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Peggy Martin as a member of the Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA), 1942-1945

We could start by firstly asking you where you grew up.

I grew up until I was five at Brunswick Heads up on the North Coast. When my father died Mum took us to Sydney because there was no work - she thought there would be no work up there when we grew up so she took us to Sydney. We came down by boat - the old boat from Byron Bay down, and it rocked like anything.

What sort of boat was it - a sailing boat?

It was just a passenger boat and our furniture came on the boat too and then my mother bought a house in Harbord for 50 pounds, just out of Manly, and she paid it off at 5 shillings a week, because she was on the widow's pension, which was 1 pound for her and 5 shillings each for us, so it was 1 pound 10 a week she got for us.

Sorry, you had another sister or brother?

Yes, a sister, and then we stayed in Harbord until I joined the Land Army.

Where did you go to school?

Harbord Primary and then I went to Manly Domestic Science and there was about - I just went away and then when we come back, of course, the house was too - my sister, she got married the day before me and the house was too small. It was only a two bedroom so my mother swapped the house for one in Bankstown, a bigger house. We bought the house off her and we still wanted to get back here. My husband was born in Yenda so we had to get back here somehow and he came out of the Army and he did his accountancy course but when we came back here he worked in Yenda, went back to Yenda and worked as company secretary but he hated being indoors so he eventually - - -

> Just going back to before the Land Army, can you remember having any ideas about what you wanted to do?

No, not really because I had to leave school when I was - I had only just done the intermediate. I couldn't go on. Actually I was supposed to go to William Street School - I passed from primary - to go to William Street School but Mum couldn't afford to send me because we had to go over on the boat and the tram.

> What was William Street School, what sort of school was that?

There was Fort Street and William Street - the real good ones went to Fort Street and the other ones went to William Street and then what was left went to Manly High. I went through school until the third year and then I couldn't go on any further because Mum had lost the pension for me so I had to leave at 14 so I could get some work and pay Mum board and that sort of thing.

What did you do then?

I worked at Marcus Clarkes for 12 months, just on 12 months I think it was I worked at Marcus Clarkes, and it was a trip from bus to Manly, boat to Sydney, tram to Marcus Clarkes, which was an awful lot but you didn't notice it in them days. You would get down to the wharf some nights and the boat wouldn't be running because it was too rough or you would have to go all the way around and half the time you wouldn't have had the money to go around because you - I suppose - I think it was 12 and 6 I started on. Then, of course, when I went in the Land Army, because it was a lot better money in the Land Army, and I didn't get my uniform for a long time because I was too young. They wouldn't give me - - -

How old were you when you joined up?

I joined up in the December and I was 16 in January and it wasn't until I went to Batlow, long after I went to Batlow that I got my uniform, so I had a bit of trouble

with clothing. They issued us with overalls and the boots and the socks - the working clothes, but not the uniform. You were sort of borrowing other people's clothes all the time and that and I never had much really when I went up there and we would have to borrow - I remember borrowing a girl's frock in Yenda and she was a lot bigger than me so she washed it and washed it and it was one of those crepes that shrink up a bit and I wore it to the dance and they she ironed it afterwards and made it come out bigger. I bought - I think it was one pay, a couple of pays - and I come up here to Griffith. We used to have to come up from Yenda of a Saturday if we came up on the back of a truck. There was a truck down there that used to always bring them up on the back of a truck and it was shopping afternoons Saturdays then, and we'd come up here. That is the only way we could get around was on the back of a truck, even after dances at night, go back on the back of a truck. It wasn't real good in the winter time I can assure you.

Did you have any experience on farms or any background at all before you joined the Land Army?

No, nothing on farms at all. I still remembered the country - I remember going back for holidays to Lismore and those places and I loved being in the country and I didn't go much on the city at all. But I never really had any experience except - I suppose I was 5 or 6 when I left down there - but I still remember little things

of being in the country. We lived between the river and the sea and we used to have to row across to school. Mum used to have to row us across to school and there was a big - it was in Brunswick Heads and the boats - it's very hard to get in and out. You've got to wait for the right tide and you'd have to row across that and Mum used to have to row us across. My father died while we were there so that's why Mum decided to take us. I think they took up a collection and got her enough money to just get us down there and our furniture and that sort of thing and then she bought the house over in Harbord, which was lovely. I loved living in Harbord.

What made you decide to join the Land Army?

I don't know. I think I was just talking to my girlfriend. She said she was thinking of joining the Land Army and I said 'Oh, gee, I'd love to go there' and I was at Marcus Clarkes. Anyway she more or less talked me into it. They were at Manly. They were having a recruiting rally at Manly. They had the posters up so down we went and joined and of course, Mum 'No, you're not going. You're not going.' All the rest of it but she signed it.

How long did it take you to convince your mother?

Only about - she was taking the papers back. I wouldn't take them back so she took them back. She

virtually signed it and they sent us to Yenda and being so young, my friend and I, we were sent out to a house, an empty house on a farm where there was quite a few girls in. We took all our things out and everything and then the chap from the house come over and said 'These two girls will have to come back to the barracks.' She said that we were too young to be out there, which we probably were. Of course, we got out of a lot of things - we got out of being initiated and all that sort of thing.

What do you mean? What did the initiations involve?

Pulling you out of bed in the middle of the night and shoving you under the shower or something like that. So we got out of that because she used to say 'Now, they're only babies.' We always got out of it even up in Batlow it was the same. The matron took us from one camp to another because there was a girl there that was, we didn't know that she was a lesbian, we had no idea there was even such things. This girl followed us around and followed us around and she was a big girl and she always had a pipe in her pocket and she used to follow us around and always wanted to put her arm around you and I hated it. I still didn't realise. I just thought she was rough and that, you know. So they sent us out to another camp away from her, but Dell was telling me the other day that even when she comes up here for the reunions, this one, that she's frightened

of her. She keeps wanting to put her arm around Dell, but it didn't strike me. Why were we being sent out there? We were being punished because we were in the best camp in town and we were being sent out to this, way out in the bush somewhere.

Can you describe to me the two different camps?

The camp I was in - the Central 1 was actually the - I was sent to Central 1 for a week when I first went there. Then they sent us to Central 2. Central 1, the girls were very nice there. They were all - it was a small place. Then Central 2 was the office built for a packing house. So downstairs was a great big room sort of thing, great big, and upstairs they done off beds, parts done off. The girls there were pretty good because the matron at the time was living there and you couldn't sneak in through at night because she was right at the head of the stairs. The only times you could sneak in was when the factory was still working, you could go through the factory. These being the offices for it they had a ramp from the factory up into the first floor, into the ground floor, so we used to be able to sneak through there but if the factory wasn't working you got stuck then, but I only got caught once and was CB for a fortnight and we were in quarantine for a fortnight at the same time. We had a good time in quarantine. We had a lovely time.

Why were you in quarantine?

One of the girls got - - -

Scarlet fever?

- - - scarlet fever, yes. In those days scarlet fever was pretty bad and they found one of the girls had scarlet fever and we just had to stay in. We didn't have any grounds to go in. Ours was only just the two-storey building so we used to get up on to the rafters - they were only so far up the partitions - and we would get up on to these partitions and get through the hole up through the roof, the manhole out on to the roof and we would hang over the roof. It was a piece up like that and we used to hang out over there and we were always getting into trouble for it but it was the only way at night time - we would sit out my bedroom, my room, my bed - there was a window and it went straight out on to the roof of the cannery. On a hot night we used to always sit out on the roof of the cannery. It's a wonder none of us got killed, you know. When you look back you do some stupid things.

So how was Batlow 1 different from Batlow 2, sorry, camp?

Well Batlow 1 was only small. It was in the RSL Club and a very small club. I think there was only about - I don't think there would be any more than 20 girls there in that camp. There was 250 girls in Batlow but

they were sprinkled all around. There was one camp where they closed it down. He was a German - actually was the head of our association for a long time but he closed - he put the Italian prisoners of war on the place and put the girls off.

Why did he decide to do that?

I suppose they probably would be good workers. They probably worked on the land all their life before they were in the Army and the girls - I don't know, some of them had been with him for quite a while too but he did get cranky about the girls raiding his orchards. If we had nothing to do we would wander out looking for somewhere to raid. Cherry time was the main thing, especially if you were in the sheds - like we were in the sheds all day. It was three shifts. We did three shifts and the worst one was the night shift - the middle shift - where you knocked off at about 11 at night and in the winter time it was freezing and the ice would be on puddles going home, and all that. You were absolutely frozen so you had a bath when you got home, if you were lucky enough to get some water, and you put all your clothes on for the next morning and would get out of bed and go to work. It was too cold to get dressed in the morning so we got dressed at night, went to bed in our clothes and then got up the next morning. It was the worst one because you were coming home late at night.

How did you get on with your meals and so on?

The meals were about a quarter of a mile away from our camps.

Would there be different meal times according to the shift workers?

No, not really. We used to cut our lunch. Most of us used to go and buy a pie up at the shop. They had the most beautiful pies at that shop. We used to go up there and buy a pie for dinner but you could cut your lunch when you had your breakfast. You had to walk up to the breakfast. We used to have to walk up the hill and the grass would be crunchy under your feet, you know. It was iced up. You had breakfast and you could cut your lunch and take it with you and then at night time or whatever you could take tea or you had dinner. It was the old scout hall it was, like the scout hall. Central 1 and Central 2 both ate there. They didn't have a cook or anything.

What if you were on your shift though? What would you do for dinner? Would you knock off?

They would knock off. Actually we used to knock off for morning tea and we used to have - I think we used to have about a half-an-hour because we had enough time to go up the street and get something and then we had about half an hour for lunch and you would probably

only get the two in a shift and then it would be the night shift. You would take your tea with you to night shift.

What were the working conditions like there, the pay and the hours, compared to the outside work?

I think they were pretty good - 3 pounds 5 shillings it was - which wasn't bad because I was thinking after I was married my husband was still in the Army and he was coming home every night and I was getting 5 pounds then so you can imagine just 3 pounds 50 for myself instead of 3 of us for 5 pounds. We used to pay 1 pound 25 shillings, or 25 pence, for our board. They supplied us with everything really. They supplied us with Modess and stuff like that and if we went to the doctor we didn't pay that or anything. I never had very much money because I used to have to send it home to Mum, so much home to Mum. She used to have to do work as well to sort of try and keep things going and pay the electric light and so forth.

Did your mother at some stage go away as a matron?

Yes, but it wasn't for very long. I rang my sister and I said - because of Mum, I knew it was my sister's fault why she came back - and she went away for I don't know if it was six months - three months near Young somewhere - but my sister was 17 and she went to live with my aunt in Manly. My sister didn't get on with

anybody. She never had any girlfriends or anything, you see, so living with my aunt and her girls, she just didn't get on, so Mum had to come home. She said 'If I hadn't have had Marcia I would have stayed' but she was always a person that never sort of got on with people and friends - girlfriends - she had none.

> Just going back to your mother for a moment, can you tell me the story that you were telling me the other day about how your mother went down.

Yes, she went back to take the papers back because I wasn't going to face them and I took the papers home to get her to sign and I said 'No, I'm not taking them back. You will have to take them back, I'm not going to take them back.' She went down, marched down with them and she was saying 'I'm taking them back. You're not going.' She came home and she had signed the papers and she said 'They talked me into it.' She would have loved to stay there because my mother always loved the country and actually before I come out of the Land Army or just as I come out of the Land Army she bought a house, and she bought the house and we both got married. She went up to Morriset to live and it was all bush. There was nobody living there. It was right on Lake Macquarie, but she loved it. She had her horses. She had her animals, ducks and everything, but she always loved the country and she has always had horses.

The first place that you went to was Yenda.

Yenda.

Is that the first time, apart from your travelling down to Harbord, was it the first time that you had been away from home?

I'd been on holidays back to Lismore to my auntie's and to Brunswick Heads. Our cousin had a car and sometimes she would take us or we would all go up there for a holiday. I can remember Mum taking us by train back up to Brunswick Heads, but no I'd never been away on my own before. Yes, I had. My mother was sick and they sent us to a home, a Red Cross home, at Leura. My mother had to have a big operation and there was nowhere for us to go but to a home. I was all right. My sister wasn't. But as Mum put us on the train she said to the woman 'I'm not worrying about Peggy, I only worry about Marcia. She won't mix.' I came down here but we pulled into Yenda Station. It was terribly dry and hot at the time and we pulled into Yenda Station and they said 'We're at Yenda.' I looked out and, of course, there was nothing on the side I looked out - only dried brown. I thought: Oh, my God, this terrible place. Of course, when we got off and train pulled away the town was the other side. It was a dreadful place I thought but actually I think we had 40 girls down there.

Can you remember your first impressions of the work, of the camp?

Yes, I was sent out to pick grapes for a woman and her husband, but she ruled the farm, and she had boys from Barnardos there, Barnardo children, which she worked into the ground and they weren't paid hardly at all. One of the eventually inherited the farm but the other one went as soon as he could. She was a woman that watched you all day. If you asked for a drink of water you'd been eating the grapes, because if you eat the grapes you get thirsty, you see. If we were on the prunes - if we went to the toilet more than twice we were eating the prunes. Then she used to occasionally give us a little bunch of grapes as we were going home and say 'Now, if you don't want them, dears, don't take them.' I had a very bad cut on my leg at the time and you had to get up into the truck up to here in grapes. I got a very bad infection from the grapes, in my leg. She used to do it for me. She was quite good like that but she - morning tea, the tea was purple. I don't know what she put in it. Tea was very hard to come by in those days. You were on a ration and she used to bring us this purple tea down and they had a dog and I gave the dog a biscuit instead of eating it and one of their boys went back and told her that we were feeding the dog with the biscuits instead of eating them so we got into trouble for that. Another day we were - a couple of girls didn't know about the hokey-pokey, you know, and we were showing them how to do the

hokey-pokey. The old man caught us and he went back and told his wife so we got the sack. That was my first job there. But, of course, matron knew what she was like. She never kept anyone for long. There was another girl came afterwards and she knew Mrs Debelle up here in Griffith because she belonged to the CWA and everything and she came down there to work for her and she left too. She never stayed. She said 'I always thought she was a nice person up here but to work for she wasn't a nice person.' So then I was sent out on my own on to a farm and there was only the man and me there and he was a very very interesting man and a lovely person. His son was away. He was in the Army and I learnt to work very quick with him because I kept up with him, listened to him and that, and if I got a little bit behind he would come back and pick a few of mine and that. I worked with him - before him, that's right, I worked for another place on snipping table grapes. You had to snip - all the dead ones - clean the bunches up. There was a chap there, a Swede, who used to tell us stories. We would listen all the time to his stories, which was really good. Also working with us was a chap, and his name was McDermott. He was caught for the Lavers murder - this Aboriginal woman that he was living had a fight and told them that he was the one that killed Lavers.

I don't know that story.

No, Lavers was killed. Lavers was a man that had a garage and the car pulled in to get petrol and they bashed him to death and they were in an old A-model Ford or something like that and it was really on top of the news for years and she put him in for it. We worked with him for quite a long time. He seemed a very nice man. He used to get home before us. He lived in a tent on the way and he used to call us in for a drink. Anyway, it worked out that he didn't do it and I think he did 17 years in gaol and then they found out he didn't do it so they had to pay him. But we did - on that farm we planted beet, hoed beetroot, hoed them out too. There were so many weeds in the beetroot, it would be close together, and hoed the beetroot out and I used to shove the tail back on so I would think that that's going to die and he is going to find out anyway, and it was very very cold and we ended up, we used to lay down, try to get away from the wind and pull the weeds out from the beetroot and my husband was on the baker's cart. He was a baker boy, as a matter of fact, and he used to always say that the Land Army were always sleeping when he past. They were always laying down. I worked with him. We did vegetables then - carrots. We did the carrots and the table grapes and then I went to Mr Arthur Boucaut. He was a really nice man. He wanted me to stay on to help him do the pruning but headquarters wouldn't let me. They told me I had to go to Batlow.

Why was that? Do you know? Was there any particular reason?

No, they didn't say why I had to go. They just said 'No, you can't stay.' They told him that - that I couldn't stay. I had to go back to Sydney. I didn't know where I was going until I got to Sydney. They sent us to Batlow and it was a whole train load of girls went to Batlow and, of course, when I got off it was snowing then and I just sat down and had a howl. I was never so cold. We had the coldest trip up, sleeping on the floor and in the case racks and so forth. You had to. The soldiers were going home on leave. The trains were always packed. People would always be laying on the floor, usually soldiers in the corridors, and you'd have to step over them and that, and we never got any free passes or anything. We had to pay our own fare home. Our annual leave was the only time we got a pass. Probably if you went - they would give you a leave pass but we weren't allowed any money to pay our fare.

What about when you were called back to go up. Probably if you went - they would give you a leave pass but we weren't allowed any money to pay our fare.

What about when you were called back to go up to Sydney before you went to Batlow? Would you have got the train paid?

Yes. When they brought us back, but when we got our leave - say we got two weeks' leave or something like that - we had to pay our own way. So we never went very often.

I was going to ask you: did that mean you could get away very much for leave?

No, you couldn't because you would only get paid the annual leave. You wouldn't get paid and you wouldn't get any pass or anything either. As I say, some of them would let you through without paying. A few of us got caught too doing that.

What would happen if you got caught?

On the train, they took some of the girls off. I was the only one who had a ticket that night. What we used to do was you would buy one ticket between four of you. When the inspector got on you would all get into the toilet. When they knocked on the door you'd hand the ticket out, you see. It was late at night one night and we thought - we were past Cootamundra - and we thought we were right and in those corridors, he just opened the door and said 'Tickets, please' and I was the only one with a ticket, you see. They put them off at Goulburn and rang through to here and they kept them at the police station at Goulburn but they eventually let them go. I think they ended up to pay the fares themselves and they let them go but it was a real thing

to try and get through without paying your fare. We went through once and we got - I don't know where it was - a chap came in, one of the porters came in and we never had any tickets and he said 'Don't worry' and he put on 'engaged', pulled the blinds down and put the 'engaged' thing on the carriage. In the next carriage there was two chaps going back - they had been taking prisoners of war to Albury, taking prisoners of war somewhere, probably the Italians that were up there and they had tickets to go back and they also had tickets to travel to Liverpool, so they gave us their tickets to Liverpool and they got off at Liverpool before that and when we went through at Sydney they just looked and they said 'These are only to Liverpool. Oh, go on.' The tram conductors always let us on without paying because all the other forces were allowed to travel free and we weren't. They used to be pretty good to us because we would say we're not AWAS. From a distance you couldn't. The AWAS had the khaki and we had more of a browny colour and we had better quality material in our clothes too. I don't know why. The hats and everything, the shoes - - -

Can you remember at what point the uniform came through?

My uniform came through about - - -

Do you remember where you were working?

Yes, I was working in Batlow in the potato shed when they came through. There was just a few of us. Yes, they came through all at once and at the time it was the first time they'd had a winter uniform so I got a summer one and a winter one at the same time and the girls were getting their winter ones as well and they were the first issues of winter uniforms and they were really nice, but you got your summer ones as well. It was pretty good in Batlow, very good in Batlow. We always made our own fun. We would go for hikes and picnics and all sorts of things. I had a friend who was in the Air Force and he used to send me coupons, petrol coupons, and if you had your petrol coupons you could get a taxi or somebody to take you down to Tumut to the dances. We used to go down to the dances. That was the only way we could get down. We went down and stayed one weekend down there I remember. We went down to Cootamundra one weekend and stayed the whole weekend and went out to the Air Force base and they took us all over the Air Force base and that, but we didn't really usually get far because my husband arrived two weeks after I arrived so he was in Yenda with me and then, of course, he was born and bred in Yenda and they wanted men up there because there was only kids and old men left. There wasn't very many what they called the CCC - Civil - I can't remember what it was - Civil something - and they worked and they were in barracks and they were sent up there to work and they had barracks and my husband and I saw the boss in the packing shed and he said 'Oh, yes, tell him to come

up,' so he went into the packing shed and they all thought that I was very cunning bringing my own boyfriend with me.

What was it like living in Batlow 2?

Very good, we had a lot of fun in Batlow 2.

Was that a bigger camp than Batlow 1?

Yes, it was - I just can't remember. It must have been about - I suppose there'd be about 30 girls in Batlow 2. You get a lot of different kinds. Some of the girls - we had a piano. Our big recreation room was really good. We had games and cards and this one girl could play the piano by ear. You only had to sing it to her once and she could play anything. An other girl used to write poetry and she was really good.

Can you remember the names of the girls?

Yes, Patty Duggan was the one that made the poetry. She was absolutely marvellous with the poems. I've even got one she wrote me when Mick and I had a fight, and she wrote this one about us. I think it was Pat McRae used to play the piano. Of course, we used to have jitter bugging. They played the piano and we used to jitter bug and throw each other and all sorts of things in those days because we only had to dance with each other. There wasn't very many men up there even

when we went to a dance unless the soldiers came up from Wagga, which they used to often do, and the Air Force would come up from Wagga too - a few of the Air Force if they'd been going through and that they'd always stopped. Sometimes we had sometimes to dance with and sometimes we just danced on our own.

Which was the one that you described the other day as Parramatta Girls Home?

It was opened after I went up there. It must have been about six months or more after I was up there and it was built about a mile out of town and it was a two-storey building, quite big, very big kitchen, dining room. They had everything that was modern in the kitchen - very nice dining room and then they had they little - they had rooms and there was only two to a room, except upstairs. Upstairs they had bigger - I think there was about four to each room and then they had a verandah along. The matron had her flat there. She had her own flat and then there was nice verandahs and they were all glassed in and that. It was a beautiful camp but it just happened in it weren't real good. They were just ones that - at that time they were picking them up and bringing them, sending them anywhere to get them off the streets and put them into jobs because they should have been doing jobs that was helping the war effort and they were sort of bringing anybody up, so that's how the girls in Central 1 and Central 2 and the ones out on farms, there was

barracks. There was Friscoe and it had about four barracks out there on this one place and then down the hill there was two more huts, so they were scattered around, whereas we thought we were a bit better than the ones out there that come up. There was a lot of nice girls there too but it just happened there was quite a few bad girls and I think they were put there because matron was living there. Actually she wasn't the matron, she was the superintendent.

What was her name?

That was Mrs Leach. Marie Smith was there for a while. She was very good. Marie Smith was with us in Yenda and they had trouble up there with a chap that followed a girl from Yenda up to Batlow and he wasn't all there, you know, and Marie Smith - she didn't know what to do with him and she knew him down here. Anyway, she got my husband to talk to him and he said if he got a photo of Doreen he'd go back so they had to go down to Tumut and get a photo taken and she gave him the photos and he went away. He still followed her up to Dawson Valley in Queensland too but that was the trouble, they started going out with them you see and they just weren't normal. There was a couple of them like that in Yenda and the girls were going out with them. They just couldn't take it when they dumped them sort of thing. So they just knew where they went and they would follow them. All the others - our bosses were quite nice, most of them. We had some very nice bosses

up there except the one we made the song up about. He never got half as much work out of the girls as the others with the three shifts, the three different shifts and that. There was one chap there. His shift used to get - I think it was half as much again for the shift in potatoes going through the dehydrator than any of the others, but everyone liked him and he didn't care if we went to the toilet for a cigarette. He knew we went and he wouldn't be timing us but when we got back we would work twice as hard for him because he was really nice whereas the other one would watch you. You went to the toilet for so long, but he was very good. I can't remember his name. We had a woman there too, a local woman, who was a forewoman and she was on the same shift as this other one and she was very tough too, so the girls just wouldn't work for them.

In what ways was she tough?

She used to go backwards and forwards past - we were peeling potatoes, not actually peeling potatoes, but the potatoes went through a machine which rubbed most of it off and then they come along a belt and you had to cut the eyes out and peel any other parts off before they went through to be cut up and they were like chips and they would go through water and there would be about an inch-and-a-half, two inches of starch on the bottom of the water left after they went through and then they went on to trays and through a dehydrator and took I think 40 minutes to go through the dehydrator.

Every 40 minutes or so they would open them up and take one lot out the bottom end and push another lot in, but she used to watch you all the time, walk behind you and sort of say 'Now you shouldn't be doing this' and 'Keep your eyes on your job' and all that and, of course, they didn't really work for her either.

Were there union organisers within that factory?

Actually, mostly I think it belonged to the Americans because the best stuff went to the Americans. The orange juice went to the Americans. The apple juice - I don't ever remember hearing of any of our soldiers ever getting anything like that. The dehydrated potatoes they did and the dehydrated cabbage but they never got the other and the tins would go through, like a large tin of fruit with the juices and they went through lacquer, all lacquered, and you would scratch your name and address in them. You would get letters back from Yankee soldiers and sailors and things. There was a couple of bad accidents because you had to sort of keep them rolling along the rollers and if they didn't, they would get caught in the rollers, and one girl went to grab one one day and got her hand caught in the roller and I was on the other side right near the button to push to stop it. I had to stop it but I think her arm was in up to about there - halfway up before I eventually got it stopped, you know. There was a few accidents but not as many as you would expect.

What happened in that situation with workers compensation and so on?

No workers compensation; she went to hospital. When she come back, I think they gave her leave for a couple of weeks and then she was just back into it. That was the only paid leave you'd get. They used to have to go to Tumut to hospital. There was a doctor come up there once a week and saw us, any of us that wanted to see a doctor. We had a lot of girls - - -

Sorry, this one, what actually happened to her arm? Was it very badly broken and mangled?

Yes, mangled, it was sort of not so much - there was a couple of bones broken but it was more the skin, like if you put your arm through a wringer, which has happened quite a lot of times with wringer washing machines, electric ones. You would go to push the thing in and it would grab your hand and take it through and hair or anything like that, but we used to have to wear our hair up to keep it out of the way of machinery.

Do you remember her name at all?

Gee, I should do know her name. She was my room-mate and I think it was Maureen Lunn, yes. Of course, there was Maureen and I and Patty Duggan. We used to call

her 'Yabba' because she talked all the time - but she sang beautifully. She used to sing a lot of country and western singing and that. There was one girl in my camp up there whose name was - it wasn't Betty Tupper. Her name was Tupper but she had been a ballet dancer and she came up there. Her and another girl stayed very much to themselves but were very nice girls, very nice to us. She had gone prematurely grey. She was nearly grey completely and she was only 26 I think she was. They were the ones that - the girls around in that side were the ones where we had these girls from the streets in Sydney that came up. I think there were about four sent to us, into our camp, and the only reason we knew was that one of the girls, a big girl and she was tough too, and her sister was in our camp and she was a lovely person.

You were just starting to tell me the story about the two girls that had come down from Surrey Hills.

Well, yes, they came down and they were really really rough. As I said this girl, her name was Peggy too, she was so ashamed of them knowing. She was hoping they wouldn't find out that she was her sister but they sent her to the same camp so everybody knew it was her sister, but we knew Peggy, and she was a really nice person, different type of person altogether. They didn't stay long. They always cleared out. We never kept them. They couldn't keep them there. They just

used to clear out again and go back to Sydney and back on the streets. Other than that we never had any trouble.

How did you know they were on the streets? Would they tell you where they were from?

She told us - the sister told us because we were friends with her and she told us and actually it wasn't long before that I even knew there were such things as prostitutes because somebody said - the girls in the towns always hated us although my girlfriend, she was living in Yenda, she worked on the land with us in Yenda, and one night there we were all sitting having a cup of coffee in the café in Yenda and they said - someone came in, one of the girls came in very very annoyed and she said one of the local girls had said all the Land Army were prostitutes. Of course, I said 'What's a prostitute?' Her husband dug me in the ribs. I knew I had said something wrong. He ended up telling me what a prostitute was. I had no idea, no more than I hadn't any idea, I didn't even have any idea when I left the Land Army about lesbians. I never knew. We used to see the girls going around together arm in arm and that but you never took any notice of that sort of thing. As I said, I got CB for sleeping together. You had to be so far apart in your beds. My girlfriend and I were sent out to this camp. It was the middle of winter. It was called - I can't remember the name of it now - but we were sent out to this camp and we had

two blankets and one palliasse between the two of us. She had long underwear, those combination sort of long underwear, and she gave me one of those and she had one and we slept together and we got caught and we got CB.

Were you told why you got CB or did you understand?

Because we slept together and that just wasn't done but we weren't told why. We never knew. We had no idea.

Was it the matron of that particular hostel that made that decision?

Yes. She made the decision and she was just the matron of that - Friscoe it was, yes, and there was about 5 camps there - and she caught us in bed together and we only had, as I said, a palliasse you had to fill with straw. When you arrived they gave you a palliasse and you had to fill it with straw and in Yenda I sort of filled it and I thought that's enough, that's enough and some girl come around, one of the ones that had been there for a while and she said 'Put as much as you can in it. You'll know why when you have to sleep on it' because you end up on the wire, the straw would sort of shift and you'd end up on the wire. In Batlow I had known girls who have had to sleep on the wire until we got palliasses, new ones that came. If you got caught sleeping together that was no good at all. We got two weeks CB for that and we had no idea. I

don't think many girls did in those days - people that were just reared - there was just Mum and I and my sister so we never knew anything.

Looking back can you remember any instances or any times when girls might have been dismissed for being lesbians?

Yes, there was girls sent home but we never knew why. We were never told why. There was one girl with us who was sent home. She was an American and she had slipped and she had got a splinter in her bottom. She wouldn't let the matron take it out. They had to hold her down to get it out and she was a really - an American accent, a real strong American accent - and we used to call her Pat the Yank. She was in the room with one of my girlfriends and we had a stickybeak in her case and there was a photo of an American sailor. It wasn't a twin brother it was her. We heard later there was - we did have two in that camp that were men. They never - we would say - four of us would get in the bath together because there wasn't enough water but they wouldn't. They would never get undressed or anything. They would get undressed when the lights went out because the lights out was a certain time and we found that Pat the Yank was supposed to be one of them, and must have been a deserter from the American Navy.

Was she found out while she was there?

We didn't know why she was sent away because we never ever, we saw the photo but we thought that must be her brother because it's so much like her but we found out it was a man. That must have been the photo of him. In those days you never even thought about that sort of thing. We can remember them holding her down and taking the - they only just pulled the pants down and just took the splinter out and fixed it up but no way she wanted - and you never ever, she always made sure you never got near the bathroom when she was there. She used to lock herself in the bathroom and that.

You were saying there was another person.

Yes, there was two.

At the same time or different times?

No, different times, that were sent home.

The other person was an Australian or an American?

An Australian, but this one in particular we couldn't work out why there was an American girl who had such a strong American accent being in the camp with us - how she come out here and got joined up. We didn't take much notice. She was pretty - like a pretty boy and beautiful curly hair and that's all they ever called her was Pat the Yank. That's what happened up there. The same with the Italian prisoners of war. I felt

sorry for them because when the girls started going out with them they were told not to. They were told they weren't to associate with them. We did in the café. We used to always get the chap to sing that had the beautiful voice and that. We talked to them. They didn't speak English really but you were nice to them because they were out on farms and they were allowed in because they weren't any trouble, the Italian prisoners of war. They were about the only ones that weren't any trouble. They never tried to escape. They were put out on farms and they had uniforms. They had the Army uniform died maroon so that's how you knew who they were and they would stay in all day Sunday but then the girls started going out with them. Then they were stopped from coming in which wasn't right, but that was the girls from over at Lady Wakehurst Hostel. Lady Wakehurst came up and opened that hostel too. I remember when she came up.

Which hostel was this? Was this the one you called - - -

We used to call Parramatta Girls Home because there were girls from Parramatta Girls Home that came there. Actually there was one I went to school with turned up up there and I never ever knew she went to Parramatta Girls Home because I went to school with her in Harbord and then I wasn't in the same class with her at Manly and I was quite surprised and she told me that her stepmother didn't want her and she had her put into the

Parramatta Girls Home and she had escaped a couple of times.

How did she find working in the Land Army? Was it a good experience for her?

She liked it. She was quite happy with it, but there were some girls - in those days you never heard of very very many people getting into trouble or going to homes. There was only a couple I knew went to Parramatta Girls Home. One boy that was sent to a home in those days and that was for throwing stones on somebody's roof - it wasn't for anything bad, you know. This other girl, the stepmother had said she was uncontrollable and had her put in the home. But she liked it up there. She settled in real good and she wasn't wild or anything. It was just the fact that the mother didn't want her. The stepmother didn't want her. That was the only reason. Then we had some that were really bad.

Do you think there were very many girls from Parramatta Girls Home or from the courts?

Yes, probably, as they turned to a certain age to go out of the home the Manpower would put them anywhere where they needed people badly like the Lithgow factories and the guns and that sort of thing or if it was harvest time into the Land Army so that's how we

sort of got them up there. But some of them settled down all right and it was quite good.

> Can you remember if your friend had a choice of where she was able to go, whether she could go into the Land Army or into one of the factories and so on or was she just sent?

No, she was just sent to the Land Army, yes, and the same with these girls that were picked up on the street. They were sent to the Land Army and probably at the time they couldn't find anywhere to put them and they just sent them up to Batlow. We didn't have any in Yenda and we never had any in Griffith as far as I know.

> Did you feel on the whole that at the camps you had a lot in common with the other girls?

Yes. We had - there was never very many fights between the girls. They never - I can't ever remember there being any fights or anything amongst them, unless it was between camps when the other camp - this other big camp didn't get on with the smaller camps at all. We never ever went over there unless we had to go over to the matron we wouldn't go near it at all. But no, most of them got on well, even the ones working in the factories. There were three different parts of the factory. There was the packing shed. They were just packing for market.

This is at Batlow?

Batlow, then there was the juice shed, which they did orange juice and apple juice, and then there was the dehydration. It start up when I was in the apple shed and then I went from packing apples to the cider shed and then over to the dehydration plant. It was all owned by Birdseye I would say had it then. It was an American turn-out. They opened the dehydration part and that but the apple cider shed was very good, very cold handling those tins first thing of a morning, putting them on to fill up and that, very boring. You had to either watch them going through the water or watch them going through the rollers into the stuff they used to dip them in, the tins. There was one job I had and I hated. It was watching a gauge. You had to sit there and watch this gauge and if it went over a certain thing you had to turn up - it was the steam gauge you know, otherwise it would probably blow up and you weren't allowed to let it get past a certain thing and you had to just sit there all day watching it. It was very boring. The orange juice factory wasn't too bad although we were sent to the orange juice factory from the potato shed because something went wrong with the machinery and they had to fit us in somewhere so they sent us and our forewoman, she was Pat McRae, she was our forewoman at the potato shed. We were doing cabbage at the time. She was a Land Army girl and lived in our camp and we were sent to do the orange

juice and you had to just hold the half orange on there and squeeze it sort of thing and I started - I don't know what we were doing but the boss come around, it was this certain boss nobody liked, and he said 'If you can't pull your socks up you'd better go home.' So Pat said 'Well we haven't any socks we'll go home' and we did. Matron had us up the next day. So Pat lost her job as forewoman but it was so funny at the time but when we were called up we weren't very happy about it. We were a bit frightened. So that would be all on my what's-a-name down in Sydney. My girlfriend sent away and got her - and they were so badly kept. Everything was so badly kept that she joined up when she was two months old.

This is the records in Sydney?

She said 'Gee, I must have been a bright child.' They never filled in anything. I asked for my book when I left and they just - there was nothing filled in it, not even uniform issue or anything, like the books the soldiers had they had their uniform issue and every time they went on leave and their pay books and everything but we never had ours like that. Actually someone said the other day about the farmers - them paying them down here, getting two pays - but our pay came from the farmer themselves and if it rained or anything they couldn't pay. They were paid to the Land Army matron and the matron paid us and we got our money just the same because I think the Government probably

made it up but we always got our money. We never sort of lost money because it rained or anything like that.

Was it always like that or did it change?

No. From the time I was there it was always like that. They used to just pay you - actually in Batlow the packing house paid us. We used to turn up for that. I remember - actually when I think back and think I've got such a bad neck and back and that you wonder why but one job we had in the packing shed in the apple cider shed was to pack 72 pound cases of the big tins, the large tins of orange and apple juice. There was, I forget, there was 12 to a box and we used to have to pack them eight high so you made a sort of steps. You would pack the one at the back and then you would pack the other one and you kept taking them up and put them all like that. Then we had another job loading the railway trucks. They had a thing that took them up to the railway trucks. We had to pack them when they got inside the railway trucks, when they come up, what do you call it?

Siding.

No, one of those things that they put - it's a machine that takes them up.

Conveyor belt.

Yes, like that, and we had to pack those. We used to have to even push the trucks into place, push one truck out and push the other trucks in to load them.

Why?

Well, there was no men there really, hardly any men to do it, and then they gave us the job of soldering the tins of cabbage, the dehydrated cabbage, and everything had to be soldered so the lid wouldn't come off or they couldn't take it off and we used to have to solder it. It was a cow of a job too. I didn't go much on that. But the local girls wherever I went, we never had much to do with local girls in Batlow because we were so many Land Army girls. In Yenda we did. We had a lot to do with the local girls. Some of them hated us. Some of them would come over to the hostels at night time and sit in our recreation room and talk to us and play cards with us and that sort of thing. Some of them we worked with out in the paddocks but there was one - there were some of them that just didn't like us at all. At a dance down there one night we had these girls, I used to call them the 'dead-end kids'. They were about five of them in the end hostel and at the dance one of the local girls went and told the chap, the MC, that this Joyce Carr was going to sing. Joyce never sang. She got up and sang. Anyway, as she went past the local girl put her foot out and tripped her when they were dancing - probably two girls dancing together and she tripped Joyce and hit her and, of

course, we were ordered out of the dance. It was a Catholic dance hall dance and we were ordered out. The Land Army was sent home. They let us back in and the next time they did the hokey-pokey so we all got ordered out again. Before we left Yenda all the dances were doing the hokey-pokey.

> Can you tell me about the hokey-pokey? Why was it such a no-no at the time.

Put your backside in; put your backside out. It was a no-no as far as the Catholic dances were concerned. Church dances, gosh, it was a terrible thing. Everyone was doing it before we left but I think they used to usually put us out for a month or something like that, so many dances, so many weeks dances or something they used to put us out. Of course, we were terrible people.

> Can you tell me about your friend at Yenda who was not a Land girl but worked with you?

Yes, actually she still - we work together down at the Smith Family. We go shopping together and that. Her family had travelled around from place to place with like a wagon and horses and a lot of them at that time seemed to stop in Yenda and they never left again. I don't know why, whether it was just the War and there was more work around and that. They stopped there and they used to all live out on the northern canal in

tents and just covered wagon sort of things. They worked with us in the paddocks. They were really nice girls. We got on well with them and the ones that used to work with us when I first went up there, they were really nice, these two girls. They used to always come to the Land Army hostels and that, but this friend of mine, she worked really really hard and she has very dry skin and she was wrinkled when she was 30 from working in the paddocks. For her age she has still got really bad skin. Right up here she tries to get rid of sun spots and so forth all over her from working in the paddocks for so long and that. It dried out all of her skin. Her sisters are the same, the ones that did work in the paddocks. They used to get paid piece work - threepence a tin for the grapes, and that.

They would work alongside you Land Army girls?

Yes.

How would the wages compare at the end of the week?

Usually they got more than we did although she was always a fast picker. I have worked with her since I've been married and she is a fast picker. As a matter of fact, it was only about three years ago, I think she is about six years older than me, but about three years ago she went out and she was earning, going from 9 until 3, she had her grand-daughter she was

rearing, and I think in three days she earnt about $400, you know, and she wasn't there that long, but she was always a very good picker and her sisters, most of them were because they had been at it for so long. We weren't. We were hopeless. They wouldn't have wanted to have paid us by - my husband - they had this competition and my husband picked 60 tins in - it was a tin a minute anyway, 60 minutes. He picked 60 tins. They kept him up with the tins, the chaps kept him up with the tins and took the others away. I felt so ashamed. I did 40 in the day. He did 60 in an hour and I'd done 40 in the day. That's when I first started, but as you got used to it - I always tell them here at the Smith Family and that now once you get - give yourself a chance to get into it and you are right, you know. This picking grapes and you've got your tin a way behind you and you're picking the grapes and then turning around and people don't know but if you put them under the vine and pick straight into it you are a lot quicker than wasting time like that. She was really good, a really good picker.

Has she been or wanted to be included on Land Army reunion occasions and so on?

She comes out to our turn-outs when we have - about once a month or so we used to go to somebody's place for our meetings and we have housie and stuff like that, well she always comes with us, but she says to me 'I did as much work as the Land Army and I never got

anything.' She did. The whole family did. The other ones that lived on the channel banks, they had a terrible job. They lived, they worked, they had to dive in the channels to wash after they worked and they really had it bad because they were a lot worse off than us. We had our showers and we had our place and our meals cooked for us and everything, but this family, there were quite a few families that were like that. They had been travelling around and all they had to live in was tents and that. But she came above it. It folded up. The house folded up because we were - Dad was on the railway putting the line through to the back, Brisbane line, it was a border loop they called it, and he was - the house would fold and go on to the railway trucks and it was made of iron and it had the windows you pushed out and you put a prop in it, you know, and of a morning when you woke up - it had no lining in it, of course - and when you would wake up in the morning there would be snakes curled up - only carpet snakes, but Mum used to - even after Dad died she was really good, you know. She could sort of look after things and make anything or do anything and I remember coming home from school and this great big goanna sitting in the backyard. I'd never seen anything so big, probably because I was small, and Mum had shot it. She used to knock the snakes down and the dogs would cart them outside. But they never worried us and I've never been frightened of snakes.

Did your mother have to work when your father died?

Yes, she had to.

What work did she do?

She wasn't supposed to, I don't suppose, but she used to do housework for people.

It would have been very hard to live just on the pension.

Yes, and I used to do messages. For a week I used to do messages for this elderly lady and go and get her messages and her shopping and things like that and I used to get tuppence a week for that. I used to think it was lovely. Mum didn't get very much and I used to always think, she'd say to me, she wouldn't say it to us, she would sort of be thinking aloud and she'd say 'I don't know how I'm going to pay this electric light bill.' I would lay awake at night worrying how Mum was going to pay the electric light bill, but it was always paid and she just worked for different people doing washing and ironing and cleaning and that sort of thing. She had a terrible life. I was a terrible child to her because I got a lot of beltings and there was a lot I didn't get that I should have got too. I never ever regret - they say today if they're hit you do something to their mind and all the rest of it but

it didn't me. I deserved every belting I got and I tell you what I deserved a lot more than I got because Mum never ever did anything in a temper. She went out. She took a stick off the tree, took all the leaves off it and then she'd come in and you'd get it but I always got it worse because my sister would stand there and say 'Well hit me Mum' and what can you do but with me I'd fight and then, of course, I got twice as much, but it was a big job to rear two girls in those days, a terrible big.

Just for a moment going back to the end of the War. When did you leave the Land Army?

I left the Land Army about - July, August, September - I was working in, they sent me to work for the Salvation Army. They wouldn't let me leave. I was married and they wouldn't let me leave. Then I was expecting my daughter and they let me leave then. They gave me a discharge then and she was born end of September and I left in March I think it was, March that year.

'45?

In '45 and she was born in September '45 so I was too big, no, I hadn't had her, that's right, It finished in August and I was too big to go into watch the march. I thought it was terrible. I so much wanted to go in and

Mum wouldn't let me go. She said 'You'll get killed in there.' That was the Victory March.

Can you remember how you felt at leaving the Land Army?

I didn't like leaving it. If I hadn't have been pregnant I wouldn't have left it. I would have stayed in it because my husband went in the Army. He was only 18. As soon as he turned 18 straight into the Army, you know, and he was in the Army and I was in Batlow and we were getting married. He sent me the ring up and it was miles too big and he told me I would grow into it, which I did. He went away and he was away when my daughter was born. But he couldn't wait to join up so when Helen was born he was 18 and I was 17.

What did you do after? Did you ever go back on to the land or on to farms?

No, but we had to get back to the country. He did his, as I said, accountancy course and then I came up here. He didn't have a job or anything but he sent me up here to see if I could get somewhere to live and I came back and I said 'Yes, I had somewhere to stay' so we went up there and we left my daughter with my sister and we came up here and he got the job of an accountant in Griffith and we stayed in a room for a while and then we built a house - we were buying this house that was being built and before it was finished being built he

got the job as company secretary at the Yenda Producers, so we never moved into the house. We had to sell it and then go down to Yenda to live. That was why we stayed there. We broke our neck to get back to here again.

Did you ever think about or receive any sort of post-war benefits or rehabilitation?

Nothing.

Did you feel at the time that you might have been entitled to something or was it not something you really thought about?

No, it's nothing we'd sort of think about because today they would but you didn't think of anything those days. You never thought - a girlfriend had a daughter knocked down. No way would they go to the police or anything like that. She was in hospital and that at the time and nobody thought of anything like that. There was only one of our girls I think that got the repatriation benefits and I don't know why the others couldn't have got it because that would have been a test case really but they wouldn't and I would say there would be a lot of them that would have a lot of things wrong with them from the heavy work that they did.

Do you feel that your time in the Land Army affected your health in any way?

I think it may have helped with my neck. I've got something - every time I have an x-ray for my neck they ask me have I been in a car accident because of the way it is situated they reckon it looks like I have been in a car accident. They found that I've got a piece of bone sticking into the spine, sort of grown into the spine. It must have been something but you usually find that most of them will complain about their back here or their necks. We weren't taught how to lift. We just lifted. An Italian taught me how to lift after that when I was working for him but we were never taught how to lift a case. You'd sort of bend over and you'd pick it up and when you are stacking cases and that all day you had to do some damage somewhere. They'd say to you 'You slept on a high pillow. Your pillow must have been too high.' You got a stiff neck. It was always classed as being sleeping on too high a pillow. It was never there was something wrong with your neck.

Looking back over the years do you think that the work that the Land Army did has been acknowledged?

No, I don't think it has because I think we wore the Crown on our uniform and it was called the Land Army but it wasn't classed as a Service. I think it should have been classed as a Service because it was really a Service. We went to the same place where the Army had their medical - Victoria Barracks. We had to go

through the same doctors, have the x-rays and everything the same. We had exactly the same medical as the boys because I remember having to go through there and all the young blokes were getting weighed and that at the time, and by wearing the Crown on our uniform it was a Service too, so we wore almost identical uniforms and I could never understand why they didn't do something for them, because we came under Manpower I suppose and it wasn't run real well. Head Office was a little tiny place. It was just a counter.

This is in Sydney, you're talking about?

In Martin Place, yes. I don't know how they kept any records even. They never had any space.

Can you remember how it was run at Griffith and can you remember Mrs Blumer?

I didn't have anything to do with up here. See I was in Yenda.

Sorry, so you didn't have anything at all to do with the Griffith - - -

Matron Smith was with us - Marie Smith was with us - and then she went up to Griffith and that was the only time I ever went - we went and visited her at Moorool House. It was the only time. We didn't even know any

of the girls in Griffith. We came up here to the dances but we knew the girls, being in uniform and that, but we didn't know any of them at all. It was only the ones in Yenda we knew, and even some of those that were out on farms, a couple of girls on one farm living in the farmer's house and that, you never knew them either so we'd come up here shopping and that but I never ever knew any of the girls except one - two of them that were in Griffith at the same time I was in Yenda and they went to school with me in Harbord and Manly and then they were up in Batlow with me but not in the same camp.