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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A

Identification. [This is an interview by] Ed Stokes on evacuee children [with] Ruth Hay. Tape one, side one.

Ruth, could you just tell us first, please, your date and place of birth?

Yes, I was born in Sunderland - that's in England - on 18th July 1927.

Your father I think had been in the First World War and had been a prisoner. How do you remember him as a man?

Well - I don't remember him very well, to be quite honest. He was a very kind, gentle man. He was very content with his lot in life - I would say that would be the best way to describe my father. Never did anyone a bad turn; a good man.

Right. And your mother - how close? I realise you later, or for most of your childhood, lived with an aunt and your grandmother and grandfather until they died. But your mother as a woman, how do you remember her?

Oh she was a very quiet woman, very self-contained. She worked extremely hard. I had two brothers and a sister - she had another baby during the war - but she didn't have time, she wasn't a person who did a lot of bothering with the neighbours. She was very much a family woman.

The decision for you to go to live with your aunt I think had something to do with the birth of the brother who came after you.

Yes. I was two, just over two, and the custom then was for the child to be born at home, so I was to be minded by my aunt, in my grandmother's home, which was just in the next street, while my mother was in bed, and that was a period of two weeks in those days. But at the end of the two weeks my grandmother asked if I might stay and live with them, as some young life in the house - let's put it that way.

You must've been a fairly cheerful little character.

I don't remember that far back! (Laughs)

The years staying in that house, was there ever a sense of divided loyalties, or did you always know you were part of your mother and father's family?

Yes I guess I always knew that. But my aunt was the dominating character in my life, definitely. I did find out fairly early in the piece that if I was in strife it wasn't much use running to tell my mother about it, so that was something that didn't happen. But I would see my parents every day, because they were just in the next street.

Tell us about your aunt, then, because she obviously was a strong character in your life.

Yes.

Was she a kind of close, loving person, or a more distant character?

I would say she was a more distant character, really. She was a very straight person. She hadn't married. She had brought up seven younger brothers, and a very deeply religious family - we belonged to the Church of England - and life did revolve around the Church, actually, at that time. So that right was right and wrong was wrong (laughs).

That's interesting, perhaps, as it might bear on later things. Do you think that instilled in you a kind of attitude of acceptance, of not questioning the elders?

I think it probably did. In those days life was strict and you were taught to be obedient. And it was a case of children were seen and not heard. I'd certainly, it was then that I learnt to read and be quiet, and that instilled in me my love of reading, which I can, you know, I can still go in the corner and read for hours and hours, and I would say that was from those days, hmm.

(5.00) The neighbourhood that you lived in, in Sunderland, could you tell us a little bit about that - its characteristics, its colours and smells, even?

Right. Well we lived in a village called Fulwell, which was on the north side of the town, and it had been quite separate until all the houses were built in between. I can remember it as a farming area, as a little girl. Quite close to where we lived were farmers' fields, and next to a very large school. It was an excellent school. But in the time that I lived there as a, up till I was, oh, say till I was about eight, gradually the fields disappeared and more houses were built. And my parents in fact moved into a new housing estate, about five minutes away.

Tell us about the home, perhaps about your parents' home or the house where you lived - what it was like as a house? Its style, how big it was, any particular things you remember.

Well my aunt's house, my grandparents' house, it was built I think in 1900, and it was an end house in a terrace. There were a lot of terraced houses in that area. There wasn't a back garden; there was a nice backyard, which was big enough in later years to put a garage into. But it was a very pleasant house. We had our front room with a bay window, and you could sit in the bay window and look out and see the world going by. There was also the general living room, and then there was a, the kitchen, which in those days was called the scullery, and off that was a big pantry under the stairs. Three bedrooms upstairs, and the toilet was outside and the laundry in the backyard. Right?

Right, that's very clear. If you were to think of what was most special about your neighbourhood to you as a child, what would you think of?

Friends. We were a very close-knit family. Oh in the wintertime my associations would be the fireplace. Everything happened around the fire.

Tell us about the fireplace and what happened round it.

Well it was an open fire with a hob where the kettle used to sing (chuckles) and everything, all the brass was very highly polished, and we would toast in front of the fire - not like the toasters of today. And it was the same in my mother's home. Really they were very similar

houses. But of course I was the young child in my aunt's house, and my grandparents', whereas in my mother's house it was rather noisy, with three little ones.

Did you play games in front of the fire - read, that sort of thing?

Yes, we did a lot of that. Reading was a very busy pastime. There was a very good library not too far from where we lived and as a school child spent a lot of time going to the library. But we also had some very good books at home as well.

Did your parents or your aunt have a wireless?

Yes, eventually - not to start with. I remember the gas lamps over the fireplace, the gas mantles. I can remember when they got electricity in the house. And the outside mangle, the big washing tubs, in those days, the wash copper.

Electricity, was that a wonderfully exciting thing? How do you remember that?

Oh just as something that happened, actually. You didn't have to be so careful with the electricity - it switched on and off - but the gas lamps, the little mantles, I think you called, could break very easily and you had to take great care of those. As a child you weren't allowed to touch anything.

Just moving onto something different: the period immediately prior to the war. Do you remember anything of that, the general build-up to war? Do you remember, for example, wireless or people talking about it?

Oh yes. That was all that anyone ever discussed, that last year before the war. I can remember Neville Chamberlain, and everyone felt very happy because they thought war was going to be averted. But then it would be round about the May, I think, in 1939 that we were all issued with gas masks. I can't remember the exact time, but we were given these cardboard boxes with little gas masks. And we had those before war actually, before it actually started.

How did they appear to you as a child, these strange things - as something evocative, or something frightening?

10.00 No I don't remember feeling particularly frightened. I guess it was, as a child it was just amusing, really, a fun sort of thing. I think we had no idea what might happen - we couldn't imagine what might happen. And the previous war was rarely discussed in the house.

Any other memories of the period before the war, Ruth?

I can remember the Anderson shelter being built in my parents' garden. They had moved into a nice house on a new housing estate, and Dad had a big garden. He was a very good gardener. And quite a big area was dug up for the Anderson shelter to go in, and then it was covered all over with soil and Dad used to grow lettuces and vegetables on top of the Anderson shelter. We didn't go into it before the war; it was closed up (laughs).

Right, a sort of special place?

Yes.

The actual declaration of war, it was 3rd September. Do you have any memory of that at all?

Oh I can remember sitting huddled round the radio - the wireless, as it was then - listening, and everyone feeling a terrible sense of dismay, a terrible feeling of dismay.

Your father, of course, had suffered in the previous war.

Yes.

How did he react?

Well Dad had been involved with the Transport Department, of organising for children to be evacuated into the country, because we were in a very vulnerable position where we were. And I guess he just got on with it, if you know what I mean. He was too old to go back into the forces, and he wouldn't've gone in any case, because they needed him in the job he was in. But we were then all sent away, the following Sunday.

You were saying, Ruth, about being sent away. I think this was an evacuation of an entire school?

That's right. I was at the grammar school at the time, and we were evacuated as a school. And we went into Richmond, in Yorkshire. I can remember being on the train and then arriving at a school in Yorkshire. And we all had little parcels of jam sandwiches, which I'd never had before - dried-up jam sandwiches! And our little bag and our gas masks, of course, which we all had to wear. It was compulsory by then. And we were, it was a girls school and we were marched down, one of the streets in Richmond is called Frenchgate and it was down the hill from this school at the top, and we were all two by two in a `crocodile', which you may have heard about - kids walking along. And they knocked at the doors going down the street and the people in the houses, they were asked how many children they could accommodate, how many beds they could .... And we were just counted out by heads, you know, `You, you, you and you'. By the time it got to my turn - we were in alphabetical order, of course, and my name then was Wilson and always at the back end - and we went to a wonderful family, a Mr and Mrs Metcalfe, who had no children of their own, and another girl, a girl called Eleanor, and I were put into their family. We made good friends with two other girls who were next door - in different classes in school, different ages - and it was a very happy time. There were a few changes. Mrs Metcalfe did in fact take in several more girls and at one stage there were five of us in the house. And I was very happy there.

During the period at Richmond, which went on until shortly before you left for Australia, did you see your parents or your aunt during that time?

I saw them a couple of times. They came over at Christmas and then the next time that they came over was to tell me that I was going to be sent away again and it was very secret. We weren't to talk about it. My mother told me afterwards she thought we were going to Canada. I was the eldest of four children - I had two brothers and my sister was nearly eight years younger than me - and I was to look after the younger ones. But in the event of being re-

evacuated on the *Batory* I was the only one chosen from the family. I don't know why; I was never ever told. And I was just told that I was going away. I wasn't asked would I like to go. And it was just taken as a matter of course: I did as I was told.

> We might come back to that just in a moment. Just stepping back for a second to the period at Richmond: it had been generally a happy time. Do you have any other clear memories of how the war impacted on your life, the phoney war during that period at Richmond?

(15.00) Not really. We didn't really realise that there was a war going on at all. Where we were it was, we were in the country, we were trying to go to school - we didn't learn a great deal; we spent a lot of time knitting socks for soldiers and balaclava helmets and that kind of thing. But I guess we didn't really realise that there was a war on. The bombing hadn't started. The only thing that really affected our family, that I knew about, was my uncle, and that was my mother's sister's husband and he was evacuated from Dunkirk. And he'd had a fairly rough time, which I did find about from letters, yes.

> The discipline that you had as a child, at Richmond, and later as you came out to Australia, was that simply just the discipline that children had generally at that time, or did the war itself bring a greater level of discipline in that you were made conscious by adults that you had to be responsible, you had to do the right thing?

Yes I would say that was certainly overlaid on previous discipline. You did ...

> Did people take gas masks really seriously, for example?

Oh yes, we did. I think we didn't ever know what was going to happen next. Certainly there was no bombing going on at the time, but the expectation was there, that something - and particularly when Dunkirk happened. That really made people very aware of, that life was very dangerous, even though as children we were pretty happy (laughs).

> Did you listen to the wireless at Richmond school, or not?

Yes, we did listen to the wireless.

> Did teachers keep you up to date with events in the war?

Oh not, I don't remember that a great deal. I guess the thing that probably would remind me of it mostly were the soldiers in barracks around the town and Sunday, going to Church, Sunday services, there was always a military presence there, and that was always very important (laughs).

> Do you remember the prayers? Were the prayers different?

Oh, yes, prayers and the hymns, you know, *For Those in Peril on the Sea*, all of that kind of thing. But you sang it with gusto; I don't know that it really (pauses) meant so much to you in those days, really and truly. It was afterwards that it really hit you what it was all about.

Well let's move on to CORB. As you were saying, of course, there was the *blitzkrieg* and you know, the sense of panic, if you like, after Dunkirk. Your parents arrived with this news. I think they came to tell you personally?

Yes my mother came. I don't remember my father being there, but I think it was my mother and my aunt.

Was there any talking about it between you and your mother and aunt at all, or was it simply presented as a decision?

It was presented as a decision. My mother did tell me after the war that she had been to visit the headmistress, who recommended that if she had children - she was an unmarried lady but she would send her children away. And I think that was what made my mother decide it was a good idea. I might mention at this point why there was so much anxiety. We were on the River Wear - Sunderland - which was between the two rivers, the Tyne and the Tees. Both the Tyne and the Tees, and the Wear, were big shipbuilding ports. But the Tyne and the Tees had barrage balloons erected and the Wear didn't. I don't understand why. It may not have been appropriate.

But that's where your parents lived, I think.

That's, yes.

You were off at school in the country in Yorkshire.

Yes.

Did you ever know why it wasn't thought that you would be safe in the country?

Well we imagined that we were going to be invaded, and that possibly (laughs) the army wouldn't get that far. Even though it was only about sixty miles inland it seemed a long way at the time. But the anticipation was that the, if there was an invasion they could just walk straight in, you see. I don't know. I imagine the whole thing was all over the country, all the - from London, they went into the country. Everywhere around the coast the children were just moved - on the east coast. I'm not sure about the west coast.

Right. So the clear motive of your mother, your parents, was to escape the danger, to get you out of the country.

Yes.

You were saying your brothers and sisters - or sister, I think - were to go. They didn't. Was that because they weren't selected or because your mother and father pulled them out of the scheme?

I don't really know. Mother never really told me. But I just imagined that they weren't selected because we were separated at the time and I was living in a different place. That was my understanding.

How did it affect you, the feeling of your going and your brothers and sister staying?

(20.00)Well you see I hadn't lived with them, as such. I knew my brothers and sisters 'cause I visited them most days - before the war. I hadn't seen them for twelve months, nearly, and I guess as a child it felt more of an adventure. I wasn't really terribly nervous; I was just doing as I was told and I don't think .... It was a big secret, as well, so when you were told you had to be quiet about something you were quiet.

Were you totally quiet? Did you tell nobody?

I told no-one, no. A secret is a secret - (laughs) still is!

Well we might wheedle one or two out this afternoon! That's most interesting, Ruth. Just one other aspect, harking back to the Richmond period, which I meant to ask: had you been homesick?

Yes I had periods when I was very homesick, but I grew very attached to my foster father. He was the stationmaster and he was very fond of fishing. He used to go trout fishing. And I was accustomed to being a very quiet child, and I can remember - none of the other children in the house went, but I would go while he was fishing. And this was in the - oh, I've forgotten the name of the river! The Swale, I think it was. And you had to be quiet while fishing was going on. It was fly-fishing, for trout. And I would sit for hours, just there, beside him, while he was fishing. Just one of those things.

Mm, that's lovely. So you got some of the sort of fatherly affection from him.

I was very fond of him, yes.

So there was this adventurous side to it as you saw it. Do you remember any of the preparations prior to leaving - medicals, for example, inoculations, that kind of thing?

Yes I think we had to have injections. I'm not very clear on that, to be perfectly honest. I had had smallpox vaccination as a baby. We had had all the regulation things that people had done. So that it wasn't like a lot of people who were having injections later, if you understand me. It wasn't considered necessary, I don't think - having been vaccinated, you know, with the great big marks on your arm, it wasn't necessary again.

One final question about coming to Australia: did you know where Australia was? Did you have any sense of place, or of the sense of time you might be away?

Not really. Didn't really have any idea at all. Twelve thousand miles didn't really mean all that much. We hadn't ever travelled very far - Richmond was the farthest I had travelled, and I don't think I exactly knew how far away that was, to be perfectly honest. (Chuckles) There again I think it was just something that you did.

And the time - was there any consciousness at all of how long you might be away?

None at all. I don't think any of us had the least idea that it would be so long. I don't think we could imagine it. I think perhaps a year might've been considered - you know - but five and a half years was never anticipated, no.

> You were saying that your mother, I think, got your clothes ready. No new clothes were bought - there wasn't a lot of money - but she packed up your little suitcase. There were a few mementos, I think.

Yes. My mother gave me, to keep, her watch. She had a gold watch which my father had given to her before they were married. And I was very careful with that watch, and when I returned to England it was returned to my mother. She also gave me a little silver horseshoe that she had had given to her as a child. I still have the silver horseshoe. Yes.

> And I think it's a daily thing you use.

I have it on my keyring. I'm never without it. The other thing that I was given - and I've been rather sad that I lost it - was a half a farthing. The children were assembled, from Richmond we were taken to Darlington, which was the major railway station, about ten miles away, I think. And we met an escort there who was to take a group of us - people whom I hadn't met before; I was on my own - and a delightful lady, who gave each of us a small memento. And the idea being that when we got back, if we got back, we would return it to her. I'm sad to say that I lost my half farthing. It was a very small coin, as you can imagine. And I was rather sorry about that.

> Mm, that seems lovely. I guess in a sense it was a sort of talisman of good fortune that you would come back to the country.

Yes.

(25.00) Did you ever have an autograph book?

No I didn't, as a matter of fact. That's a shame, that I didn't have that. Not at that time; I did have one later but not at that period of my life, no.

> And about the final farewell from the family, Ruth: do you remember any final little things said, any loving things or perhaps even things about how you should behave?

Oh, `Be good, do as you're told' and that kind of thing. You know, `We'll write' and `You must write', et cetera. But in those days we were a very sedate family. There was not a lot of demonstrativeness, let us put it that way, I think. The love was there, all the same, but we didn't go round doing a lot of hugging and kissing, if you know what I mean.

> Right. And were there tears?

Oh yes, there were a few tears, but people were trying to be very cheerful and smiling and laughing and joking. You know the way people go on. But I do hate ....

> Ruth, I know it's a difficult memory, but you were saying about train stations even today.

Yes, going on any long distance. I hate to be seen off on a long journey. I know when we were returning to Australia, to emigrate, I wouldn't allow my family to come. We had said our goodbyes in the home. And I still prefer not to be seen off anywhere - trains, planes, anywhere. I prefer just to go (laughs).

> Yes, and that obviously connects back with that.

Yes, it's too emotional an experience, yes.

> You were saying that the journey to Liverpool, I think, was, you were very much on your own.

Yes. You see I had, I had just turned thirteen and starting with all this puberty business, and I found that that time at Liverpool a very strained time. I was very much on my own. I didn't know anyone. I was very shy. I s'pose I, now that I think about it, I was an extremely shy child and wasn't willing to discuss my feelings, I guess that would be the best way to describe it. But it was a difficult period. I guess once we got onto the ship things settled down. Yes, it was quite enjoyable, as a matter of fact, on the ship (laughs).

> I know you told me before that it was actually at Liverpool that your periods began and that had an effect then that continued afterwards.

Yes. I think that was, I was so wrapped up in myself I think I was fairly oblivious to a lot of the things that were going on around me, because I was, this very personal thing was happening to me which I hadn't really expected. I didn't think it would happen for another twelve months. Fourteen was the designated age in our family lore (chuckles). And this happened the whole of the time that we were at Liverpool. We were in a school all together on palliasses and I was trying to be very secretive and see to my own personal hygiene, which was a bit of a problem to me, and I just dare not tell anyone about it. I didn't know what to say, at any case. It had previously been discussed; I knew what to expect. But when it did happen it was a bit of a shock - it's the best way I can describe it.

> Yes, it must've been just very hard for a girl to be on her own at that time. And I think you were making the other point that does say something about the trauma involved.

Well, all the time on the ship I was counting the days expecting this to happen again, and nothing happened and nothing happened and nothing happened. And we belonged to the old school where you didn't get your hair wet, you didn't do this, that and the other thing at these monthly times, and in point of fact I didn't have another period for six months. So that was a bit of an anxiety for me as well. But I soon forgot about it, actually (laughs).

> Right, but it does I think say something about the kind of trauma that you were going through as a girl.

I think so. I think it was a very stressful period. Even though I wasn't talking about it I guess it was all there. I kept it inside.

Sure. Let's just go on to Liverpool again. Is there anything else that you feel you would like to record about the period in Liverpool that really stands out in your mind?

Not really. As I say, I was so ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

Identification. [This is an interview by Ed Stokes on] evacuee children [with] Ruth Hay. Tape one, side two.

Ruth, at Liverpool did you ever think of running home, of escaping?

No it didn't occur to me. One didn't do that kind of thing (laughs). That's something that's dogged me all my life - one doesn't run away. And it became a terrible thing when I was actually in Australia, the fact that well, we had run away.

That was the feeling in Australia, that you had deserted Britain?

Yes.

Would you like just to describe that now, while it's in your mind?

Well I guess, it was probably the other children at school, discussing all of this kind of thing and um .... I can't really put my hand to it but I know one of the things was I felt I should be doing my bit for my country, and as a school child there wasn't very much that you could do, really. I thought I would go and be a nurse, but I was too young when, you know. They didn't take nurses till you were eighteen.

That's interesting. There're so many convolutions in this, because the whole point of the evacuation was that it was doing the country a favour by kind of removing yourself as a mouth to feed and all that. But I guess it ...

I hadn't thought about it like that!

And the children weren't told that, or didn't see it. Let's go on to the *Batory*, Ruth. Do you have any recollections of actually the day you reached the ship, of boarding the ship?

Oh I can remember all being lined up on the wharf, and we waited a long time. You know, we were in this huge crowd. You see there were almost five hundred of us. And it was a long time waiting to get on board the ship, I can remember that quite clearly, and finally getting on board and being allocated to cabins. There were four of us in a cabin, four girls. We were in a group of, I think there were fourteen or fifteen of us with an escort, and we were all close together. You know, the cabins weren't scattered about. And it was very comfortable, as a matter of fact (laughs) - I quite enjoyed being on the ship.

Yes, it was certainly quite luxurious. Do you remember the troops boarding the ship that day?

No. I don't remember that. They must've been there, but I don't remember. I know we didn't, we were waiting to sail for what seemed like hours and hours and hours, and in point of fact we were all tucked up in bed. I think we didn't sail till midnight, and I seem to have a vague recollection of feeling the change, the movement of the ship, and us peering out of the porthole to see what was happening.

You could look out of the porthole, could you? It wasn't blocked off?

Yes we could see out of the portholes, mm.

Right. Do you remember the first day, I would imagine it would've been, when you actually saw the sea, when you realised you were at sea surrounded by a convoy?

It was very grey, and very bleak, and the sea was very cold looking (laughs), and all you could see was this great expanse of ocean, and ships everywhere. I understand that there were fifty ships in the convoy - I could be wrong there - but it was the largest convoy that had left Britain at the time. That was my, all my knowledge of it, yes.

As you remember that sight of the sea, was it something that prompted feelings of excitement, or of less cheerful thoughts?

Bit of apprehension, I think, wondering where we were going, what was happening. But it was quite exciting at the same time. It was an adventure. Yes, I don't remember bursting into tears or anything like that.

I gather you didn't suffer as other children did from seasickness.

No I've got a very strong stomach. I never get seasick; I love the sea. And I used to be one of the few children sometimes who would be in the dining room. In the early days I'd see perhaps five or six of us down there. Some children were terribly ill, but I could eat - no trouble at all! (Laughs)

(5.00) Did you help with other, perhaps younger children who were really seasick? And what did you do?

Oh I used to get involved with the little ones. Well, we had an awful lot of time on our hands. The escorts were marvellous. We had lots of singing, et cetera, but we also had a lot of time sitting on the deck. We always had to wear our kapok life jackets, which we used as seats because there weren't any seats there, and I had my little position on the deck, and one of the things that I used to do was read to children, little children, or tell them stories. There'd be a couple of other girls with me and we'd - because a lot of the very young children were very unhappy.

Right, and of course you were a thirteen-year-old going on.

That's right.

Did you, did the little children come to you, or did you gather them up?

Oh no, they would come. There was one particular child, I don't know what his name was, but he spent a lot of time, but he was a really, he developed later into a very cheeky little boy because he was a pet with the soldiers. We called him Samson. He was five. Five-year-old's a terrible time to be separated from the parents (laughs). But they would come and they would spend time with you and listen to what you had to say, your stories, and then they would go off and play again. But of course you know there wasn't a great deal of room.

Yes I know that. The ship was quite constrained until of course after Singapore. I think you've got quite strong memories of the food on the ship.

Yes. (Laughs) There was porridge for breakfast every morning, and lots of jam and bread (laughs). The food was quite alright. It was very plain but a lot of it - there was plenty of food. And every afternoon there was the most delicious cake, which to me was extra delicious because we never, as a family never had a great deal of cake. And this particular cake, to be perfectly honest I can still taste it, can you believe that? It had, it was very plain - it was probably what you would now call a plain Madeira cake - but it had this crunchy topping on it. I can see it (laughs). And I, as I say, I always had a good appetite. I never did without my food.

Did you get much pampering or treats from the Polish stewards in the dining room, or the crew generally?

I don't remember any special treats in the dining room, really. We had a, oh, a delightful lady who was the stewardess. She was very kind to us in the bedroom. And one of the special things was that she'd bring us special little cakes of soap, and I can remember the smell of that soap very clearly. It was just different from anything that we'd had, because I was accustomed to very plain soap (laughs) and I can remember hoarding two or three cakes of this special soap. You see the soap that we mainly washed with, it was salt water for baths and that was, you know, you couldn't get a lather in salt water and baths were not the most pleasant experience. But this, this other special soap was kept as a special treat. Yes.

Could you actually put into words the smell?

I don't know how I could, really. A particular scent. I would have to smell it again. I can remember as a younger child we had, we used to visit aunts in Cumberland, and they always used Palmolive soap and to this day I can smell that Palmolive soap. It has a special meaning to me, because it was a happy association, right? No, apart from the cake and the soap, food was quite ordinary, apart from the, an experience later on. I don't know whether you want to know about that.

Was this the story of the cockroaches?

Oh yes.

Tell us where this story begins. I think it was one of the ports.

(10.00)Well I found out only recently, when I was speaking to one of the other men, that the cockroaches came on board at Bombay. I find that a bit hard to believe because it's my, I really think that all ships have cockroaches. They're all round the heating system. But the cockroaches got into the food at some stage or other on the ship, and there was an outcry from the children. A lot of them went into revolt and they decided that they would have a petition about the bad food and the cockroaches. And I was horrified. I think I'm afraid I was rather a prig of a child, but you didn't complain. That was the rule, that you didn't complain. However, all of the girls in our group signed the petition except me. I wouldn't sign it. And our escort came along and she was very distressed that her girls could do such a thing as to complain. And it was rather a traumatic thing for me, because I told her `I didn't sign the form' but she wasn't interested (laughs).

So Little Goody Two-Shoes didn't ...

Little Goody Two-Shoes didn't come off very well (laughs). It didn't make any difference, I might add.

The cockroaches, Ruth, surely they didn't actually appear in the food at the table?

They were in the food, at the table. They were in the porridge.

Really?

If you ate porridge (sighs), if you were hungry enough to eat, well you just, you know. There weren't all that many. I mean, there might be one cockroach in a dish of porridge (laughs).

Ruth, do you remember the shortage of water on the ship?

Not particularly. I think we were conscious all the time not to waste anything, but then - there again, from my point of view I had always been brought up to a waste not, want not policy. We were a very frugal family. Nothing was ever wasted. And I think probably if there was a shortage I would've taken it in my stride. I would've just accepted that. Yes.

Right. Another sort of health or hygiene aspect: head lice. I think you believe they did get around the kids ...

Oh yes.

... and this affected you in Australia. Tell us about the connection there.

Well I was unaware when I was on the ship that I might've got head lice, and I was absolutely horrified, I was appalled, when we had been with our guardian - there was another girl and myself, a girl a wee bit younger than me, and we'd gone up to the mountains and we were with a most delightful lady, and we'd been there a little while when she had a visitor staying. And she was so ashamed of scratching her head in front of this visitor that she went to her bedroom, laid a petticoat on the bed and combed her hair. And unfortunately she discovered that she had head lice, which of course we children must've brought with us. So we then went through a very tortuous experience of having, of hanging over the baths and fine combing our hair and going through all kinds of things. I had my hair cut. I wore my hair as a boy for the

rest of my time there, in what we used to call an Eton crop. The other girl refused to have her hair cut off. It was quite long, onto her shoulders, and she wouldn't have it cut, and I'm afraid that she didn't stay with this family very long. But for my part I was horrified, because in England we were very conscious that this sort of thing mustn't happen, and every week when the hair was washed it was rinsed with vinegar and et cetera, or lots of preventative measures. And it was a terrible disgrace (laughs). I can laugh now (laughs).

> Yes I could imagine how you felt at the time. Thanks for telling us that, Ruth. Ruth, on the ship, homesickness: how big a problem was that for you?

I don't remember very much about it. I think that must be one of the things that I probably blotted out. I really and truly cannot remember very much. A lot of, there was a lot of crying in the beds. I know a lot of people did a lot of crying - you know, um ....

> Children your age, or younger children?

Children my age, yes. Well the four of us in our room were similar ages, from about eleven to thirteen; there were a lot of younger children round us and those .... It was mainly, you see, at night. During the day they did every effort they could to keep us busy. There was very little time when we were left to our own devices. Of course there had to be times when we were sitting on the deck to amuse ourselves - we had games like Pick-up Sticks and this kind of thing - but it's one of those kind of things that you do try and blot out, I think. I think my homesickness came later, in the later years when I'd been in Australia several years and started to wonder why, why all this was happening, you know?

> The escorts, as you were saying they did a lot in the day. Were they able, or your escort for example, to do much at night? For instance, did they, or did she come in and read bedtime stories, cuddle you in bed - do the sort of things that a parent does to settle a child for the night?

(15.00)I don't remember any of that. Possibly we were considered older girls. She may have done it in the other rooms, with the smaller girls, but I don't remember any real closeness of that kind at all. No, I don't.

> I gather from something else you said before, Ruth, that your relationship with the escort was adequate but not - I mean, you weren't overflowing with ...

No. That probably was my, it would be my own make-up, I imagine. I realise now, the more I think about it I realise that I was a rather withdrawn kind of person, let's put it that way. Right? I probably was shy and I didn't expect too much (laughs).

> Did you make friends with other children, other girls on the ship easily?

Yes. I had some very good friends, and I was very sorry to lose them, as a matter of fact. There were a couple of girls whom I would've very much liked to have had with me, to have lived, you know, to have shared when we .... But I wasn't lucky enough to get with them, for whatever reason. I don't know whether they were going to relatives or whatever.

> Right. A couple of other little things about the voyage. Church services and `crossing the line' - what do you remember of that?

Well we had church services very regularly, held in the dining room, as I remember. And a lot of singing (chuckles). 'Crossing the line', well we crossed the line three times. I only remember that they had a ceremony the first time - I don't think they had one any more after that- and I wasn't one of the children who was actually involved with being thrown in. I think it was mainly the servicemen and the crew who really got up to all the tricks, you know? But we were there as spectators, and we were given certificates to say that we'd crossed the line. Unfortunately I've lost mine.

> The sea itself, Ruth: do you have any recollection of the colours, the smells of being at sea? And how did they change as the voyage progressed?

Yes the sea changed, of course, considerably. We had times when it was so calm and so blue it was beautiful, and you'd just be skimming along. And one of the things I remember particularly were the flying fish. They were marvellous. We used to watch for flying fish a lot and sometimes the silly things landed on the deck! (Laughs) They'd be about six inches long. The weather, I don't honestly remember a great deal of very rough weather. It wasn't really bad in the Bay of Biscay. As I remember it, it was worse in the Australian Bight, where we had tremendous swells. It was really very heavy - I remember that very clearly - and it was quite dangerous to go out on deck. But of course it was exciting (laughs).

> And the colours of the sky, do you remember how they changed?

I don't remember particularly.

> Okay, well let's, we'll skate on over that. The ports that you went to, Ruth, we might just skate over Freetown and Cape Town ...

Freetown, yes.

> ... because I think your stronger memories are elsewhere. Bombay.

Bombay I thought was horrible. It smelled so foul, it was really dreadful, and it was so hot! You know, we didn't .... I found that I perspired a great deal. I had a, my school uniform dress was a kind of plain blue poplin, and when it was wet it became navy blue, and I remember very clearly it would be, the perspiration, it would be saturated in perspiration. And Bombay I disliked intensely.

> The smells of Bombay - were they only evident when you were in the port?

Oh no, I think we sort of, we knew we were getting there - worse, of course, in the port. I think it was because it was so still. Even at night it was so hot, and you couldn't sleep because it was too hot.

> That's an interesting aspect. Sleeping in the, once you're into the tropics, how easy was that? And were the cabins ventilated? Could you keep your portholes open or were you blacked out?

Well I seem to remember that we could have our portholes open, but it seems rather strange. I'm sure they should've been blacked out. They probably were blacked out when they were

closed and we had the lights on, but I think we must've been able to open them and have them open while, once the lights were out. That's a vague memory. I'm sure we had the portholes open.

> Anyway, going on to sleeping: how easy or difficult was sleeping in very hot weather?

Oh very - for me very difficult. I don't really like the very hot weather, and we'd just lie there and perspire (laughs) - nearly expire!

(20.00) Tossing and turning?

Yes.

> Right. Colombo I think was a happier experience.

Oh we loved Colombo. I was with a group, there were eight of us, and we were all taken off - I understand that all the children, the whole of the group of the children, were taken off in private parties. I'm not sure how many did as we did, but there were a group of eight of us and we were with a lady and a friend and we were taken out in two cars, and we were taken to the zoo. I think I've been to nearly all the zoos in all these places. And it was wonderful; we rode on the elephants and we had a marvellous time. And then we were taken back to the ship - now the ship was anchored out in the bay and you went on a little ferry - and in the evening we had, we were taken to their house, this marvellous house with servants, coloured servants, who all wore white gloves and served at the table, and we felt very special. And we had this very nice dinner - I can't remember what we ate - but when we were to leave we were given big jars of sweets or lollies and a great big hand of bananas. Not a hand of bananas, it was a stick of bananas, with a lot of hands on it. And we were very late getting back to the ship - it was about half past eight, quite dark - and I can remember all the other children leaning over the rails shouting `Here they are! They're coming! They're coming!' We were the last on board and there was a lot of anxiety. I think they were out to send a search party for us. But we had a wonderful day (chuckles) and in point of fact, that lady took all of our names and addresses and wrote to all of our parents.

> Mm, that's lovely, to say that you were safe. I was going to ask about letters. Could you write to your parents during the voyage?

Yes, I'm sure that we wrote to our parents and the letters were posted. You see, the expectation was that when we left Colombo, and I think that caused a lot of anxiety for our parents as well - not Colombo, I'm sorry, Cape Town - we posted letters at Cape Town and the expectation was that we would then be straight across to Fremantle. But of course we then went up to Bombay and Ceylon and Singapore. And we were ages from then getting to Fremantle. There was a lot of anxiety in that period of time. I can't remember how many letters I wrote but I know we did write letters, yes.

> That's most interesting about that deviating voyage and the time involved. Ruth, just quickly back to the bananas: would you have seen many bananas as a child in Sunderland?

Oh yes, we had bananas. We had fruit. As I say, we were .... (Chuckles) I've often thought about this still, and I think we were a family, we lived in genteel poverty (laughs). But as children we weren't deprived, really. We didn't have luxurious fruits but there were apples, there were oranges, there were pears, there were bananas. Bananas were one of the things that were very difficult during the war, and people had to queue for all the imported fruit. They were Fife's bananas, and they had little blue labels with `Fife's' written on. I don't know whether anyone else can recall that, but I think they came from the West Indies, the bananas.

> Yes, I'd imagine they would have. That's most interesting. The final port of call, Ruth, Singapore, I think you went to Raffles Girls School.

That's right.

> In these visits - of course, Singapore was very much the hub of the Empire - how much do you sense from what people said to you, from the general atmosphere you were surrounded by, that you were, in a sense, British children calling in at the ports of the Empire?

Oh we were accepted very graciously, and we were treated very well. Everyone - you know, the red carpet was rolled out in so many places. I imagine the boys went to Raffles Boys School but we went, as girls, to the girls school and we were entertained. It was really very lovely. I can remember this absolutely beautiful building, with a courtyard and arches and plenty of shade and shelter, and it was really very nice. And I assume now, thinking about it, that it must've been a private school or a well-to-do school. It was very charming.

> Singapore of course is hot, but despite the heat did you find a joy in the kind of, in the luxuriance of tropical vegetation?

Oh it was a very pleasant place, and really there was no feeling there of anxiety, at the time. Even though the soldiers who were on board were being discharged there, there really wasn't much thought of war there at all. It was quite exciting.

> I was going to ask you, finally, about the soldiers and their disembarkation. How did that affect the mood of the ship as you remember it on the voyage down to Australia?

(25.00)I think it made the voyage a lot quieter. It didn't really, as far as I was concerned, make a great deal of difference to me, because those poor men, they were confined in a very small space on that ship and it was really rather awful for them, I suppose.

> You were saying before - I had meant to ask you - about talking through some kind of a barrier.

Yes. Well you see, they were confined in the stern of the ship, and we would have been on what I s'pose you'd call the promenade deck, where we'd sit out. And you could speak to them. There was a fence; there was a (laughs) - I can't remember what it looked like but it was definitely a barrier, a very physical barrier. But we could, we were able to speak to them - those who wished to. I don't remember personally having many conversations with them.

> And was there no mingling at other points, where they were on guard duty around the ship or at other places?

I don't remember that. They may have been.

> Right. Well just finally on the voyage down to Australia, Ruth: as you approached Australia do you remember any lectures on Australia. And if you did, what sort of preconception did you build up of what Australia would be like?

I think, oh we were given, of course we were given lots of songs about Australia - kookaburras and kangaroos and all the rest of it - but (laughs) we were given talks about what to expect. But you know, what you're told about and what actually it is like, very often your imagination runs riot and it's not quite like that at all when you get there. I don't think I imagined that it could've have been so hot, even though I had mostly summer dresses. I mean, when I say `summer dresses' I had four dresses. The expectation wasn't there. As I remember now, officials came on board at Fremantle. We had a very nice time at Fremantle as well; we were taken ashore. Some children were leaving there but the rest of us who weren't were taken out, taken to the zoo. But they did come on board and we were spoken to and explained - you know, explanations et cetera.

> As you approached Sydney, where you were to disembark, was there a sense for you of excitement and wonder, or trepidation, or all of those things together?

I think all of those things together. There was some anxiety about where you were going and who you were going to live with, because you know, having had the experience once, actually, and my previous experience had been a happy one, so I really didn't feel frightened. I anticipated that I would have another happy experience, really. And it worked out that way - to start with. Yes, mm.

> Right. Just finally on the voyage, a very penultimate thing, Ruth: do you remember coming into Sydney in the day, or was it at night?

I think it must've been daytime [inaudible].

> Would you have any recollection, then, of standing on the deck and looking at the Harbour?

Oh we were on the deck, looking at the Harbour and seeing the Bridge. Oh that's very clear. I mean this Sydney Harbour, you know, that's sort of, that's imprinted on your mind forever!

> How did it seem to you?

Huge. Very large. But I can't remember even whether the sun was shining or not, to be quite honest.

> Ruth, when you arrived in Sydney children without relatives to go to I think went to the quarantine camp.

Yes.

What do you remember of that period?

Well we were there for about five days, and it was a really good time. I thoroughly enjoyed being there. We were looked after by the V-A-Ds of the Red Cross, and these were lovely young girls - you know young girls, they'd be about in their twenties, I suppose. And they were very kind, they took us down .... We'd go swimming down in the little bays, and they'd talk to us and oh it was - we were all goggle-eyed, you know, and we were taking it all in. And it was really great. I enjoyed being there.

Were you captured by the beauty of that part of Sydney Harbour?

Yes. It was, well it was very rocky (laughs). But it was the girls themselves that took us under their wing, that we were really wrapped up in all what they were doing. They were telling us about their boyfriends and going out and doing this, that and the other thing, and things they were going to wear and where they were going. It really .... So we thought `Oh this is great' (laughs).

Do you remember having either medical ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

Identification. [This is an interview by] Ed Stokes on evacuees [with] Ruth Hay. Tape two, side one.

Ruth, do you remember anything of medicals or IQ tests at the quarantine place?

Not at the quarantine place particularly. I s'pose there probably were. I can just remember the fun that we had there, to be quite honest. My understanding was we were just waiting there while they contacted the people who'd offered to take us. No.

Did you have any meeting with Mrs Kincome before you were to go to stay with her, or when you met her for the first time did you go straight home?

We went straight home, yes.

What were the first impressions?

Oh she was .... She always dressed in black and she wore - I don't know why - and a black hat, and a very plump lady, very pleasant. She didn't have her daughters with her. She had two daughters; one was married and one was going to be married the following February, and she was still at home, Margot. And we went up on the train, and then on the taxi, to this very nice house - typical house up in the mountains, with a lovely garden and lots of fruit trees. And her husband was away at the time. He was in the Merchant Navy; he was with the British India Steam Company, which incidentally my uncle was in the same company, but

from the English end. Mr Kincome was - Captain Kincome, I should say, was an Englishman. But I didn't meet him for many years.

Right. I think a couple of other girls from the *Batory* went with you.

Yes. There was another girl, and I've been rather sad that I've lost trace, totally trace of that girl. She was a bit younger than me. Her name was Violet Holmes, and she came from Gateshead, which was a few miles away from my home town. But Violet and I weren't really compatible, unfortunately. I went up to the Grammar, to the high school at Katoomba, and she was kept at the primary school, in sixth class, in Wentworth Falls. We were only there together for about three months, altogether.

And she left?

And she left. I think it was the episode of the head lice that caused her to leave (chuckles).

Right. Was there a third girl, or was it just the two of you?

No just the two of us.

Right. How easy or perhaps hard was it to fit into the Kincomes' family?

Well I think it was really fairly easy. They were all very kind. I felt very young, I must admit. I felt, I was thirteen, but with, both with the family and with the other girls at school I felt a very young thirteen. Everyone else seemed so much more mature. Mrs Kincome's younger daughter was sixteen and she was married, which was fairly common in those days, and she was living away from home. But the other daughter, Margot, she was nineteen and she was a delightful girl - very nice. And we just seemed to fit in, somehow or other. By the time you got established at school, and I'd help around the house and be round the garden and all of this kind of thing.

The housework - was that just the kind of everyday thing that you would naturally help out with, or were you in any way used as cheap household labour?

(5.00) Oh I don't think that we were used like that. I think it was just normal housework that has to be done. We'd go out - there was always the washing-up and sweeping up and that kind of thing. As I remember, when Margot was there she used to do most of the housework, because she was at home all day. She didn't go out to work, whereas we were at school. But after she left, then I did more round about the house. But it was just the normal kind of work that a girl would do for a family, yes. Oh I don't, I didn't feel put on, let's put it that way.

How much were you part of the family in terms of doing things together?

What sort of things did we do? (Chuckles) We didn't go out a great deal. Mrs Kincome often used to go down to Sydney. Now she had family in Sydney, in Coogee, and she'd go down to Sydney and we'd go down for the day. I would have a day off school and I think possibly the authorities frowned on that, because we did this reasonably often. And we'd go down on the train. And I was just as a daughter - I was really treated as her own daughter. I

couldn't say anything else. And we'd have a day out. She would go to Anthony Horderns, which is gone now, and she would do her ordering for months. Things were bought by the dozen and the half dozen. And then we would go down to visit the family, at Coogee. And then we'd come home again on the train, the `Fish' train it was called. That was simply because the driver, I believe, the guard and the conductor all had names of fishes. That's how it got its name originally.

That's a funny memory.

Yes but this was, I was just treated as one of the family.

The discipline of the house - would you describe that as relaxed, strict, severe?

Oh relaxed. I don't honestly remember any discipline, really - apart from the episode of the head lice. That was a problem.

What about the house itself and the area that the house was in? Very different to England, of course. How do you remember that?

Well we were a mile from the railway station. Wentworth Falls has hardly changed - I was there quite recently and it hasn't changed very much; it's a really beautiful country spot - and we were .... You know, oh, the street has changed, there are more houses up there now, but it was a beautiful detached brick house, with a large garden and an orchard - very spacious. But just gravel roads. There wasn't any kerbing and guttering, whereas in England everything is laid out and formal. I don't think there are any places in England like there are in Australia, like that. Everything's so much built up over there; even the country areas in England are formal.

Did you find that more informal, yet to be built, aspect of Australia - was that something that you liked, or could've done without?

I didn't mind it; it didn't worry me. The things that bothered me mainly were flies, the heat, the mosquitoes, and the fear of snakes, because we were quite close to the bush. We were the last house. And I saw my first snake up there, which was a big black snake. So I kept out of the bush quite a lot on that account. I didn't go wandering too far. But you see these were things that we weren't really accustomed to.

Could you tell us a little bit more about that? I think that's an interesting aspect - the flies and mosquitoes.

Yes, the other part of it. Well I, I'm still allergic to mosquitoes: they bite me when they don't bite someone else. But the thing that really struck me that was so different was the toilet system. (Laughs) I'd been accustomed to proper flush toilets, et cetera, and whereas Mrs Kincome had a septic system, which was good, I could not get used to most .... Practically all the other houses round about had the old pan system, and I found that awful! (Laughs)

That's interesting, that in England you'd - in Sunderland they hadn't, they were all flush toilets?

I hadn't experienced .... Oh no, oh Sunderland was a big town - yes. There were only very few places in the very isolated country in England who didn't have proper toilet system, to my knowledge.

> If we could draw all that together, I don't know if you could picture it but it might be evocative if you could - a hot summer's day, the toilet ....

The flies, and the maggots - oh unbearable! (Laughs)

> Could you go further, or is that ...?

(10.00)I disliked it intensely. Actually the heat up there was not as unpleasant as the heat on the coast. It was a fairly dry heat. But I found that I didn't have as much energy - you know, when sports days would come along and I didn't have the energy to run around in the school that the other kids seemed to do - and I'm sure it was just the change of climate. Or maybe it's my constitution; I don't know. But I'm, disliked that very much.

> Right, that's most interesting. And of course you were away from the beaches up there so you didn't get that benefit. Do you have any other memories of the bush aspect, of how that was different, how perhaps it seemed strange or threatening?

No it didn't really threaten, apart from the keeping away from really getting into the bush to get, you know in case of the snakes. It was a mile to walk down to get to the station, and we'd walk through the edge of the bush to go to school. I found that you were less likely to miss the train, the further away from the station that you lived (chuckles).

> Do you remember the trees and the birds, that are quite different? Did they strike you at the time?

Oh yes. Well, totally different. I found sometimes, the bush as such I found to be very monotonous, because you just - it was so dense, you see, and you couldn't always go wandering through the undergrowth because it was so dense. You had to really be careful. There was a very nice area at the other side of the town, but you wouldn't go there alone, where they had glow-worms. It was a cave with glow-worms, and I sometimes would go with a couple of the other schoolmates. On a Saturday we'd go and see if we could see these, but that wasn't very often and ...

> Could you tell us any more about those glow-worm escapades?

Yes, that was just one rather nice thing about the place. I don't know whether the area would still be there or whether it'll be built up now. But the other thing that I remember, we moved - Mrs Kincome moved house several times while I was there. She was a lady who liked to move. We left the original house and went to stay on the other side of the railway, and while we were there, there was a very large bushfire. I remember this. We were packed up on the veranda waiting and waiting, with all our gear, in case the fire got too close. But it was near the reservoir at Wentworth Falls and it was supposed to be on a three-mile front, and all the rumours at the time were that there was (chuckles) sabotage! I don't know why.

> Related to the war?

Related to the war, yes! We were very much country bumpkins up there (chuckles).

That must, I mean, a bushfire being close to you ....

It was very frightening. It was really frightening. 'Cause I hadn't seen anything like that before. Two or three houses along the end of the road - it was a fairly long, sparse area - were burnt out, and as I say we were ready packed up to flee. But they got the fire under control before it got to us.

Ruth, just finally on the bush, do you remember - but being careful not to perhaps confuse it with your later life in Australia, but of that time then - do you remember smells or colours that you associated with the bush?

I would say mainly the, what you think about is the difference in the trees. You know in Britain everything is so green, and it's a more greyish-green here - although the one thing that I remember, we used to go out picking the young pink tips from the gum trees, and we always picked a bunch of those and we had them hanging in the kitchen; they'd be hung from the ceiling. And the idea was to keep the flies away. Now I don't know whether it really worked or not. You see we had flyscreen doors - that was something else I'd never been accustomed to - (pauses) oh yes and in this house there were bare boards on the kitchen floor, which was quite alright because everybody else had that kind of thing, but this was an interim place while we were waiting to move on. As I say, we did a bit of moving around.

That's interesting about the red tips. I'd never heard that.

No I haven't, I haven't heard any, you know I haven't heard it mentioned since, but we always did it. Yes.

You were saying, Ruth, that you were a keen reader. Do you remember reading books while you were in Australia about Australia, and did it give you, did it open your eyes to Australian life?

Not particularly. We had Australian history, certainly, and I read that quite a lot at school, but what I'm reading now is quite different from what we were given at school to read. It was fairly simple, I suppose, and they glossed over a lot of the early start of Australia. No I didn't really find out much about the rest of Australia, let's put it that way.

(15.00) Well let's just move on to some other things, because .... But that was a very interesting diversion, into the bush. Just back to Mrs Kincome. You were telling us a bit about the house you lived in. Do you remember any other things about the domestic set-up of the house - baths, showers, kitchens, that sort of thing - as it compared to England?

Oh yes - one very important thing: we had tank water. There was no town water, and we did have the septic tank, and we had to be very careful of water. And also Mrs Kincome did have an electric stove but she didn't ever use it. We always used an open, a black stove, for which we used to go out and collect wood. That was the early forays into the bush, were to get wood, to start the fire. And I think she must've used coal, actually - I think it was coal - but you always had to have the wood to start it. But then there was the laundry outside. That was

totally different from Britain. And (chuckles) talking about, there was a beautiful bathroom but we never ever did have a bath as such, or a shower as such. A shower .... You had a basin of water - this was to conserve water - and you stood in the bath. You washed yourself - you soaped yourself and then you tipped the basin of water over yourself, and that was how you got your shower. And it, you know - I get so angry when they talk about English people being dirty and only washing once a week, having a bath once a week (chuckles) and I remember the early days in the bush!

Yes. The heat - did you have a fridge or did you have ...

Oh yes.

... but a gas, electric, or an old cool safe?

It was an electric. Now Mrs Kincome - I am talking about her quite freely, but she was a very, they were in very comfortable circumstances. She had a very good position. And she had everything, everything that you would like, all mod cons. When I moved down to Sydney they had a fridge but it was a kerosene fridge. We didn't have .... She had on the veranda an icebox but it was never used. But I can remember neighbours getting the blocks of ice, the ice cart coming around, and I remember that very well. And we had, we did have a drip safe at one place that we stayed at, and that was something very novel to me. One thing, I'll tell you one of the things that I didn't like was the smell of the meat. Meat always - I couldn't bear the smell of raw meat when I lived in the country. Whether it was that it was very fresh or what I don't know. You don't get that now; you don't - possibly because of better refrigeration. But that was one of the things that I disliked intensely.

Different to England. Ruth, let's just if we can move on to the other two families - it's, and keep it separate from other things such as school, which I'll come to. After a couple of years, I think at the end of '42, or a year and a half, you left Mrs Kincome's home. Had it been a good time, and why did you go?

To leave Mrs Kincome? Well Mrs Kincome suffered from asthma, and I really think that that was the reason for my leaving. I was never .... If I was told I can't remember. There again I think it might be a case of blocking out. I know I was desperately unhappy when I was told I was leaving and going down to Sydney, but she was a sick lady. She was very ill before, just before I left her - I remember that, the doctor coming, and really being quite ill.

Well of course the war had gone on. She quite possibly had not realised you'd been there ....

Well I had been with her over two years, and she was really - it was really great, the pair, just the two of us in the house together, because her daughters were both married and away. And she had two dogs - I forgot about that: a great dane, who had been the Grand Champion of Australia - that's just a little sideline - and a miniature French poodle.

Seems an odd combination. The family you went to next, a Jewish family, the Israels ...

Yes.

... had you met them before you left Mrs Kincome?

No.

How was that done? Did you have any contact with the CORB or welfare people?

No, I think that the welfare people must've collected me and taken me to them. D'you know, I can't remember that first introduction? I cannot remember.

Mm, that's interesting, and possibly there is a bit of blocking out there ...

I'm sure that there was. I had um - yes.

Well let's go on to them anyway. You don't realise how it was arranged, but you ...

(20.00) Well they were very kind to me. Mrs Israel was, I think she was about twenty-eight - she was quite young, you see. And they had been wanting a baby, and they'd been married quite a few years, and they had asked .... They said that they would take an evacuee but they were thinking of a small child and they got an unhappy fifteen-year-old (chuckles). But she was wonderful. She was very kind. She was a very fun lady, Mrs Israel. She was not Jewish herself. And Mr Israel was a bit more reserved, and I think he could've done without this child, girl in the house. Because they lived, they had a pharmacy and they lived in a flat behind the pharmacy. And of course by this time they had their own baby. And I helped around the place; I used to do what I could for them.

Was there much room in the house, in the flat?

Well it was a big enough flat, but they didn't really have room for me. I had a, my bed .... They had a nice veranda, and I had the bed on the veranda. But I think, really and truly I think I was there just as an interim period. I was with them for six months, and I don't think it was ever intended to be a long period. Not, I s'pose, that anyone expected us to be there for very long.

Given that it was an interim period we might perhaps move over it a little bit more quickly, but could I just ask you: were there any - excluding the fact of your own unhappiness, having left the Kincomes - were there any extremely bad or extremely good things about being with, I think it was, Auntie Pat and Uncle Cec?

That's right. I was given pocket-money every week. She wanted me to look nice, and as I say I was not the most, oh, dainty girl. I was quite, a bit clumsy, actually. But she tried her best with me. And he let me help in the shop. And he said, he was willing to put me through college to become a pharmacist, because I became, I was very interested. And I really loved school - I was very happy at school, I enjoyed school - and he was saying that was what he would do. And you know, to me it came as a big shock when it came time to leave. And there again I'm not sure of the circumstances. What I do remember is that she did have a miscarriage and she was quite sick, and I think that's one of the reasons why I left - that he decided she had enough to cope with, without a strange person in the house.

Sure. So that was a bit of bad luck, in a way, having a double bout of illness there.

Yes.

You were saying you felt very anxious when you left. Did you know where you were going?

No I had no idea. I think that what they did was try and find a family in the area, so that I wouldn't be disrupted at school again, because I carried .... I'd, by this time, having come down to Sydney I went to St George Girls High School at Kogarah, and I was moved to a family, oh, at Oatley, which was two stations further down the line but I could still attend the same school. And this family was an English lady who had married an Australian soldier after the first world war. They had three children - two sons and a daughter - who were all older than me. The eldest boy was in the army; the younger boy was doing an apprenticeship but he went into the air force while I was staying with them; and their daughter, Gwen, worked in an office and she married while I was with them, as well.

Looking at both these changes that happened to you, Ruth, do you think in retrospect that the welfare people who were liaising in Australia for CORB, that they gave you enough support, guidance? Would it've been better, do you think, if you'd had more explanations from them? Or wouldn't it've made any difference?

I think it would, it would've been very much better. I honestly don't remember having conversations with any of the welfare people. I can remember once at school in Katoomba, the headmaster getting me into his office and being spoken to there, but to be quite honest I don't remember any contact with anyone else at all.

So there was no - nobody ever came and said `Look we have a problem here. Here are the possible solutions. How do you feel about it'?

Not to my recollection at all. Whether it did happen and I've blotted it out - I mean, that's a possibility, I'm aware of that. But I do not remember, no.

Do you think it would've been easier if you'd been more outspoken yourself, or not?

Possibly. But I was so terribly anxious not to put a foot wrong, I think I probably kept quiet when perhaps I should've been more outspoken. I was afraid to speak up in case I did the wrong, said the wrong thing. And perhaps that was something that went against me, in that regard. I don't know.

(25.00) Well that's very understandable, if you did react that way.

Ruth, just finally, the period with the Van Epens. The atmosphere of that home, in terms of the things you did together, whether there was closeness and intimacy, the kind of discipline of the house - how do you remember that?

This was a stricter household altogether. They were a Methodist family, and with each of the families I was with I was to attend my own church but I also attended with them. Mrs Van Epen went out to work. Everyone had their work to do, but it wasn't excessive. I was at school and I used to have a lot of homework, because I was at this stage, I was in, I was studying again for another exam, hoping to go on to get my Higher School Certificate and go on to university - still hoping for that. However, I had to leave at the end of the year and go out to work. This was not as relaxed a household as others that I had been in. Mr Van Epen had been badly injured in the war, and he was a fairly nervous man. He was a schoolteacher, who taught at Blackfriars Correspondence School. Because of his wartime experience he found it difficult and .... But he was a kind man - not that .... I don't suppose I had a great deal to say to him, but he was a very gentle person. I was very fond of Gwen, the daughter. I loved Gwen. She was kind to me; she used to make me dresses, she used to sew .... I can remember, I can remember in great detail dresses that she made for me - to this day I can see the colour and the stitching (chuckles) and I feel a bit sad that I haven't been in contact with her for quite some time now.

> Ruth, a different topic - school. Without going into too much detail, was school generally a positive or not so good experience for you?

Oh I loved school. I was very happy at school. Except when I first went up to Katoomba High School - I ran into a bit of strife there, because I ...

> With children, or ...?

With the children - oh not with the teachers or anyone like that - I think because I was still a pretty staid English-type person (chuckles) and this is when I first came across the expression `You bloody Pommie bastard', you know? And it's a bit hard for a thirteen-year-old to be called that, without any real reason to her knowledge. But at the time I think Australians were feeling very bad about Mr Churchill, you see - letting Australia go, et cetera. And it was, I put up with it for quite a while until one day Mrs Kincome found out I was not very happy and I had to explain to her what was wrong, and she said `You turn round and tell them that you're proud to be British'. And it was surprising how that, they stopped tormenting me then. But apart from that, no, I en.... School days were very happy; I enjoyed school.

> Well you did later go out to work. We might just treat this fairly briefly, because time's getting on. Just tell us what you did.

Well I went to work at the Ministry of Transport, which was in an office in the APA Building in Martin Place. And I was the records clerk, and I took the place of a young man - Ray Wheat, his name was, and he was going into the navy, I think, or the army. And there was another lass, who took the place of another records clerk, another young man. And we became very good friends - Gwenda Eastman was her name, and I had contact with her not so long ago. We've remained friends over the years. I have a few friends whom I made when I was a schoolgirl, that I'm still in contact with, yes. I enjoyed the job but I didn't really want to work in an office. That wasn't my idea at all. However, I went to night classes to learn typing and shorthand. The typing was fine but not the shorthand - because my heart wasn't in it, I think. But I decided that I should be doing something ...

END TAPE 2, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B

> Identification. [This is an interview] by Ed Stokes on evacuees [with] Ruth Hay, tape two, side two.
>
> The matron.

(Laughs) Yes. She said `Come back six weeks before your eighteenth birthday'. Well, that was just at the time when the war in Europe had finished, so I was then in hopes that I would soon be returning to England. This was in 1945.

> Well I was going to go on to that, but just before the end of the war - during the war, during these years adding up, how much had your family in England remained in your thoughts?

Oh constantly. I was, I wrote - you know, we had correspondence all of the time. Sometimes there would be long gaps without letters. But there was an effort to keep in touch all the time. I must admit, though, that, you know the subject of the war wasn't mentioned in the letters. This was just general family matters that were going on. My mother had taken the children out to a tiny little cottage in the country, and she had another baby during the war, which unfortunately died. So I used to, had a spell of knitting for this new baby - I don't think it ever, ever got the clothes I knitted! But we used to write regularly.

> Your homesickness and feelings for the family, did that ease and get less over time, or stay the same or perhaps get greater?

No, in fact it got worse. I think I was more homesick as time went on than I had been in the beginning. In fact, I had very, very .... With all the moves I had really rather bad feelings, you know. I started thinking there was something wrong with me, and that was why I was being sent away all the time. And that was not a very good outcome of all of this.

> Was that a thing that you thought about just occasionally and not too seriously, or did it go fairly deep?

Oh it went fairly deep. It wasn't something that I ever spoke to anyone about, because there again I guess I was fairly reticent. Part way through our time there - I s'pose it would be in the last year - one of the sons married and his daughter was to come and live in the house, which was making a really crowded situation. And Mrs Van Epen visited a lady whom I had met at school, actually - she was one of the examining supervisors - and she asked her would she take me, but of course she couldn't. And that did not make me feel very good at all (chuckles). So that I was very anxious to return to England. I was really keen to get home.

> Ruth, I do know you got engaged to a sailor. Was this connected in any way with these feelings, and could you tell us how the affair began?

Well in 1945, when the war was cooling off in Britain, they sent out their - it was called the British Pacific Fleet. And they were very popular in Australia. There had, there'd been a lot of Americans out here and they weren't as popular as they could be. We attended a rally - it must've been some kind of a religious rally - at the Sydney Town Hall, and I was with Mrs Van Epen and her daughter, and on the same aisle that we were sitting, two English sailors

were there. Now a lot of Australians were inviting the British sailors into their homes, which Mrs Van Epen did, and they were two boys - they would be nineteen, I think they were, eighteen and nineteen: I know I was seventeen at the time - and I became very attached to one of them and we got engaged (chuckles). However, it didn't last very long. It was just one of those things, I think.

Was it related, do you think, to these feelings of rejection?

(5.00) I should think it probably was. It was somebody of my own. I think that that probably had a lot, looking at it from this point I would say that it was, because it was alright while he was there but when he went away and started doing his own thing, religiously, I realised that that was not for me. So unfortunately the engagement was broken off.

Okay. Well thank you for telling us that. Well let's go on to getting back to England. It seems that at the end of the war it was quite clear that the people who mattered were your own parents, not the fosters. The decision to go home I think came after there'd been some talk of your mother migrating.

Yes. Mother decided that the family had been split up for such a long time it would be good if they could come to Australia and be a family together. However, she discovered that my two brothers, who were teenagers by this time, were not allowed to leave Britain, because of national service. All the young men had to do that; it was compulsory. So it was a case of I should go back home to Britain to them, and I was very happy to do so. I would've been happy if they'd come to Australia; I didn't mind as long as we were back together as a family again.

The preparations to leave: do you remember much of that - organising tickets and so on, or was that mostly done for you?

That was done. It was all arranged. There were children being put on, I think, every boat that was going back to Europe they were fitting a few children in. We were one of the la..., I was with one of the last groups to go. There were eighty of us on board the *Nestor* and it was a slow trip.

Just before we go on the *Nestor*, Ruth: did you have any final farewells, any .... For instance, did you see Mrs Kincome again, that sort of thing?

I saw Mrs Kincome shortly beforehand, at her daughter's twenty-first birthday, and her husband had returned home and he was a sick man. But it was lovely to see her again. I don't remember if I saw the Israels; I probably did but I don't remember anything special about it. All I can remember is being very happy to get ready to go back to my family! (Chuckles)

Well as you steamed out of Sydney obviously your thoughts were ahead, not back, were they?

Very excited - very excited to be going back. It wasn't Australia that I wanted to leave so much as that I wanted to be back with my own family, yes.

Well we might just skate over the voyage, unless there's anything particularly significant you ...?

Not really - nothing. Nothing important. One of the girls got herself involved with one of the sailors, and it was just one of these innocent things and talking, you know. But they were very strict on the ship and she was confined to her cabin and he was put in the brig or whatever it is they do to sailors. And when I think about it now, how, they were very anxious that nothing happened - you know, there was no damage to any of the children. And we used to hang over the railings - you don't call it the railings, you know - and lower a bucket down with notes to this girl, and really try to protect her. It was really sad. She was put off the ship at Cape Town, as a matter of fact, and she was put onto the *Andes*, which was also carrying evacuees back home again.

She was a CORB girl?

Yes. She'd come from Glasgow. I wrote to her a couple of times but then a'course it fizzled out, as these things do.

You might remember being one of the oldest children - just quickly - on the voyage out. Did the authorities, the escorts, rather stamp on boy-girl relationships, or not?

Well they may've done, but I was really quite isolated from that - I don't remember. I wasn't into the, quite into the boy-girl scene at that stage. I had my little clique of girlfriends and I don't remember much about the boys at all.

Well let's just talk about Britain. You get back and you berthed, I know, in Liverpool before we meet your family. What were your first impressions of Britain?

Oh dull and grey (chuckles) and dingy - so different from Australia. Of course it was February, and the weather was very bad: it was wet and of course, there were great gaps everywhere from the bombing. The place was a mess, actually - yes.

The bombing - did that strike you as more severe than you'd believed it was, or what?

(10.00) Well I s'pose I really hadn't been able to form any opinion, but I got an awful shock when I got back to Sunderland, to see whole streets of houses demolished. They had what they called landmines, and whole blocks - ten houses demolished with one landmine. And it really was in a bad way. It was a mess.

The people who'd been through all this, the British people, how did they seem to you?

Well they were very busy getting on with their own jobs. They were very busy just living, I guess. Everyone seemed, they were all quite good to me, except when I started work I found that very quickly outside my family circle I didn't tell anyone I'd been to Australia, because I soon found out that they didn't want to know. I was, you know, the lucky one. I had run away while they had to stay and suffer. And I had to put up with a bit of that so you just didn't talk about it - you just, I just shut it off, actually. I think that's part of the business why there's quite a lot I can't remember now.

Just building on that story, Ruth: just tell us, although the name may be wrong we think this is a story of Mary Williams.

Marie, yes, Marie Williams. I think that was the name. Now this was a girl who was in the hospital, training, when I started - she was so much ahead of me. And I used to hear some, one of the seniors on the ward that I worked always complaining about her, saying `Oh, she's always grizzling and saying "Nobody understands me"', and I actually did hear this once myself. And so I very quickly did not talk about what had happened to me over the previous six years. I never mentioned the fact that I had been in Australia; I kept very quiet.

And I understand that Marie Williams had lost all her family?

I understood that, that she had been away all this time and her family - there'd been the bombing and she'd lost her family. Now - but this I'm, you know, I can't swear to the name exactly.

Right. Well let's move on to actually getting home - your family. Before you got home could you visualise, could you see a picture in your mind's eye of your mother and father, or not?

Oh yes, I could picture my parents, because I had had a photograph from them, and they hadn't really changed at all. They really hadn't changed. The big changes were in my brothers and sister. My sister was four and a half the last time I saw her, and now this time she was, her next bir.... It was her birthday the following week and she was eleven, and there are big changes, you see, then. And the two brothers were teenagers. My elder brother had left school and he was starting an apprenticeship. And they were the biggest changes. The problem was where I was to live, because I had lived with my aunt until the war started, and she wanted me to go back and live with her again but my mother wanted me back at home, living with her. There'd been some other family dissent about me living at, you know, with my aunt - other sisters-in-law. And it was a problem.

So what was the solution?

Well, I had to work out a solution, because I didn't really want to hurt either of them, and it was a real problem to me. But I knew - my mother did open her heart to me and I knew she felt very badly about me being away. And my solution was to go and do my nursing training as soon as I possibly could, because in those days we had to live in the nurses' home, and I would spend my one night off with my mother but I would go during the day and see my aunt. So that that was how I worked it out. And it seemed to be reasonably satisfactory (chuckles).

Just stepping back a moment, the actual first meeting with your parents - do you remember that and how ...

(15.00) Oh very well (chuckles). Well what happened that, we were kept at Liverpool for a couple of days until they organised trains and meeting times, et cetera. And the understanding was that the train didn't go to Sunderland, that it went direct to Newcastle. And my parents and my brothers and sister had to go to Newcastle and meet me at the station. However, the train went through Sunderland first, and all of my luggage, which was in the guard's van, was put off on Sunderland station. And I was hanging out of the window

wondering what on earth I was to do, because here was my luggage dumped on the platform and I was scared it would be lost, but I had to go through to Newcastle because the family were there. So we got to Newcastle station, then we all piled in the train and came back to Sunderland station. And of course when we got back the luggage was sitting there - no-one had touched it. People were very honest in those days (chuckles). But my, you know, meeting the family - everybody, the kids grown up in .... My sister tells me that her recollection of me was a big red hat that I had; it was a maroo.... Everyone wore hats in those days, and it was a maroon-coloured hat with a very large brim, which was very fashionable (chuckles) in Australia. And that's how my sister says she remembers me. All she can think about is the big red hat.

Was there much open emotion, or was it rather restrained as when you went away?

Oh no, there was quite a lot of emotion. And that went on for quite a while, actually, yes. My mother, really it, she took a long time to get over it.

You were saying that .... Well you returned the gold watch, I think.

Oh yes (chuckles). Now, talking of the gold watch, I wore that all of the time - and then it stopped. And I was very distressed about my watch stopping, and it was while I was with Mr and Mrs Van Epen. However, Mr Van Epen said `We'll see if we can fix it up'. So they opened the back and it was absolutely clogged with dust, and that's all that was wrong with it. They got a feather that they dipped in oil, and they cleaned all the dust out of the back of this watch, and it went again, as good as gold! So of course it was given back to Mum, the minute I got back. But I did hang onto my little horseshoe. I've still got that (chuckles).

That's very interesting, the watch. No doubt that fine dust of Australia.

Yes.

How deeply had it all affected your mother?

Oh she was badly affected by the war, really - psychologically, I should say, more than anything else. She'd taken the children into the country - very isolated spot. My father stayed in Sunderland because of his job, lived with my aunt. The house two doors from ours was totally demolished with a bomb, and of course all the houses in the street were badly damaged. They had to be repaired. But what happened, houses were requisitioned. Any house that was empty that didn't have a family in it was taken over by the Council, to put bombed-out people in it. And Mother could not get back home into her own home, and she was stuck out in the wilds with the children, and it was difficult for them to get to school. When I say out in the wilds, they were way up a hillside in Cumberland.

So in addition to that there was your problem in Australia? She had a double burden.

She had a double burden. She was worried about what was happening to me, and the family was split up, you see. And then she had a baby, which she lost when it was twenty months old, and that really, she was very disturbed. She's fine now (chuckles).

> Just moving on: I think the first winter was very severe. What do you remember of that?

Oh it was an extremely cold winter. One of the things .... We all had coal fires in those days - they were the open fires - and there was very little coal to be had. Now I'm not sure if there'd been a miners' strike, or there was a lot of trouble. But people were g.... There was snow in the streets, there was ice everywhere, and people were going down .... We were close to the coast, you see, and they were going down to the beach; there were outcrops of coal - it was a big mining area - on the sand, on the beach, and people, you could see people flocking down to the beach with sacks, with sledges on the snow, with bicycles, getting sacks, trying to get coal, because they were, it was so cold. And it was a very dangerous practice because sometimes they picked up black stones, which exploded, but they did it nevertheless.

> And rationing: do you remember rationing still affecting life and do you ever remember any feeling of concern over whether you were almost eating too much - that kind of thing?

No rationing .... It's surprising, rationing was still going on but at that stage bread was not rationed. And I put on a stone in weight that first month that I was home, because of the change in diet. We ate a lot of bread, a lot of buns and things like that, even though there wasn't much butter - two ounces of butter, two ounces of marge. But we managed. No-one really .... You weren't really starving; no-one was starving. Bread rationing came later. That happened I think because people like us were returning or the troops were returning, and things got tighter after the war, that rationing got tighter then.

> Just finally on the family, Ruth: did you find it easy to talk about Australia and about what they'd been through? Could you regain the kind of closeness of family life easily, or not?

No. I couldn't really. It was very difficult to t.... I used to talk about what had gone on over there, but there was always the restraint, there was always the feeling that I had been living it up in the lap of luxury while the .... I shouldn't say this particularly with the close family, but you just didn't talk about it. I found that I soon just stopped talking about Australia altogether.

> Isn't that strange, although in a way although you'd had the physical luxuries you'd been the ones who'd been so cut off.

(20.00)Yes. Well I suppose for a long time I used to think `Oh,' you know, `that was terrible', but it wasn't really (chuckles) when you think, when you look around and see what other people went through. We escaped very lightly, actually.

> Right. How had CORB changed you, do you think? And overall, had it been a good thing for you or a bad thing?

I don't think it was a particularly good thing. A bad thing - well there was a lot of heartache. I had a lot of .... It was a real struggle for me, for quite a while, to come to terms with meeting up with the family again, having been totally estranged from them. I remember - well this is, and you can put this in if you want to or not - we did some psychological work when I was here in Newcastle working with staff development. And one of the psychologists,

one of the things was arranging yourself in your family. I don't know whether you've done anything like this. And in the classes I was the training officer, and I had all of these nursing staff who were changing over from one program to another. And we did a lot of this kind of thing. And they had to arrange themselves - you know: mother, father, where the children came, who came where - and it was very interesting how it all worked out. I never ever told anybody about myself but what I did think at the time was, my family were all arranged (pauses) - it was a feeling of separation, a cut-off, which we got over, but it took time. It took quite some time to get over.

> Could you just describe again - I know it's difficult, Ruth - but that image, the Newcastle image, a group and the window.

As I say, arranging yourself with your parents and the rest of the family, the children, my family seemed to be a group together. My sister was very close to my father; I never really got close to my father again. I was outside the window, looking in. And I was a bit sad about that, because I never felt that I got really close to my father ever again. Perhaps I was never really close to him at all, because I'd lived with my aunt.

> Right, thank you for saying that. I know it was difficult. Ruth, if you'd known how long the war would go, do you think your mother would've sent you?

I don't think so. She would say now, she would say no. She's said many times `I've regretted sending you away. I wish I hadn't done it. It changed all our lives.' She said that so many times. And it took her, it took her a long time to stop talking about it.

> If you'd been a parent in such a situation .... You have been a parent. When your children were younger, how would you have reacted?

Oh I would never separate myself from my children. There's no way in the world. And I just think now, I look at my grandchildren and I think `How could they have borne it - really - to separate?'. You know? Because I, I've got two grandsons, eight and five, and I just cannot imagine them being separated from their parents. I really can't.

> Looking back on CORB, on its establishment and how it operated, do you see any fault in officialdom in setting the scheme up, or do you believe it was well intentioned? Sorry, that's not clear. It was well intentioned ...

Yes.

> ... but do you feel it should've been thought through more deeply at an emotional level?

I'm sure it should. I think it's something that was done in a great hurry. I really think that it probably - I'm just saying off the top of my head what I think - that it happened after Dunkirk and really, this country really anticipated being invaded. A lot of children and a lot of families had been going over to America and Canada - people who could afford it - and my understanding was that the government were trying to give the families of people who couldn't afford to send their children away the opportunity. When you think about it, though, in sheer numbers, it was rather an odd thing to do. I don't know whether they did a whole lot

of testing, whether the children had been tested before they went away. I thought about that quite a lot, whether that was a sort of a selection. I don't honestly know.

(25.00) Right. Well just a few final things, Ruth. Perhaps I might just put this on the record, because it's not particularly relevant but it's helpful to know. You did later, I know, in '62, finally come back to Australia with your husband, but I think there was no desire to come back. You came back because he wanted to.

Yes. I didn't want to return to Australia. He wanted to emigrate - anywhere. He'd go anywhere to get out of the cold weather and the bad weather. He was very anxious to go to South Africa; I refused, on account of apartheid, et cetera. I just disagreed. I said Canada I'd go to, but that was too cold for him. So alright, New Zealand he would go to: his health wasn't good enough. I said `Okay, alright, I'll go to Australia'. I knew what to expect. I knew a lot of people, you see - they were advertising for people to come to Australia. But a lot of people were unhappy and coming back to Britain, and I felt that they were people who had no idea what the conditions were like. I thought `Well I know what to expect', but I didn't really want to leave my parents.

Was that the key thing in your desire to stay - your parents?

Yes.

Right. You did come out here, and I know your father died in '65 so you didn't see him again ...

No.

Your mother I know is still alive.

That's right - at ninety (laughs). I think she's going on forever!

That's lovely. Is there anything finally that you feel you would like to add to this record - of any kind - that hasn't been said?

Not particularly. It was an experiment which I guess worked in some cases. I think some people were much worse off than I was. I really, looking back, it was not all that bad an experience. However, I would never ever do it to my family. I would never break up my family like that.

Well Ruth, for making the tape - and I know some of it's not been that easy - thank you very much on behalf of the War Memorial.

Thank you.

END TAPE 2, SIDE B