown in the deep end, but it was a small, just branch dealing with local shopkeepers mainly. I mean the manager … The manager posted ledgers and I was sort of handling cash because it was easier that way and we got relief eventually, but there was a period of months where it was pretty hard work because there were just the two of us.

> Well having a job and obviously some income must have given you more flexibility in your life. Oh, did you pay board, incidentally, once you had a job?

Yes, just a, you know a, to help towards my keep because – this was something I didn't appreciate at the time – because I. knew from what mother had told me in the letters they were paying a nominal sum each week whilst we were away and she believed that it was coming to the people who were looking after us. But no it was all done on a voluntary basis,

and we understand that money sort of went towards our fares. I really don't know what it was. It was only a matter of a small amount each week. But the people that took us into their families did so voluntarily.

> Well it must have been good to repay that kindness, but with the money that was left over, what did you like doing best? What were your favourite activities?

Oh I didn't have a great deal of outside interests beyond normal family life.

> Did you love the climate? Was that a big thing the open air, the beaches?

Yes and of course living . – I spent quite a lot of time on the beach. I mean I used to have my lunches on the beach most days and even, at times, have a midday swim. I have been known to sort of wear swimming costume underneath my bank uniform going to work. But I didn't – I spent a lot of time within the family. In fact my Aussie Mum used to say I didn't go out enough but I was happy with the life there and writing letters home and I used to be independent and do my own washing and …

> Just talking about the beach for the moment and I mean swimming at lunchtime. That must have seemed a far cry from the kind of life you might have had in England.

It certainly was because – Well I lived near the beach you see for three and a half of the five years or so I was out here.

> As the war dragged on and obviously it went on much longer than people had thought, how much did Britain remain in your thoughts and in particular your family? How much did they fade?

They were always there. I don't think it ever actually faded but you lived in the present rather than in the past and, of course, you thought about the future I suppose, but there was always that uncertainty about it. It's really hard to explain. You don't forget family and yet I had contentment here at the same time.

> And it was quite separate from your family?

Mm

> Did you think about and perhaps hope that the war will end in that you could then go back to Britain or did you dread that with the war's end there might come an obligation not a desire to return to Britain?

(10.00) Oh, I think I had made the decision before the war ended that I really wanted to remain in Australia but at the same time there was that obligation to go back and see one's parents.

> This was complicated of course because you'd got to know with the family I think, a young man. Tell us about that?

Well over a period of years I'd known him and of course then we decided to become engaged and he got sent to England at this time as part of the occupational forces in Germany, so our position became that he was the one that was overseas, of course getting to know my parents. And one of the decisions that I finally made was knowing that he was over there and was

going to be in England for a period of time, that I would get back to England as soon as possible after the European war finished so that we could get married over there and then me return to Australia later. But it didn't quite work out that way in the end.

> Let's just step back a moment before the end of the war. How frequently had you written to your parents and how often did you receive letters from them?

Well I used to write every week and post them off, but of course mails were uncertain. It could take up to three months before they were received and this happened in reverse. But we were able to keep in more contact inasmuch as we had a system whereby once a month we could send a cable, which was just a text we had to choose, but at least one knew that on the dates that they were sent that everything was alright. And too, I was lucky to be the one that was chosen to make one of the two-way broadcasts to my parents.

> Tell us about that. I'd image that must have been I mean this is obviously pre-ISD dialling and all the rest of it.

Oh yes. Well it happened in 1942, just after I had gone to live with the Jones people, and it was an all day effort. I had to go into the ABC studios in Sydney. My parents were in the BBC studio in London and it took a great deal of time to get all the equipment out and get it all tuned in. And I can remember the lady in the studios here talking to – what was her name? – the lady who subsequently did *Family favourites* from Britain in the two-way link-up, Jean Metcalfe. And they were having conversation while they were getting all the acoustics done up and then the magic moment came when we were able to speak to our parents – I think there were six of us who did so that day.

> Did you have a little text prepared or was this impromptu?

Oh it was impromptu. It was a question and answer thing and I had just started work, so that was my main news. You know, I told them that I'd got a job and I'd started work.

> Well, the war did finally end and when it did, Pam, was It clear to you who mattered most, your real or your foster parents?

I never ever thought of it in times and I think because I'd sort of mapped out in my mind that I was going to do the right thing by both and that was to go home to my parents and stay a while and then come back to be with my Aussie parents. I seemed to think I'd reached a compromise that would satisfy me and hopefully both sets of parents at this time.

> Were you conscious of the effect then of the family in Australia of your going back to England?

No, not initially because I'm afraid I acted with the impetuosity of youth, in as much as the European war had finished, and I suppose it would have been in the June after VE day – VJ day, no VE day in the May – I was at work one day and I don't know what made me think of it but I suddenly thought, “Look, the European war's over and we've been told that we can go home when the war's over”. So I immediately rang up the Education Department and said, “Well, now the European war's over, have we got to wait for the Japanese war to finish before we can go home?”, and they said, “No, if we were over nineteen they were allowing us to go as individuals, as berths became available”. And I said, “Oh well, will you put my name down please?” And I came home from work in the normal way, but instead of coming in and saying “Hello”, I sort of went in saying, “Well, I'm going home”. And of course it absolutely

devastated my Australian Mum, because I'd gone to work in the normal way in the morning and had made this decision during that day without any consultation. I mean it was just one of those things you acted on, on the spur of the moment.

(15.00) Once you did that and there was this upset, did your foster mother, did she do anything to dissuade you or not?

Well no she didn't dissuade me because when I sort of – It was just I went in and said, “I am going home”. And it wasn't until we sort of sat down and talked about it and I said, “Yes but I'm only going to be back probably a year and I'll be back here”. She had her doubts about my coming back. She seemed to think that once I got home that would sort of get a hold on me. She accepted my decision to go back at, you know. She did accept that I was going back but it was to go back to come back again. And I left half my clothes and had started a Glory box. I mean I left all those things in Australia.

I think that also reflected the views of Bob, your young man.

Yes it did. He felt that if I got back to England I wouldn't want to come back again.

CORB – the CORB officials in Australia, or the Education Department acting on their behalf – did they give you any advice or was it just –

No. It was purely my own decision.

And the actual arrangement of the passage and so on?

That was done for me. I mean I was just sent the ticket when it was available, to go back.

And did you ever get any information or any sense that the Australian government was, if not pressuring, certainly holding out the attractions of Australia to you young people saying, “Why not stay”, or at least, “Come back”.

No. I don't remember any contact like that at all.

Going on a little bit, Pam, the preparations to leave. Were there any presents, any mementoes from your family in Australia?

I have mementoes from friends and people at work in particular and they gave me a wonderful send off. I can remember I must have been very naive in those days, because I'd gone into work the day before I was due to leave and the boss had said to me, 'Tomorrow's your last day. You needn't come in uniform.' He says, 'You know, wear one of your pretty dresses'. Which I did. It was almost an order, you know. And of course I arrived at work and did my normal morning and then come lunch time he said, 'Oh I hate to do this to you on your last day,' he said, 'but I've got an important letter that must go over to Sydney office straight away'. Which of course meant I had to go from Manly on the ferry over to the City office and come back, and by the time I came back the bank had been closed to the public, but the whole of the banking hall had been changed into a dining room with trestle tables, waiters from the local hotel were present, my friends from the other banks were present, customers that I'd got to know very well were present., and there was this marvellous farewell in the bank.

Mm. That sounds a really lovely, lovely occasion.

Yeah. It really was.

And did the family have a party for you?

When I got back – of course VJ happened during my return trip and …

Sorry I meant the family in Australia.

Oh. No, we didn't have a party, because as far as the attitude then was, I was coming back. I was only going away briefly. It wasn't a farewell party. It was people just wished me well when I saw them and said, 'We'll see you next year'. But when I arrived back in England, I thought it again was rather nice because VE had been celebrated with street parties and they were going to have another street party for VJ celebration, and knowing that I was then on my way home, they held over the street party until I got back. So there was a sort of party almost immediately I arrived back home.

Sounds great. Pam, stepping back to Sydney, embarking on the ship and steaming down the harbour, did you have any – What were the thoughts, what were the memories?

Well, it was sort of 'So long for now, see you next year'. I was so sure at, that point, that I was coming back. I never thought that when I went through it was going to be twenty–four years again before I saw that harbour again. I mean I just didn't think that would be possible at that stage, the way I was feeling, and what plans I'd made. I was definitely going to come back next year.

(20.00) The voyage home – we might just skate over the route and the ship, except just to ask was there anything that stands out in your mind particularly and was – and how did the voyage differ from the voyage out?

Again the only similarity really was that I was on a troopship because the ship that I went on, which was the *Rangatiri* – a New Zealand shipping line – was taking people, nearly all naval personnel that had been in the hospital down at Jervis Bay, and they were seamen who'd lost ships, you know, been torpedoed and things, and they were sending them back to Britain. Again we travelled under troopship conditions in that we didn't have cabins. There were fourteen of us in this one sort of dormitory. We had very little facilities for our clothing. I mean we had to keep our clothing virtually in the suitcases which were made accessible to us every other day. They were in a hold that we could get into and we just had pegs at the sides of our bunks. I mean it was –

So it was a lot more spartan really than the …

Oh very much, very much more spartan than we'd gone out, but we didn't complain. I mean it was getting us back. We went the different way round. I went back via Panama, but the only time we went ashore was for [inaudible) at Bilbao.

The date when you left and when you got back – do you remember those months?

I left here on 16th July and got back to England on 26th August which was exactly six weeks, which was roughly half the time as we'd taken to get back here – to get out here.

Right. Britain. Did you berth at Southampton?

Yes.

Just leave aside the family for a moment. What were your first impressions of Britain itself – of Southampton, of London – as you saw it?

I saw very little of Southampton because we came straight off the ship onto the boat–train, so it was just the station, I had tried to imagine what it was going to be like. And I can – My first impressions that I clearly remember was approaching London. For one thing I was very surprised how quickly we'd got there because I'd remembered as Southampton being a long way from London, and yet we seemed to get there so quickly, and suddenly I could see Big Ben in the distance and I thought, 'We're at London', and approaching in to Waterloo one saw the results of the bombing – bomb sites, ruins. It looked grey. It looked dirty, but I was sort of looking beyond that by this time, sort of anxious to get to my parents. But it seemed grey – everything seemed very grey and un – not uncared for but – I don't know. It …

Well much older I guess.

Well, yes. It was older but the other surprising thing was having seen the newsreels of the results of bombing, I was surprised to see as many buildings standing as were standing. I expected vast areas to be flattened. There were a lot of ruins, but there were still a lot of buildings standing. I can remember thinking that, and was glad to see that Big Ben was still there.

That's most interesting. Just talking on a bit, but skating your family for a moment, but thinking of the weeks ahead – the people in England. How did they seem to you and how did they compare with the people you'd got to know in Australia?

Well they were obviously all very relieved the war was over and were anxious for their men to come back and build up life again. But they too were drab. I mean clothes rationing had been so much more severe. It had been sort of mend and make do. People looked – I remember everything appearing grey. The sky was grey. Buildings were grey. I missed sunshine – although it was still summertime when I got there. And there weren't those clear blue skies. But again people remarkably cheerful, you know, allowing for the ordeal they'd gone through. The sort of British spirit was still there, you know, the sort of fighting bulldog feeling was still there. I thought – I immediately thought how lucky I had been to have that experience of being away compared with school friends that I re-met – I met up with again. I'd had a marvellous war compared with the things they'd had to endure.

(25.00) That's most interesting, Pam. Well let's go on to meeting your family, your mother and father and of course I think there was a little baby sister as well.

Yes.

The first meeting – where were you and how did it all go?

Well I travelled back with five other girls of my own age who were making the journey individually, and we all came up together in the boat-train. And I was the only one that was going to be met in London. Others were going north and I looked out of the coach windows as the train was pulling to a stop and I knew that was my family because there was mother, father and a ten-year old and a baby in arms. And I thought well, 'That is definitely my parents'. But again this feeling of greyness and they looked so much older than I remembered

them. Alright, I knew that they would look older, but we'd been away five years, but to me they looked about fifteen years older. Mother had gone completely white. In that time Father looked much leaner and balder and older. My sister had grown from a five-year old to a ten-year old and although the face was the same she was obviously different and a completely new baby. She was just over a year old at the time. And –

Besides those physical differences how. – Did you get on easily or not?

No, well when I sort of – I got out of the train and I was going to run towards them and then I couldn't. I just felt my feet had gone to lead and I immediately got back into the train, and I said, 'I can't face them'. And they said, 'Well, of course you can', and these four physically pushed me out of that train again and this was absolu – I couldn't quite understand my own feelings, 'til in the end of course I went up to them and Mother burst into tears and Dad hugged me – but I don't know, it's one of those emotional sort of spots in your life where I really didn't quite know how I felt. It was one of those ironies. They seemed more pleased to see me than I did to see them at that moment. I was too bewildered by it all, sort of overcome by it all. I don't know whether it was easier for them getting one person back and there was me having to see four people, I don't know. After a while we went through the barrier in the normal way, I then had the problem of my cases being lost, which took up a lot of time because I had to wait for the second section of the boat-train to come up and still my luggage wasn't on. And yet I'd seen them put on the train at Southampton, which made it a bit difficult because everyone got caught up with the formalities of having to report lost luggage, and in actual fact I was three weeks without it before it was found and returned to me.

Well did that break the ice or did it –

It gave me something else to think about. When you say did it break the ice or not, I don't know because we had to go round to the stationmaster's office.

Let's go on a bit. Let's say you've got home and the first few days have gone by and so on. Was it then easy to talk, to open up and talk about Australia, about your emotions, on your part, and could they do that with you?

Er (pause). I'm trying to sort of think back. I found it a little bit different, for one thing I had expected to go back into what had been my bedroom, but by this time mother had made that room for my two younger sisters and I was given the other bedroom on my own. I found that sort of strange. I found things in the house to be in the same places that I'd left them in. In the living room the sideboard and the table and everything were in the same place. Um –

Could I just pause there Pam. It had not, obviously, been easy recognising your parents, they'd aged and so on, of course the house in a sense hadn't the physical –

END TAPE 2, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE A

This is Ed Stokes, evacuee children, Pam Squirrell, tape three, side one.

Pam, just building on the little episode where you couldn't get out of the train. You were saying that, even today, you feel it’s a difficult memory.

Well, it's a difficult memory because I feel a little guilty that I found it so difficult to go to my own parents.

After all these years?

It was a thing I feel, I regret happened. I mean my parents – I don't know whether they, I ever told them that I got back into the train. I don't think I have ever mentioned it, so they don't know, but I felt a certain –

Had they seen you?

No, I don't think so because they didn't sort of recognise me. I think they were expecting a schoolgirl back.

And you were saying that the girls on the train with you – and perhaps you could give their names.

Well, I don't remember all of them, but there was Barbara Helliwell [?] and Margaret Hardisty [?] and Margaret Hardisty was the girl that I had made the friendship with on the outward journey to Australia. And we happened to meet up again. I hadn't seen her during our stay in Australia because she was a child that lived in Melbourne and I'd gone on to Sydney. But we recognised one another when we got on board.

And you were saying that when she went home …

Yeah. When she went back she was being met at Leeds, later that day, and we subsequently met. She too had found it very difficult to make that initial approach to her parents when they met her at Leeds.

And I think a few days later was ...

She had made a friendship with one of the men returning on the ship who had to go into hospital, and who happened to be in a military hospital near where I lived, so she'd come down to see him and stayed with me and we exchanged our experiences and we were both finding it very difficult in those early days to accept being back, and accept our parents and everything else.

I was just saying before …

And again she was the same age as me at the time, so …

I was just saying before the tape finished, despite the changes in your parents, the house basically I think was the same, was there a powerful sense of emotional home-coming and contentment in the physical surroundings of the home, the mementoes, the possessions and so on or not?

Yes, I think the house itself was satisfying. Again the climate of course was very different and I still had this feeling of everything being grey and people – the houses were unkempt in as much as people hadn't been able to paint them during the war – they hadn't been able to replace curtains, garden railings had been taken, repairs hadn't been able to be carried out in the same way. There were these empty blocks with ruins on them. There was an unkempt look about the place because there hadn't been the maintenance, or the maintenance hadn't been possible during the war years.

That's most interesting. Going back to your family – just some final questions. As time went on – days to weeks, weeks to months and so on – did you regain again some of the closeness you'd had before you left?

Not a closeness as such. My father, I think, accepted that I'd grown up a little bit more than my mother had, initially. I had continuity in that I still worked for the bank, but this time in Australia House in London. Um, that was the most constant factor in my life at that time, and because I was working in Australia House, I was working with primarily Australian people.

(5.00) Was that important to you?

It .was at that time. Yes. It had a continuity about it.

I think you were saying before also that there was some difficulty with your sister.

Yes. My, sister, Ann, who had been five when I left was now ten and she found it hard to accept the attention, I think, that I was getting – allowing for the fact that a baby sister had arrived just previously and then an older sister. There was a certain amount of resentment, obviously, that the two of us were getting far more attention than she was at that particular time.

How much could you tell your parents of your experiences in Australia, and did you downplay them to avoid their feeling that you'd had it too easy, you'd had too good a time?

I didn't play it down because I think again with mother, she appreciated that it made her feel that she'd done the right thing, that I'd had these advantages by being in Australia [that] they hadn't had during the war in Britain, that. I think she felt justified in having made that decision.

And were you aware, Pam, of the heartbreak they probably had gone through? Could they talk about that? Did you sense it?

Um. They didn't talk about it much at that time. It's subsequently I learnt about it, not at that moment. I mean we became aware of the difficulties. Um (pause).

How much later did you become aware of that?

Well, I suppose perhaps within six months. Mother was obviously aware how relaxed I was with Australians, inasmuch as she felt she wanted to repay Australia. And working in Australia House, I had lots of contacts with Australian forces personnel at that time. And Mum used to say to me, 'If anybody wants a bed for the night they're always welcome'. So it was quite often we had three or four Australian people, even if there was personnel [?] sleeping on the floor. People used to come and sort of have a meal and a chat and Mother found that I was very relaxed and easy with them. I mean it was – we don't know who did it – but somebody painted out the name of our road and put 'ANZAC Club' with an arrow pointing down to our house at one time. It helped me that I had this contact with Australia and it. – Mum and Dad enjoyed it was they felt it was one way of saying 'Thank you Australia' for having had me.

That's most interesting. One other sign – thinking of the street sign – that I remember you mentioning is this one your friend made. Tell us about that

poster – I think it was – because it didn't. – I mean there was a real message in it.

Yes. She had made this sign to pin over the front door, 'Welcome Home Pam', on my arrival back and she had drawn a map of the world with me in school uniform making my way by a devious route, because by this time with correspondence I'd sort of filled her in with the route we'd had out. So she'd got that fairly accurately. And she'd drawn a route back starting as a dot in Sydney and it gradually became a question mark that got bigger and bigger the nearer it got to England. And I suppose you know that was so true because my parents weren't sure who or what was coming back and they certainly weren't. And it did draw quite a bit of attention in the street. People used to say, 'Well that's a bit different', and I mean it was a question mark.

Right. The girl who did the sign was she one of the original three musketeers?

Yes. A friend called Laura Norton.

Well the other two – could the three of you again get together closely or not?

(10.00) I saw Laura, because again there was another story and I suppose this was a result of war. It just so happened that at the end of the street in which I lived, was a prisoner of war camp and at the time I arrived home, it was housing Italians who were being repatriated at that time. And then following them the Germans arrived and gradually they – As they were getting nearer going home they were allowed out of the camp to go into the local town, and Laura met one of these and subsequently married him, went back to Germany with him and they then migrated to Canada, and her family – her parents – joined them in Canada.

Remarkable story.

So, you know, she had to wait another six years after me before she did things, but in this case it was Canada she went to.

Right. Well just round off your story, Pam. We must move on a little bit. The affair with your Australian man – I think you were engaged.

Mm.

Didn't work out.

Mm.

When that had faded away, how strong was Australia? How strong did it stay in your mind?

It was always there. I was still of course working in Australia House which was a constant reminder of things Australian. The bank staff over here were very good. They were supplying the London staff with food parcels which, when I did marry in '48, were a great help to be starting off in a married life with a little bit extra than the rations that were then available.

Did you write much to the family in Manly?

Yes. Yes. Although it took twenty-four years before I came back on the first holiday, I still corresponded regularly with them throughout the whole of that period of time, and in fact the, my Aussie Mum, as I called her, is godmother to our eldest child.

That's a lovely memory. Pam you were saying that after you married there were two families involved and money and children and the years went on and you stayed in England. You did then finally make a decision to come out here after some holidays, and I think you came out in …

'74 to live.

Right in 1974. Has Australian life matched the hopes and memories of those war years?

In – For me, in many ways, yes – the freedom to be yourself. There isn't the conformity, I don't think, in Australian life that there is in Britain. You seem to have the freedom to make your own … to do your own thing I think more. You're not worried about what people next door are going to think about it. I think it is basically that sort of freedom.

Right. Just a few very final questions about CORB itself. CORB had quite clearly changed you – your family relationships. Overall was it a good or a bad experience for you? Was it a blessing or a curse in your life?

I would say, um [pause]

Or perhaps neither?

Oh. Yes. I mean it definitely did have an effect on me but I think it's been for the better. I think I've had a happier life, with the sad moments in between, but we all have that. I'm very content now.

If you were faced with a situation – as your parents were – of the threat of an invasion or certainly of severe bombing and so on, and you had children of about that age – what would you do?

Well I've discussed this with other evacuees I've met over the years and we all feel that we couldn't do it. But then we haven't actually had to face that situation. I mean we can talk about 'if' but if it did happen, we've often said we'd probably change our mind.

Right. The last and ultimate question – is there anything you feel you want to add to this record that has not been put on the tape so far?

No. I can't think of anything. I think we've covered it pretty well.

Well it really is. It's a really good, thorough and very, very interesting tape. So on behalf of the War Memorial, thank you.

Thank you.

END TAPE 3, SIDE A