Australian War Memorial

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INTERVIEWEE: Nell Worthy

INTERVIEWER: Sue Maslin

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Nell Worthy as a member of the Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA), 1942-1945, interviewed and recorded by Sue Maslin on 30 May 1985 at Coleraine, Victoria.

If you could start off firstly just with a little bit about your family life, where you grew up?

Well, I grew up in Melbourne and I worked in the city for about 15 years as a machinist and then, as I said, I joined the VAD at Heidelberg and I wanted to go overseas. I worked in the early years of the war night shift in the hospital in Austin and at Saint Vincent's two nights a week and I had to carry my little case with my uniform all the time because I was evacuation staff for Saint Vincent's.

What did that mean? What did that involve?

If war came near and the patients had to be evacuated we had to go straight there and help, that's why we carried our VAD uniforms with us. And then when I went to… I wanted to go overseas and they wouldn't take me because of my medical history. So I joined the Land Army the next day and it was when… I think it was Kitty Stuart…

Kitty McEwan?

McEwen, she was the one who first enrolled us. Then we went into a room where there was just a table and that was it. And Debbie and I went in and another girl, can't think of her name, from Brighton. And we three

joined up and I think that there had been three before us. And then we were sent to our various locations. And I only ever went to any of the… We were sent first to Mont Park to train, you know where Mont Park is? It's still there they tell me.

I believe it is. I'd really like to know how the idea of joining the Land Army got into your head?

Well, Debbie came in on Sunday, and we were great mates, we were both in Guiding together. Where is she now? Up in the Goulbourn Valley somewhere. She married a farmer up there. Well, she came in an the Sunday and said I'm going to join the Land Army in the morning how about coming? So we went. We joined up there and then. And we were straight away sent to train, must have been Olive Mellor right from the beginning, I don't ever remember anyone else with the training. Then I went back and later on I spent nine weeks with her there helping train the other girls. We lived in the nurses home at Mont Park and the mental patients used to do the cleaning. They also did the gardening and all that kind of thing. We got very friendly with them, they were lovely. But then the milking set was funny. They'd be milking a hundred cows twice a day and you'd look down and you'd see a mental patient skip one cow and move closer and closer. They became very fond of us, you know. We used to go to the potting shed to have our, I suppose it was our cuppa, and they used to come into light their smokes.

They were given a sheet of newspaper and tobacco and we were dead scared to laugh in front of them. They'd light it at the fire and it would go woosh until it came to the tobacco. They were very proud of their Land Army girls and they cut out all the pictures out of the papers and posted them up around the potting shed.

So what sort of training did you have at Mont Park?

We learnt to milk cows and we learnt to weed the vegetable garden which was back breaking, and then we were sent to…

Can you tell me your first impression of cows?

Cows? I was terrified. They said I went snow white when I got close to a cow. I'd never seen a cow before, not up close. And you'd be confronted with a hundred cows and a man sort of belting them into the shed. There was a hundred in the shed at a time. They used to belt them in one end, belt them out the other end. It was terrifying. But I soon got used to it. We learnt on this paper mashe cow, we learnt to milk. I can still milk a cow. It was… I think our training was marvellous. Olive Mellor was wonderful. She had a book on gardening published while I was there, which I have. I used to know her daughter too, she was in Guiding. I think she was wonderful. She encouraged us

to do these things. And then at night we shared rooms there, three to a room. I remember one girl had contact lenses which we'd never seen before and we used to be fascinated watching her put her eyes in and take them out. They're common place now but they weren't in those days.

Did you have any experience on the land at all before you joined the Land Army?

No, I came from the city. I told you I'd never seen cows up close before. I'd seen horses, I learned to ride down there. My father had me taught to ride when I was about 18. There were a lot of things I didn't do when I was younger because I had a TB hip but I learned to ride and that was a big asset. But then they always had horses that were half broken in at the farm. It was a nightmare. I don't think I ever got thrown off though. And the draft horses were the hardest to ride because your legs had to be out so wide and if you'd taken a draft horse out as we did one paddock on the Annicky(?) Road we had to take the stones off the paddock before they could plough it. We'd take the dray out, pick up the stones all day and put it in the dray and then ride the horse home. And it was rather hard effort to ride the horse home. But when we were stacking the hay it was fun. They got some of the… the boys went to university because the men went to the war. The men they had milking the cows. And then the boys left school and came home to work. And whether I

came there they went back to the university and we women, Mrs Williamson and I, did the milking and so forth. And when it was harvest time it was university leave too, and they'd bring a few of their boys up from the university, their mates, to help stack the hay and that. And the brutes used to leave me up on top of the stack and when the bell rang for lunch and they'd say, "Oh, there's a rope there, slide down if you like", and I had to. They did it deliberately.

Where would this have been?

This was at Bellpost Hill. It was great. Yes, I've gone from Mont Park to Bellpost Hill in one fell swoop.

Can you tell me about stacking the hay?

Well, a big wagon comes in with the hay and the man on the wagon forks it down and then another man turns the sheafs so that it's in the right position. Then the third one sort of puts them in place. Well, I was the turner. Even when I was married I used to turn the hay for my husband on the stack. It was hard work but it was fun. We used to cut the chaff, the hay into chaff too, and one day I lost my glasses. I used to wear glasses all the time then and I lost them. Weeks later we found them in one of the bales and they had been licked and licked and licked. But not spoilt. It was a good life. It was hard work but it was good and

there was lots of fun in it, the people I was with were grand.

So can you tell me how you got to be sent to Bellpost and you…?

No, I was just told that's where I had to go and that was it. I had to go to Geelong Railway Station and they picked me up.

What were your first impressions of starting work at Bellpost?

Well, it was a bit frightening at first but the people were so nice it made life easier. The boys were grand fun. They were not just ruffians, they were college boys and they were very nice. They used to help me out on Sundays. They'd wash the cans and that for me. But one morning the little fellow said to me, "You'd better not go down to the bails, Nell." And I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, Rex is washing up." I said, "That's all right, I'll go and help him." He said, "Well, he's only wearing his boots." So I didn't go down. They used to help me out in lots of things like that.

So can you tell me about a little bit about your time at Bellpost and the work you did and so on?

At Bellpost Hill? Well, I did everything that the men used to do. Put the crops in, and harvest the crops,

and milk the cows, feed the cows and feed the calves, feed the dogs, and empty the toilet. Dig a hole and empty the toilet, and that was about the worst job of the lot. But Mrs Williamson used to… she had a family of boys, one girl who joined the Army I think because her boys were conscientious objectors, they're religion didn't permit them to go to the war. So her daughter did. And she loved doing my washing because it was feminine. She got so sick of doing the boys' washing. She was a very fine woman and we became very, very, good friends. The day after I was married we went back there and had Christmas dinner with them, then we came back here. I did help on the farm when I was married, all that experience was a help. I don't suppose I'd have ever married a farmer otherwise.

What was the dairying like? Can you describe what you had to do there?

Yes, we had to bring the cows in four o'clock in the afternoon, lock them in the yard and then there were two, it was a sort of… not an L, it had two sides of feeding, two rows of feeding bails and the cows were bailed up there and then they were brought down to the other bails, milking pails and they were buckets. It was a bucket system then, the milk went into the buckets and you had to empty the buckets and the milk was put into the cooler after that. And some were separated so they took it out. It must have taken buckets to sell because I can't remember, there weren't

cartons in those days and I don't think there were bottles. But Saturday night was a lonely time because I'd always gone out Saturday nights in Melbourne to balls or something like that. Saturday night I would hear the train going past down the Carria(?), you could look over the bay and we'd be getting the milk and the cream ready for Sunday and I used to feel awfully lonely then. I sort of never got over that. But I used to go to church every Sunday. I used to ride in or drive in to Geelong. Actually I was confirmed there. But I went in. After I came into the Land Army I worked in Geelong for a time. But I worked at a factory making tents for the Army.

Can you tell me what sort of hours you worked at while you were at Bellpost Hill?

About 80 hours a day sometimes I think. 80 hours a week anyway. We worked from the time we got up until we went to bed. There was no letting up. I had nothing to do with the housework excepting when there were parties. They gave a 21st birthday party for their son and I certainly helped with the cooking for that. The woman, Mrs Williamson, was a… what do you call it who teaches cooking at school?

Domestic science teacher?

Yes, she was a domestic science teacher. She made the most fabulous things and I helped her with those. We

had wonderful times. No drink or anything, that just wasn't done, but it was wonderful.

Can you tell me again about going out to the dances?

Well, we danced seven nights a week. There was a dance at West Geelong on Sunday nights and there was a little place near by, Lovely Banks. Oh, it was beautiful and we used to go to dances there. It wasn't much bigger than this room and being the first Land Army girl in the district I didn't lack partners. There was always somebody to partner me at all these things. But no transport, so you had to ride your bike and leave it at the police station for safety, or, I didn't like the horse at night. I did come off the horse one night, one day going down Bellpost Hill, but I didn't get hurt. I took my own horse there after a time. It was a good life that.

Did you go to the dances and then come back and have to milk?

I would go to the dances and come back and start milking and then go to bed about four o'clock and get up at nine. And start to do all the chores of the day. Sometimes if it was hay time we'd go out working on the hay then. We got to bed fairly early at night, though, if it wasn't a dance, but often it was seven nights a week. I don't regret not dancing now because I had a

lovely time. Then the other girls started to come to the district and we'd visit one another at night. I can't remember the names of the people around. There weren't very many there. There were three or four, we used to visit one another at night.

And you would visit each other where you were living on the different farms or would you go out together somewhere else?

We'd go to their farm, to wherever they were living. Because we couldn't go out. No conveyances. Either a horse or a bike. Then Olly Irwin came there one time and I can't even remember where she came from, excepting that she got married later. And then the Australian girls seemed to peter out so they got a girl from Scotland. But she wasn't a terrific success. She thought horses had to be groomed all the time and it's a hard job grooming draft horses every day before you use them and after you bring them home. She stayed for quite a time though.

And what was her background?

She was working on the land in Scotland and I don't know how we got her there, through an advertisement or something. She stayed for a while. I remember going down to meet her on the boat in Melbourne. I'd never been on a big boat before.

Can you remember the times that you would spend with the other Land girls, what sort of leisure activities you might have together?

Yes, talk. That was about all we had time for. We talked and talked and talked and we had a lovely time.

What sort of things would you talk about?

Oh, the work we did and all the men in the district and they were mostly married because the young ones had gone away. There were a few old bachelors and one old boy used to come over when I was… We were cutting chaff and I'd be forking the hay down into the chaff cutter and he'd be forking it down and I'd be pushing it through the chaff cutter and he was so excited about being with a girl at long last that he'd work on one spot until he'd got it right down to the wagon and then he'd have to move to another spot. I used to have to sharpen the chaff cutter and I cut my hand one day badly and had to go into the doctor's to have the stitched.

Would you have gone out with some of the young blokes round the district at that time? Did you have suitors?

Yes, yes, definitely. But I didn't get terribly involved with any of them. I did get a bit involved with one but I didn't intend to marry him. I didn't

think it would be much of a life on the land. But then I eventually married a farmer. Not a dairy farmer though. That's hard work.

Why wouldn't you marry a dairy farmer?

It's seven days a week job. You've got to milk your cows twice a day, seven days a week. It's all right if there are a number of you but if there are only just two of you, you've got to stay home all the time to milk the cows. When we were married we milked three or four but we left the calves on, just shut up the calves when you wanted to milk, it was easier that way.

With the other Land girls in the district at that time that started coming in after you arrived, what sort of backgrounds did they have? Were they similar and did you have a lot in common with them?

Yes, they were all from the city. I don't think any country girls ever joined the Land Army because they probably had enough at home. We were all city girls.

What sort of problems did you think you found as city girls going to the country?

Well, it was so different. It was wonderful, it was quite different. I hadn't ever thought of going on the land. I couldn't imagine what a farm was like. My

grandmother had a farm at Macleod many years before but they were only little places. You milked one cow and grew a few vegetables, that sort of thing, when I was a child. But then I'd worked in the city for so many years and we're used to going back and forwards every day. You felt you wanted to do something for the country. I couldn't be a VAD, I'd join the Land Army and that was the best thing I ever did, I think. Sorry there's not a Land Army now for our kids.

How much do you think the war was, or your awareness of the war, was at the time? Were you very aware there was a war going on around you?

I was on a Guide camp when war broke out. But I can't think where it was. It wasn't Pattern Hills, it was somewhere up that way. Wattle Glen, I think, and came home in the train that morning. War had been declared. It had been talked about for a long while and then our first thought, I think in everybody's mind, was to see what we could do about it. Couldn't join the Army, the Air Force, or something, well, I wanted to be a VAD. Lots of VADs went overseas. But glad I joined the Land Army instead. It was a bit haphazard then. You went into this room and there was with Kitty McEwan, you said, she was the only one there and we knew her through Guiding anyway. And we just, Debbie and I were both in Guides, and Jean somebody from Brighton was with us and we three joined up but I never saw them

after that because they were… I think they were flax farming or something.

How did you know Kitty McEwan in Guides?

Well, she was in Guiding. I was on the, before I was married, I was on the State Committee for Brownies. I'd been in Guiding since 1926 and I'm still in it. Sort of you get to know a lot of people through that.

Do you remember other Guides getting together with the idea of going off to join the Land Army?

No, because we didn't see anybody then. We joined and that was it, we went. And we met various people when we went to, that must have been Burnley where that photo was taken or on the way to Burnley but others met a lot of them. We met them actually at Mont Park, that's where we met the most girls. And then I went back to help Mrs Mellor for nine weeks. I met a lot of the girls then, new girls. The mental patients used to deliver the milk to the door and they'd been programmed, it's like a computer, they were programmed to bring the milk to the door every night, I think it was. And if we had no girls there, there were some times when you were waiting for another lot of girls to come in, it was no use saying to them we didn't want the milk because they were programmed to leave the milk and they left it.

Can you tell me what your living conditions were like at Mont Park?

Well, we lived in the nurse's home which is just inside the gates as you go in, I suppose it still is. And it was great, the meals were good and the mental patients did all the cleaning and everything.

Can you describe your room where you lived?

It was just like a usual nurse's room with about three beds in it. It's quite comfortable, everything was comfortable. And I was within cycling distance of home. It was just a few miles away. We used to go home from time to time.

How did you all feel about doing your training in the mental hospital?

Terrified, at first. At night you'd hear weird sounds. There's one ward where the patients are locked up, if they're really mental, and you'd hear weird noises from there. But we become used to it. We became used to it, rather, but there'd be some of them out in the compounds during the day and for one woman called out to us one day, "Grab yourselves a man, girls, there's a war on." I don't think she was as mad as they thought she was. No, we worked with the men, side by side with the men. The worst were, the worst mental patients were working in the pigsties. We weren't allowed near

the pigsties. But sometimes you would see a man missing from the dairy and they'd say "he's taken a bad turn" and if he become violent there the manager just hit them on the head with a shovel and then he was put him wherever they keep them until he became normal again. No, we became good friends with the mental patients. Some of them were cultured people. There were doctors and people like that. But they just had, they were quite okay until they had their mad turns.

So why were you chosen to go back for your nine week period, do you think?

I don't know, I don't know. I knew Mrs Mellor and we're quite friendly and then they decided I should go back and help with the training of the other girls.

So what did that involve?

Teaching them how to milk which I'd just learned myself. Oh dear, I never thought I'd learn to milk a cow and all the other things we had to do on the farm. We didn't see… They must have had poultry there but we didn't see them. We saw these eternal lines of cows twice a day. We had a lot of walking to do. We had to walk from one end of Mont Park to the others to the cow bails, and they had vast vegetable gardens. We weeded those by the hour. Then we went to Mont Park and then we went to Burnley and we had to take a great number of notes. I've got the book somewhere, I looked at it not

so long ago, but I haven't the vaguest idea what the notes were about, gardening, I think the gardening I do I've just learnt by experience. I suppose it was a break for us to go there. We didn't stay there. We must have gone back to Mont Park each night because we definitely didn't stay at Burnley. I don't think there'd be a place to stay.

Can you remember what sort of reactions you got from your family and friends when you decided to join the Land Army?

Yes, they thought I was mad. But then there were six other girls in the family and I was the youngest. They all thought I was mad and especially the animals. They used to say, "Please send a photo of yourself without an animal in it". I couldn't do that because I loved animals, I always had animals. Fortunately I'd learned to ride before hand, that was an asset, to be able to ride.

Why did they think you were mad to join the Land Army?

Hard work, it's hard work and I was going away, right away, I wouldn't see very much of them. But it was wonderful though.

Can you tell me what your sisters did during the war?

They mostly worked. Yes, I don't think any of them married till… they must have married during the war or something, or after the war. I can't remember. But I know I married 1949, a man who was a farmer and I came… I hadn't seen this part of the world and we were married on Christmas Eve and we came through to Melford Forest on Christmas night and the week after the man came in to bale the hay and I was, my husband went off to help him, and he said, "I'll be back a bit later" and he didn't come back until about ten o'clock and there was a 1,025 acres and I hadn't a clue where he was. And I was terrified. And I can remember hear something coughing and I said when he come back, "There's someone around, I can hear a coughing." And he laughed like anything, he said it was a possum up the chimney. So I struck that when I went to Balmoral, possums, not here though.

> Sorry, just going back again to before the war, I was wondering what your father and what your mother did? What their work was?

Well, my mother had twelve children, two died when they were very young and my father drove a team of draft horses. He used to cart stuff from the wharves and we had these, this was before we moved to Ivanhoe, and he had this great team of draft horses in stables there. We never saw him in the daylight. He used to go in the dark in the morning and come back at dark at night. We

weren't allowed to cry when he was around because Dad was so tired when he came home. We had lots of fun. Belonging to a large family's great, it's really lovely. Then when I married I didn't have any children so we adopted two and they've been marvellous.

And your brothers, what happened to them during the war?

Well, neither of my brothers, I don't know what happened to Les then, but my younger brother went into aircraft manufacture and he was in aircraft manufacture all during the war and when that sort of petered out he joined the CSL, the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories and he worked there until he retired just last year. But they weren't given a very nice time during the war, the men who didn't wear uniform. People wouldn't dance with them. It was rather mean, you know, wasn't it? Because somebody had to stay home. No, I was the only one in the family. My husband was in the Army. I was the only one in the family who did war jobs but then, of course, they had to do extra work.

Can you describe to me a bit more about the factory work that you had before you joined the Land Army?

Yes, I did, I was a machinist, I sewed things. In Collins Street we made all sorts of things. Mostly tents and water bags and that kind of thing. Then when

I came out of the Land Army I went to a factory in Geelong and stayed there for a time. Stayed at a hostel there and worked at the factory like that.

What was the factory work like, what were the conditions like?

Pretty grim compared with today. You weren't allowed to talk while you were working and you got two pounds a week when you turned twenty-one and I had to wait six months before I got it. You weren't allowed to speak if a boy went past you but strangely enough I've just recently met a boy whom I worked with before the war. He saw my name in the paper, in the telephone book. He was down here having breakfast down Coleraine, he and his wife, and he knew whom I'd married and he'd gone in the Army and I'd gone in the Land Army and we hadn't met all that time. And he's visited me, he and his wife visited me a couple of times since then.

Was there any problems getting transferred out of your factory job into the Land Army?

Yes, great number of problems. They were very nasty about it, really very nasty. Even after I was married they were still nasty about it, they wanted me back. So I got nasty too.

In what way were they nasty?

Well, they wanted me back. They said they'd use force if necessary to get me back because it was an essential job that I was doing. But I thought it was much more essential to do the job on the land and I enjoyed it so much more. I think you really live when you get right away from home, don't you?

What about your friends? Did any other friends of yours that were working at the factory leave to join up the Services or the Land Army.

Well, they joined the Services. This fellow, Claude, he went to join the Services and I hadn't heard much about it. It was in Collins Lane that I worked and I hadn't heard from any of them until just… Flinders Lane, that's right… Hadn't heard from any of them until I met Claude after all these years. Taking me back miles.

Can you remember before the war having any plans for yourself for the future, what you might have done?

No, no, I hoped I'd meet a nice man one day but I didn't think it would be a farmer, I didn't think in those terms. We went out to dances and that a great deal. We went to Sunday school and we went to church and went to the pictures with another crowd. But we didn't have any dreams of marrying a farmer. Would be the last straw. But even now I couldn't, I couldn't

bear to go back to the city to live although I love to go back each year for a week or two. I've got a brother and two sisters down there, I love going back but the country's for me now.

Can you remember what sort of appealed to you about the VAD. Why did you want to join with them?

Well, I did a first aid course and then I got my bronze medallion and then I got my, I think it was home nursing medallion or something, and then we joined the VAD Corp and we went marching on ANZAC day with all the other people. Then they built Heidelberg hospital, we watched it built. We wondered which corner of the paddock they'd put it in and when it finished it filled up the whole paddock. It was a dairy farm there before they built that. And I don't know, it just appealed to me. I went there to be examined for overseas Service but I didn't pass. But I don't think they could have had very stringent rules about joining the Land Army. I think being keen was the main thing. I never had any health problems there.

Do you think Kitty McEwen gave you a bit of an idea what it would involve or you really didn't have a clue?

No we just went head long into it. We didn't know where we'd be sent. I didn't know what Debbie was

doing and I think she went on to flax, I think. There were some odd things happened when they had crowds like that, they slept in hostels. I remember one of them telling me someone had a baby one night. She was a very fat girl and no one had known until she went into labour and she produced this baby. And then they became very suspicious of rather fat girls who joined. What a horrifying experience for the girl. She mightn't have really even known although it's hard to credit. If she were a bit dim she mightn't have known.

Do you feel at the time disappointed that you weren't living in a hostile with other girls?

No way, I had a great time where I was. I was treated like a lady. The boys were great fun. They played all kinds of tricks on me but they were very kind and good. I remember once being in bed sick and one of them used to bring me in cool drinks and wash my face and hands for me. They were so kind and good. I suppose I was lucky in that way. Although all the other girls in the district seemed to be very happy.

Can you tell me a little bit about the Williamsons, what sort of people they were?

They were very, I told you they were Plymouth Brethren, that was their religion. They went to church several times a week at night and they had meetings in their home which I didn't attend. And they never tried to

force their religion on me, they knew I had my own, and they were very kind, lovely people. And the boys, one went later to England to Leeds University to do a course. He's a professor now. I can't remember what of, though. But they were all very… There were three boys and one girl and this girl went in the Land Army in the Army and she's now at Sandy Bay in Tasmania. I haven't seen her in years. She married a doctor. They were wonderful people, kind, nice, lovely, hard working people. They didn't know about the world, I don't think. Because they lived their own lives. On a farm you do, unless you belonged to various things. you do tend to live within yourself.

How were they different to other people, do you feel, when you say they lived in their own world?

Well, they didn't have a radio and I remember once I had a radio but I used to have ear phones to listen to when I was in the house in bed and I used to have it on in the dairy sometimes while I'd be white washing the cow bails, I'd have it on. And I think it was the Queen's coronation, would that be as far back as that?

Well, the Queen got coronated, didn't she, in '53 or something?

It would be before that. Perhaps when she was married. I turned my radio on for them to listen to and someone came on yodelling and they went into fits of laughter,

they'd never heard it before. They didn't live in the world. I used to have to drive the calves, the unwanted calves to the abattoirs in the milk cart and I remember one time to my horrible embarrassment I scraped a car as I drove past. I had one calf between my knees and two in the back of the milk cart and I scraped the car and I, of course, gave the man my name and address and they sent to bill to Mr Williamson. To my horror he read it out at the table and they went into fits of laughter. I went to all of those places in the milk cart and in fact I've even driven the dray into get oats and stuff like that and taken the horses into be shod to West Geelong.

Were they unusual in not having much machinery around?

Well, nobody had tractors then because there was no petrol and I don't know whether anybody else had machinery. I didn't see any evidence of it, but theirs was all horses. I think everybody was at that time. I think chiefly because of the petrol. But I suppose other people must have had cars, they didn't?

Can you tell me about the draft horses?

They were so tall, one especially, Jock was so tall I had to put his collar on the fence and then get my shoulder under it and lift it up on to his neck to do

it up. They were gentle but they were very big things compared with me.

What sort of work would you do with the draft horses?

Well, all the work on the land, cultivate and sow the crop. When the crop matured, cut the crop with the binder, and then stook it. All the work was done with the horses. They weren't big places like I'm used to now. It was very rich country there. They only grew oats for feed to cut for chaff for their cows and their horses.

Can you remember how you felt sitting on the back of say a fleshing machine with the draft horses?

I certainly do and I remember going out on the cultivator with the little dog. They had a little terrier dog in the bag hanging on the cultivator with me all day. He was good company. And they used to bring my lunch out to me and I used to love a lot of sugar in my tea and they said I had more than my ration, so they cut it out. They brought the tea out without any sugar and I've never had sugar in my tea since. But they were nice fresh lunches, they'd bring them out to the paddock for me.

You were starting to tell me a story that you remember about one day on the cultivating machine?

Oh, when I first went out with the team cultivating they told me, Ian took me out and told me how to go round and round and round, up and down, up and down, and then start another block, up and down, up and down, but he didn't tell me how to stop and I was still going when it was dark. He came out, he said, "We expected you home ages ago" and I said, "Yes, but you didn't tell me how to stop the team." I didn't know. So I eventually got back home. Sound silly doesn't it?

Oh, not at all.

If you know how to start it, a team, you should know how to stop them but they forgot to tell me that. They thought it was fun when I made boo boos like that, the boys. I think sometimes they did it for pure fun.

Would you like to have a bit of a break or are you quite happy to keep talking?

No, haven't you nearly finished with me?

Probably won't go too much longer, just say if you're feeling tired of it. I'm finding this terribly interesting, though. It's great, these reminisces.

When they had the boys from the university up to help with the hay at harvest time I didn't get any sleep

because I had to get up at 1 o'clock in the morning to milk the cows. So I had a little one man tent, I took it out and slept outside while they were there because they used to be too noisy in the house so I slept out alone at that time. But they were a great crowd, the boys.

Can you tell me about the people who you worked alongside with, or who worked with you?

Well, they were men.

Well, who would have been on the farm apart from yourself and Mr Williamson?

Their sons when it was harvest time and we always had one man and sometimes when we didn't have a man we'd get a boy from the home and we had a weird lot of boys from the home. They mostly finished up running away. They always used to leave me the hardest cows to milk. They were notoriously lazy. The men you'd get to work on farms, they were a good crowd, no swearing or anything when I was around because I didn't know about swearing then.

You didn't know about swearing?

I didn't swear then, I've learnt that in my old age.

> And which home would the boys come from and how old would they be?

One was only five, the youngest one when I went there and he used to ride, I taught him to ride a horse. He rode into school. I don't know where he went, it would be West Geelong or somewhere, or Lovely Banks perhaps. I don't know. And the other two were at college and then they went back and then they went on to uni and I don't know where they are now. One married, I know, the other went to Sydney. I don't know whether he married or not.

> I was thinking about the boys' home, which boys' home would that have been? You were talking before about the boys' home?

Yes, well, I don't know what boys home they came from, but we always seemed to be able to get a boy from the boys' home. And there was a hut that they lived in and they were never very reliable. Well, we found that since when we were on the farm, the young boys were never very reliable. I suppose they were the ones who couldn't get jobs in the town. One even ran away with the child's money box, emptied it before he went. And they always used to milk the easiest cows. If the power went off we'd have to milk by hand and they'd leave me the hard ones. Some were hard to milk, too. They always did have the bull running with the cow. That was the weirdest set up. And as I said one got

its horn caught in Mrs Williamson's corsets and that was, we screamed, she screamed with terror and I screamed with laughter and we had to wait until he hooked his head out of her. Corsets used to do op down the front. They used to clip up and as he walked in he put his head down, caught it in the front of her corsets. It was a terrifying experience for her but they always did run the bull with the cows. That's a bit frightening really.

(Resumes)

… Much about our time at Burnley, we were given a lot of theory I think. We had a whole book full of notes, which I don't think anyone ever looked at. That's where those other papers are and I can't remember where it is. I can't find it. I've moved from the farm to Balmoral to one house and then I bought a house and moved to that, then I moved down here so I've got rid of a lot of papers. That's unfortunate in a way. Never mind. You'll get lots of photos from the other probably.

> Yes, we've come across quite a few good collections of photographs now. In fact Kitty McEwen herself put together a very good collection which was…

Is she still alive?

No, no, she died some time ago.

Yes, I think I can vaguely remember that. How come she started the Land Army?

(Resumes)

… Your education when I went back, when I went there Mrs Williamson and I took over the milking and Mr Williamson did, he wasn't a very strong man, he was only a very little fellow, but he did a lot of the jobs. And then the young boy started the school. As I said, I taught him to ride a bike and ride a horse.

So what sort of things, what sort of jobs would Mrs Williamson do? How would she fill in her day?

She helped with, oh well, she had the housework, but she helped with the dairying and the chooks. They had a small poultry farm there as well and that was the noisiest thing I've ever heard. They're terribly noisy, smelly things, chooks. And we used to have to wash all the eggs, and pack them up. Saturday nights, as I said, was lonely. We had to get the milk ready for the round in the morning. We had to get the cream, lots of people bought cream on Sundays. And one awful night they found a mouse in the vat of cream and they still potted it up but we didn't have cream the next day. I'll never forget that. I think it might have

happened before and it probably has happened since, but they didn't, we didn't eat any cream that day.

Everybody else did?

Yes, and they probably thrived on it.

So do you think your time in the Land Army effected your health in any way?

Well, to a certain extent. I'd had a TB hip when I was a child and I refused to wear surgical shoes when I was about 18. They told me I'd never walk again when I was 12 and I did a lot, I've done a lot of walking since then. No, I don't know, I still would have continued hiking with things like that with Guides and camping. I don't think so.

Did it effect your health in a good way?

Well, I'm fit, I'll be 73 this year and I'm really fit excepting that I've got a limp. I know because one leg's shorter than the other and I've got osteoarthritis but apart from that I never have any other problems.

Do you think your arthritis might have been stimulated a bit by your time in the Land Army?

Oh, probably was but then think of all the fun I had. I would have missed a lot if I hadn't gone in the Land Army. They were lovely people to work for. I was one of the family. It was so nice.

Can you describe where you lived?

It was a lovely home. It had all mod cons and they even had a refrigerator and we didn't in those days. And Mrs Williamson was a very fine cook. Yes, it was very, very, comfortable, very nice. I had my own room. I have no complaints about how I was treated, it was very, very good. And who I went out with was my business, they never queried my coming or going.

Can you remember sort of the reactions of the local people, people in the local community to you as a Land Army girl?

Yes, they used to stand and peer over the fences when I was putting the crop in. Oh men, the old bachelors who hadn't gone to the war, used to lean on the fences and leer at me. It was quite fascinating, I'd never struck that before. And I did a lot of needle work there. There was one paddock when it was half in crop and they hadn't fenced it off and they used to put the cows on the other half and I used to have to sit and keep the cows off that half and I sat there and did needle work. I've still got needle work I did there. Yes, men thought it was queer, girls coming. Well, I was the

first, and then there were several others. I didn't see terribly many. We never met a great deal, there were two or three others. But not many because it wasn't a big area.

Can you remember the sort of comments the men might make?

No, not really. They made them behind my back, I think. But there was always someone to give you a hand. If the boss wasn't around then someone would hop over the fence and help you because they couldn't really believe that girls were capable of doing what we did. And I was only small, I'm only five feet, and I think they thought I was a bit mad at first. But then they were all so very nice, all the neighbours. And now it's a big built on place. I think there's a drive-in theatre just opposite now. Horrible, progress is horrible.

Did you have friends at the time that were in the women's Services?

No, I don't think so, excepting the ones I joined up with, they were my friends. Oh, there were lots of Guiding people, I went back to Guides afterwards when I came out of the Land Army and then, as I said, I was on the committee for Brownies in Melbourne when I came down here. And I think the first week I was married someone bailed me up in the street and I was given a

Brownie pack to look after and I haven't been out of it since. Now I'm in Trefoil(?) Guild, which is people who have been in Guiding and are still interested in helping. The tablet's working, you'll be pleased to know.

> That's good, I was a bit worried - you seemed to be feeling a bit of pain there. Just with talking with women in the Services since that time, did you ever sort of discuss differences between the Land Army experience and their experience in the Services?

Only of late. I was a bowler for years. I was in Balmoral Bowling Club and one woman was in the Air Force and one woman was in the Army and we were in Guiding too at the same time because one of the women said she was at a rally where the Chief Scout was down Frankston in, I think it was 1936 or something. No, we didn't have a great deal to talk about but they mostly married men from the Services that they'd been in. Because they didn't consider the Land Army as Service, you know. It's really the silent part of the war, isn't it? We did get a uniform eventually, but grudgingly, I think. We got bib and brace overalls, and I haven't been out of slacks much since then. I was an oddity when I came back to Ivanhoe. I painted the house and I think every man in the street gave me advice as he came past. Because I wore overalls, I'd been so used to wearing them, and people didn't in

those days. Wasn't the done thing to wear slacks. And when I was married I wore slacks and I can remember the dairy was near to the back door and the man who was working there didn't know my husband was in the dairy and he came to the door, he said, "I haven't seen you in a dress yet, Mrs Worthy." He said, "I must bring some of my wife's old dresses to give to you." And my husband stuck his head out, he said, "You do that, it will save me buying her some." So I've stuck very much to slacks since then.

Do you think people realised the work that the Land Army was doing?

No, I don't really think they did, I don't think, the city people didn't. There was a little bit of publicity, a few photos in the papers but I don't really think they realised the extent of the work that the Land Army did. How much it meant to them. What do they do with flax? They make cotton out of it or something don't they?

At the time they made the ropes for the parachutes.

Linseed oil and that. Before I joined the Land Army when I was VAD I was making seamen's stockings, you know, knitting those great big long ones with no heels or toes in them and making hammocks.

Over the years since the war do you feel that the Land Army's contribution has been acknowledged at all?

No, I don't think it has. I don't really think, when you say you were in the Land Army during the war, they think "oh yes, she's just working on a farm", but that's it. I don't really think it's had, it's been accepted as one of the Services. We've never been asked to march in ANZAC Day marches and things like that. Like there was a time when I marched as a VAD and then later I marched as a Guide Commissioner(?) and my husband marched as an ex-soldier and Wayne and I had one Guide and one Scout, so we all marched in those things. But we were never accepted like the other Services, which was wrong wasn't it? Because I don't know how much work they did.

Did you ever talk about the differences in the work that you did?

Not really, no. We never had time. We were very busy. We didn't have much time, spare time in the daytime to sort of… The people I was with got the paper. As I said, we didn't have any radio until I brought my own. I used to listen to "Blue Hills" and "The Lawsons" on the radio while I was white washing the cow bails. But they wouldn't have it in the house, it just wasn't part of their religion. But as I said, they didn't ram their religion down my throat which was very good.

Can you remember back to the day that you left the Land Army?

Yes, I do. I went back home and after a while, oh, I stayed on for a fair while at the farm, then when I went back home I got a job making trousers, as I told you. Forty pairs a week you had to make from start to finish and I couldn't face it. I did one week and then I did sewing at home, like dressmaking, after that. I earned quite a bit doing that. Then I did work at a place down at Fairfield, I think it was. It was leatherwork, but I used to ride my bike down there, down Heidelberg Road everyday. You're not a city girl, you don't know these places, do you?

I was born in Melbourne, I lived down there for about the first eight years.

Did you? Then I worked at home most of the time and I was, oh, I was working at this place at Fairfield when I was married. We only had three months engagement, decided it was a waste of time being engaged, so we got married.

When did you meet your husband? Before the end of the war?

I met him in Melbourne as a matter of fact when he was on leave. After he came out of the Army and he was

down there at one stage. And then after that he only had, he came down with someone who was carting loads of bales of wool down and he'd come down and he'd have two or three hours before they'd go back again. So we did our courtship in spasms. We did a lot of writing.

How did you feel about leaving the Land Army?

Bit sad, bit sad, but I still kept in touch with the people. I still kept in touch with the same family and, as I said, I went back the year I was married and put their crops in for them. I don't know how they prospered after that. They kept in touch but it wasn't the same.

We're making a film about the Land Army, as you know, and I was wondering if there was any sort of messages or any sort of image that you wish for us to convey about the Land Army, what would it be?

Well, I'd like people to realise how hard we really worked for the people. I don't think they realise. In the other Services, they probably did work. I don't know what work they did in the Air Force and the Army. But they probably worked, but we did work very hard hours. We didn't get any special privileges or anything. I think we only got about a pound a week and our keep, which wasn't very much. Couldn't save on it or anything. And you didn't get any superannuation or anything like that, I think the other Services did get

money when they left, didn't they? We didn't get any perks like that, but we didn't look for them. Think we did it for the love of it, you know, and for the fun of it. You must have enough from me by now, Sue.

Yes, that's terrific.