

NSW DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING

‘Millers Point Oral History Project’

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE:	Alice Brown
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INTERVIEWER:	Frank HEIMANS
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00:03 START OF TAPE MP-FH43 SIDE A

00:33 *Tell me your full name as you were born.*

Alice Gwendoline Goss.

When was that Alice?

29 July 1917 in Gloucester Street, Sydney.

Was it called Sydney or The Rocks then?

Well they did call it The Rocks but mainly we always referred to it as Sydney. Yes, it was The Rocks really.

What did you think of the Millers Point mob that was just across the other side?

01:14 Oh they were good.

Now who brought you into the world?

Nurse Martin.

I believe that she was a formidable lady, do you know anything about her that you can tell me?

01:29 I knew her for many years, I'd see her and that, because she lived down in Argyle Place for many years and she would always get around in her nurse's uniform with a little cap and the tail down the back, but she was a lovely lady.

She was a professional nurse and midwife. Was she attached to any hospital?

01:55 Not that I know of, not that I really know, I don't think she would have been. I think she was just there and if you had any problems you called for Nurse Martin.

Now tell me a little bit about your mother and your father.

02:09 My mother was born in Tasmania and we don't know a great deal about her early life. She came over here with her two sisters and then of course we didn't bother asking questions in our young days. When she came over here she married dad. She went to work for some nuns out at Paddington and she was married from there. Dad was a seaman and he was born in Kent Street, Millers Point and he was a seaman and that. I think he was at sea when mum caught the flu in 1919 and she was only sick a couple of days and she was taken to the temporary hospital in the Deaf and Dumb Institute in City Road where she died. She left three of us.

03:28 I had two brothers, George was the eldest he was four and a half and Eddie was three and a half, almost four, and then myself I was a year and eleven months. She died in June 1919. My grandmother took us down to 84 Kent Street, Millers Point where I lived until I was twenty-nine and my aunt Helena looked after us. At one stage when I was about four years old, when my grandmother was ill we went to an orphanage at Narellan for about three months. We went there because they was the only orphanage that would take the three of us together and we were only there about three months and gran brought us home. Didn't see much of my brothers when we were there because they were positioned in a cottage away from the big building. Anyhow, after that I came back, went to St Brigid's School until I was about seven and then I went up to St Patrick's.

Can I just take you back a little bit to the flu epidemic - did it hit the people of The Rocks and Millers Point very hard?

05:00 It did very hard. But mum wouldn't stay at home. My grandmother wanted her to stay at home and she would nurse her because gran had been nursing some of the neighbours as well and apparently Ruby Colbeck next door to my grandmother in Kent Street, she had just got over the flu and she said to my mother, 'Are you frightened?' and she said yes and my grandmother reckoned she frightened herself into it. But she wouldn't stay home, she thought she'd get better at hospital. At the same time my youngest brother, Eddie, he had it, but gran took him home and nursed him and he got over it.

Do you think the reason that she was taken to the Deaf and Dumb Institute, which was a temporary place I imagine, did that have anything to do with her death?

06:00 I don't know. Gran often said it was very bad weather and of course in those days I believe the ambulances were not like now they were only canvas and that. They took her to a couple of hospitals, Canterbury and somewhere else, but they couldn't get in there so that is how she came to go to the Institute and she was within six weeks of a confinement. She was buried up in Rookwood Cemetery.

Do you think the Deaf and Dumb Institute didn't have proper care for her?

06:42 I wouldn't know about that. When I was about seventeen or eighteen, it was funny, I was away on holidays in the mountains and waiting for dinner one night people were talking, a whole lot of older people, and one of them was saying they believed that in those days when they took you to the hospital if they thought you'd get better they'd put you one side and if they thought you wouldn't get better they'd put you the other side. That I don't know, but it is strange how after years you hear these things.

Do you think there would have been a real fear among the community about this flu?

07:28 I should imagine there was. I think it hit down the Point a fair bit. I don't know about deaths, but I know there were a lot of people. I can only go from what my grandmother told me.

You were only one year and eleven months when this happened so do you have any recollections of your mum at all?

None at all.

Did people talk about her afterwards?

07:51 Oh yes. My grandmother was very broken up about it I believe she liked her so much, she was very fond of her. But anyhow that is about all I know.

Do you have any photographs of your mum?

Yes. That is her wedding photograph up there with my father, her sister and her uncle. I have several photographs of her.

Now you said your father was born in Kent Street, so does his family go back a long time in Millers Point?

08:33 Yes. My grandfather was English, he came from Kent, and my grandmother was Irish, she came from Limerick. We worked out that she went to New Zealand first because she had a sister there, but she often said that on the Sunday night there was an earth tremor so she went and booked on a boat the next day to get out of there. That was in Napier. She must have gone to Brisbane because she often used to say she worked as a nursemaid, I think it must have been for a family with a hotel in Brisbane in the Valley. She said they were saved one night by an Aboriginal girl coming out saying, 'Missy, Missy, get out - the water is coming.' She married my grandfather in Brisbane and they came down here in the 1880s and she lived in many places down there. They lived in Clarence Lane, Pottinger Street, Kent Street, in one of the big houses in Kent Street, and then in 1910 they moved to 84 Kent Street.

You are talking about your grandmother and grandfather on your mother's side?

10:13 No, on my father's side. They moved there into Kent Street and the last of the family was there for seventy-five years before they moved out. Then she moved into a little flat a couple of doors down.

So the Goss family goes back to the 1880s then in Millers Point.

10:39 Yes. My mother's family goes back further than that in New Zealand and I think at the moment my children would be about seven generation Australian on my mother's side.

What was the family name of your mother?

Robertson.

Now were you all Catholic or was it a mixture?

No my grandfather wasn't a Catholic. My grandmother was and all the children were baptised Catholics, but in the meantime we've got a bit of a mixture. All of my children are Catholic and the grandchildren, but some of the others have drifted

away, my brothers.

You mentioned that you went to St Brigid's at Millers Point, your first school, can you tell me who some of the sisters were?

11:49 Sister Mary Nelasco was the one in charge and she was a wonderful elocutionist. It was a little school in the church and on Fridays all the school desks would be moved back and the pews would be moved up for Sunday Mass. Then in the other little room there was Sister Gabriel, she was a dear old nun, she eventually went up to the orphanage at Waitara. Every year sister would have a new novice down there to train and there were numerous ones after that. The last one that I think I remember was Sister Joseph, I think she was the last one there, but Sister Antoinette was there for many years. Father Piquet - he baptised me.

Tell me a little bit about him.

12:48 Oh he was a dear old man, a little French man, he had white hair. He used to go up to St Vincent's Hospital and that and at one stage I believe, it was in the paper, he used to have his breviary and his glasses in his hand like that and he'd just walk across the road and the policeman on duty used to stop the traffic for him. He'd wander round the Point and that and he'd give his shoes away if necessary. He was a wonderful man, very gentle and that. I think it was about 1936 they built a memorial to him at a seminary up in Toongabbie.

You've got a story to tell about Father Piquet and a pair of trousers.

13:44 Yes my gran used to tell a story about him. People used to come to the presbytery for things and he gave this man a pair of trousers and it turned out it was one of the other priest's trousers he gave.

Now what sort of chores did you do during your childhood, what were your family responsibilities as a child?

14:09 Well I didn't do much, aunty used to do all the work and that, until I remember coming home from school one day when I must have been about ten and I washed the kitchen floor, so ever after that I had to do that once a week. Of course as I grew up there were chores. Like we had a fuel stove which had to be black-leaded and the hobs had to be whitened. My grandmother wouldn't have a gas or an electric stove so we had the fuel stove, which was wonderful cooking and we'd toast the bread or grill the steak over the open fire. In the winter time that is where we

sat around the fuel stove and my grandmother would have a glass of stout on the hob to get warm then she'd heat the poker and put it in and stir it.

Why didn't your grandmother like gas or electricity?

15:16 Because she thought that we might gas ourselves when we were little. Also one of the neighbours, Mr Dooley, always reckoned that gas caused cancer, so that was the idea then. But she used to say to me, 'You oberdom, you couldn't find the water if you went for it.'

Can you describe your grandmother to us, what sort of a person was she?

15:47 I've got photos of her there. She was just an ordinary little Irish woman, she had very nice hair, very good hair and nice blue eyes. She was very generous, if any one came in and said they liked something she'd give it to them. Of course we didn't have electricity for many years, I can remember that coming on. In fact that lamp over there was what we had on the lounge room table, we didn't call it the lounge room then it was the front room, and that was the kerosene lamp we used to have with a different top on it.

Now your grandmother had a special job she used to do, tell me a bit about that.

16:41 She used to lay people out when they died, wash them and lay them out. Or if they were sick she'd go and sit with them during the night and that. I remember one winter's night we were sitting by the fire and a lady came across from High Street - her mother was dying and she wanted to know would granny mind if she called her out in the middle of the night. But the people round there were like that, you know, they helped when they could. She wasn't the only one that did that, Mrs Connaghan did it and quite a lot of other people.

What would your grandmother do exactly if someone died?

17:24 I don't know but we'd go to the wakes, there were always Irish wakes around there and I'd be taken to the wake because she couldn't leave me home.

Now they had special dresses for the dead, didn't they.

17:40 Well they all dressed in black. I know one that she used to always wear it was her best one, and they'd have black beads and a black-bordered handkerchief. Most people would be buried from the house and the neighbours would put their blinds down and close their doors and that when the funeral was going off. I can still see the mourning coaches they had - they had a couple of horses and little narrow doors

that they'd have to get in with their big dresses and that. She had a black outfit she wore and she had this hat with a black ostrich feather in it, that was the one she wore for funerals and for best.

How was the dead person attired? Were they dressed in a special nightgown or something?

18:33 Oh well she had bought a nightgown to wear when she was laid out but of course she ended up giving it to a next door neighbour who, poor soul, was a bit of an alcoholic and when she had to go to hospital she didn't have a nightie and her sister came in and asked gran if she'd lend her one. She always had a drawer that had her special nightie, white towels and a special quilt that if she was sick or that when the doctor came they were there and they'd have the basin and the jug of water for the doctor to wash his hands and that.

Was it a black or white nightie that they used to put on the dead?

19:21 White. Some people would have a shroud, you could get those from the convent. Quite a lot of people did, but of course that just grew out of fashion, I suppose you could still get them at some convents probably the Carmelites.

Now is it true they used to cover up the room?

19:45 Oh yes, they used to put sheets all round the room and some people would put a little black cross on them. Then the coffin would be in the room and people would sit around talking and drinking and that. It was quite different to what it is now, so that is probably where the wakes these days came from.

Was it an Irish custom do you think?

Yes it would be because gran used to tell us the story about in Ireland. She was at a wake one night and it was upstairs and the wake was upstairs and the body was on a table with a big sheet over it. They heard snoring and they thought it was the corpse and they all raced out and the next morning a fellow came down the stairs and he said, 'It is the best sleep I ever had,' he had rolled under the table and went to sleep. That is what she used to tell me.

How many of these deaths would your grandmother have attended, do you think?

Oh God I wouldn't know, you just didn't keep track of it.

When somebody in the community at Millers Point died how many people would turn up for the funeral and so on?

21:12 Quite a few. All the neighbours would go and someone would generally go

round to collect for a wreath and that. Yes they were pretty good in those days.
Now Rookwood Cemetery would have been a long way from Millers Point.

21:36 They'd be taken up to the Mortuary Travel in Regent Street and they had quite a nice stone building there which was called the Mortuary and there would be a train there, the funeral train, and they'd be put onto that. Of course there would probably be more than them on it. Then they'd go out to the cemetery which had little stations along the way, all nice in stone and that.

So this is a special train for the funeral?

Special train yes and the people could go on the train.

Did you ever go to a funeral like that on a train?

22:16 I can't remember going on the train to a funeral, I can't. But I can remember we went right out to the cemetery in the car. She always told Mr Bull that he had to have a hearse for her - she didn't want a motor car when she died but of course there were no hearses around when she died. Of course the motor cars went off as if they were taking her to a picnic.

That is what she thought, your grandmother? Was it a horse-drawn hearse in those days?

No she had a motor car. They did have horse-drawn hearses, big fancy ones.

She died in 1941 wasn't it?

No, she died in 1948.

It is all very interesting about death at Millers Point. What about when a child was born was it a big deal there?

23:22 I don't remember that. Of course in those days they kept a lot of things like that from children.

You weren't allowed to know?

Well you'd know the baby was born but that was it, it was just life.

Now you lived at 84 Kent Street with your grandmother and your grandfather?

No, my grandfather died about 1915 I think, he was only fifty-four.

What did he die of?

TB. He died then and left gran. They had three deaths within fifteen months: her husband and a son and my mother.

One of the children of your grandparents died, right. So then you were born in 1917. Can

you describe the house at 84 Kent Street, how many storeys was it?

24:31 It was two-storeys. I had a bottom veranda and a top veranda. The door was never locked - you just pulled a piece of string under the handle and the door opened. You went in a hall and there was one room on this side, which was called the front room, which would now be called a lounge room. There were stairs there and then a hall along there which went out into a porch with a pantry on one side and then into the kitchen. You had to go out the porch and down the yard to go to the bathroom or the laundry. The kitchen had a fuel stove and a sink in it. That is on the ground floor. Then when you went upstairs there was a landing and at the top of the stairs there were two rooms with two steps to go up. The landing went across and there were five steps up to the next landing and there were two rooms there, one on the left and the big one went right across the house and opened onto the veranda. It was only two storeys but it has since been made into three. They moved in there in 1910.

Did you have your own bedroom when you were growing up?

26:18 No, I did in my teens I suppose, but I slept in the big room in my own bed until I was about twelve or something and my gran and aunt slept in the same room but it was a great big room. When I had to go to bed early I used to read by the street lamp, there was a street lamp outside and the head of my bed was near the door and I'd just pull the curtain back and do my reading then until I heard someone coming.

Would have been a bit hard on the eyes.

26:59 That is what has probably caused my bad eyesight now.

You were young and you were strong. You were living there with your brothers?

Well I lived there with my grandmother and my aunt until I was twenty-nine, the only time I wasn't there was when I went to New Guinea. My father married about seven years after my mother died and the two boys went with him and gran asked could she have me, so I stayed with her. They went to live at Balmain and I used to go over there quite a lot.

Tell me a little bit about some of the neighbours in the street and their names if you remember them.

27:53 There was Mrs Bickle one side, there was Mrs Colbeck on the other,

Longhursts in the next house, later on the Tylers came there and then the Hogans. Then there was Chapmans and Ratterys and in the big house near the tennis court that was Wolffs for some years and then Isles, because there was Isle's Suburban Deliveries on the other side of aunty's - that took up about 70-something to about 80 in the numbers in the street. Then there was the little lane between them and Bickles and up round the back of our back lane there was, and it is still there, like a cave cut out in the rock at the base of Observatory Hill.

29:06 END OF TAPE MP-FH43 SIDE A

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29:08 START OF TAPE MP-FH43 SIDE B

Alice tell me a little bit about the sounds of Millers Point that you heard as a child.

29:23 Well I can remember as a child in the wool season the big horses, I think a lot of them would be Clydesdales, with the bales of wool. These huge lorries would be lined up along Kent Street all night taking the wool to Dalgety's Wool Store and onto the ships - that would go on during the wool season. At other times it was the coal lumpers loading the ships, you'd hear the machinery going all night long.

Gave you the idea it was a maritime place.

Yes much more noise there then than now.

Would you hear the sound of the horses hooves on the cobblestones and that sort of thing?

30:13 They were not cobblestones actually, the road was made of blocks with tar and that over the top of it. I remember when they relaid the road they dug all of the wooden blocks up and we took them in for the fire, we burnt the road.

Now were there hawkers that used to supply you with things, who were they?

30:47 Yes but I don't know what his name was, he was a Chinese and he used to come round every week. He'd bring cardigans and blouses and aprons and sometimes tea-towels or towels or something like that in a big case and you'd pay so much a week off, a shilling a week, and he'd add it all up in Chinese, you would see him writing down in Chinese what people owed and that. He was a nice man, Johnny we

used to call him.

So he used to sell a bit of everything.

Things like that, he'd carry them around in suitcases.

Other people have spoken to us about Jackson the greengrocer.

31:34 Yes, he lived down in Kent Street on the corner of the lane, he used to come round with vegetables. Then there was another Chinese man came round once a week. Then of course there was the milkman with his little milk cart and there was the rabbit man and on Fridays he was the fish man. So they all came round to the door and you had your bread delivered and everything, and the milk. The ice man used to come of a morning, come in early put the ice in the ice chest and go out again. Later on they used to leave it on the front door step.

So the rabbit man turned into a fish man on Friday. Did they all have horses and carts?

Yes horse and cart.

Now where the Observatory Hotel now is there used to be something else what was that?

32:40 That was the Council's stone yard, they had all stone and that in there. Later Isles took it over as a bit of a service station and that. Then next to that was Vitalick which supplied food for the cattle and sheep and that. Later that became a grog store, a bottle shop. On the corner of High Street there was a vacant lot which is now all been taken up with the Observatory Hotel.

Now there was a school once in Kent Street.

33:41 Yes. Apparently where Vitalick was, before there, there had been a Catholic school there, I can't remember what aunty said it was called.

So what are your memories of growing up in Millers Point as a child?

34:01 Going to school. When my brothers were living there we used to go down to the New York Theatre, which was known as 'The Pickle and Pork', which was in George Street North, down where the train comes out now, the tunnel there, well it was just about there. You'd go there on a Saturday afternoon, six pence in, I think it was, and you'd have cartoons and then the picture and you'd have a serial when the horse went over the cliff it was next week you had to see the rest of it, continued next week. Then after the pictures we'd walk up Argyle Cut and just around the corner from George Street North there was a fish and chips shop and you'd buy a

penn'eth of chips or three penne'th of chips, however flush you were at the time, and you'd eat them going up. They would be wrapped in paper and you'd just tear the top of the paper and eat your chips going up. It is the only way to eat chips really, they don't taste the same otherwise. You'd get plenty of salt and vinegar on them.

What sort of games did you play as a child Alice?

35:25 Well mainly you'd play rounders and ball games and hopscotch on the footpath or in the school yard, or marbles, just ordinary games. Of an evening sometimes if you were allowed out if it was a hot night or that you'd sit on the step talking.

What did the mothers do to entertain themselves?

35:51 Nothing much really but they were always so busy in those days. You see it wasn't like now, your washing would take you all day and your ironing, with the flat iron that you had to heat on the stove, all kinds of things. You'd have a big copper and to have a bath and that you'd have to heat water and carry the water and put it into the bath, but at Christmas time the copper would be scrubbed out until it shone and the Christmas puddings would be boiled in it. Then after they were cooked it was cleaned out again and when the ham had to be cooked the ham was put in it, then it had to be cleaned out again. So things like that you had to do. Chicken and what have you - that had to be ordered, you only had that at Easter and Christmas time. Cream if you wanted that at any time it had to be ordered.

When you wanted to have a bath how did you have it? Was there a bath tub in the house?

37:08 No, out the back was a galvanised iron bathroom with a tin bath and the toilet was the other side of that and then the laundry was right down the end of the house in a tin shed until I was ten or something and they built us a new bathroom, toilet and laundry all in one, concrete and what have you. The copper was in the corner and a tap went through into the bath and you could light the copper up and just turn it on. But there was no hot shower.

So you didn't have to carry the hot water in buckets any more.

No.

That was a big advance then wasn't it.

I'll say.

Was the fire station in Kent Street at that time when you were young?

38:06 No. The fire station was down in Circular Quay and where the fire station is that is where my father was born, it had been a cooperage at one time. My father was born there and there were all little houses around there which went up the hill, which has all been altered since the Bridge was built. The Grosvenor Hotel was up there. The flagstone steps were called the Flagstaff Steps, they are a different name now, and the houses went up the steps and the big one on the top - that was run by a Belgian woman and it was the Scandinavian Sailors Home for many years. That is what it was like then. Then of course the fire station came there and the other building, the IBM it was, but that is what it was like there.

You didn't call the Observatory the Observatory in those days?

The Flagstaff is what we knew it as.

Did you go up there much?

39:32 Quite a bit, we'd go up there to play. You'd go up over that way perhaps coming down to Cumberland Street or that. The Observatory of course was there and they had in their back yard, which run along the path, this awful British bulldog, it was a horrible thing, I can still remember that, and you'd run past there as fast as you could.

Talking about the neighbours in the street: there was the McGrath family tell me about them.

40:09 Yes the McGrath family lived on the opposite side of the road about halfway down and Mr McGrath was a tailor, they later moved out to Rose Bay, and he had several daughters and a couple of sons and that. He was the tailor and his tailoring place was in his front room and he was a big Irishman and he'd go down the street quite often with tails and that and we used to call him the 'Mayor of Kent Street'. He was quite an imposing figure.

Did he wear a top hat as well?

40:45 No, I can't remember him wearing a top hat. There was the Jacksons and there was Granny Allen and on New Year's Eve night she used to throw wood and that into the middle of the road and have a bonfire. The Bischell family always had a party on and they'd bring their piano out into the street.

So you'd have a bit of a sing song.

41:17 Yes. You were saying what did we do, I forgot before, we used to walk across to the Domain Swimming Pool, that was our main swimming place. Winter time I used to be taken to the Botanical Gardens and through the Domain with all the spruikers and that, things like that. Summer time we'd go for picnics down to Nelson's Bay (Nielsen Park?) or Clifton Gardens, pack your hamper and get on the ferry and go. I was in the Vigoro Club, we played Vigoro.

It was an interesting life you had there.

The cricket, I used to be taken out to the cricket. I saw Bradman and all those play.

Do you remember the Harbour Bridge being built?

Oh yes.

Tell me what you remember about the Harbour Bridge.

42:17 I remember what the place looked like before, Princes Street and that. As I say we used to go up to St Patrick's over the hill and there was a square there called Grosvenor Square and there was this big Grosvenor Hotel, much like Petty's, it's one that all the country people stayed at and it had a private bar, that was there.

Buchanan's whisky place was next to it. When the Bridge was built I can remember it starting and all these places being pulled down. I remember sitting on my father's knee and asking him how old I'd be when it was finished and gran used to say, 'Oh they're actually building it, they've been talking about it for fifty years.' They pulled some nice houses down and that in Princes Street and it altered the whole place really.

Were you there on the day that the Bridge opened?

43:22 Yes. I walked over it on the Wednesday beforehand, the children were allowed to walk over, and it poured cats and dogs, but we all went. On the day it opened I was up in front of Fort Street High School to see it opened. But the cord was cut further up, but I remember Bea Miles coming along, she was sitting on the front of a little aeroplane and she was an icon of Sydney, really. I've suppose you've heard of her.

We have. You saw her?

Yes, several times. They had a procession.

Did she live in Millers Point?

No.

Who were your best friends when you were growing up?

44:26 Mary Hyde was one of them, Thelma Williams, the Byrne family later on when I was a little older, Ellie and Frances, Imelda. I can't think of her name, she lived in Argyle Place, she had a stroke when she was thirty-seven. I didn't have a great number, I had my cousins mainly. I had a cousin that lived in Jackson's house before they did and another one who lived in Kent Street, next to the little shop.

Were there many people in Millers Point of non-Australian origin, like for instance migrants?

45:31 No not many, I can't remember any. Not at the school I can't remember any. *Mainly Irish-Catholic.*

Mainly that and Scottish and English, they were mainly that.

Now when you finished St Brigid's School where did you go after that?

Went up to St Patrick's.

Is that the business college?

No, I went to the primary school and then on to the business college later on.

What do you remember about St Patrick's Primary School?

46:09 I remember at one stage we had it underneath the church in the crypt and later on we were down in the hall, or before that I think we were down in the hall because I remember our class was up on the stage. Then we went upstairs to the first floor after the high school, or the business college, left there and went into their own building. Then they built another primary school in Gloucester Street and I went there for a short time.

Were they mainly nuns teaching you?

46:47 They were all nuns teaching then, except the singing teacher - she wasn't a nun.

Maybe they couldn't find a nun with a good voice. After you finished St Patrick's you went to the business college, tell me a bit about why you went to learn typing and so on.

47:11 I don't know it was just one of those things, I suppose. My grandmother sent me there and so that is where I went. There was Sister Aquin and Sister Marcel was there then.

So what were you taught there at the business college?

Shorthand and typing and a little bit of bookkeeping in those days. It changed a lot

after that. Later on my two daughters went there, Ann and Sue went to the business college.

So when you finished your business college were you looking for a job?

47:47 Yes it was 1932 during the Depression and it was very hard to get work then. In the school holidays for a couple of years I got work. One Christmas holiday I worked down in the Food for Babies Fund helping get their tickets ready for the Arts Union. Then I worked for Mrs Hawkins up in Macquarie Street, packing face cream into jars and that for Mussons the chemist, she made the face cream for him. Then when I went out to work some of us from the college were sent down to the Knights of the Southern Cross in Elizabeth Street to meet a man and he told us to come down to a place in Sussex Street, but don't say anything about him. There was a position for someone in the office but before you got it you had to work at packing the groceries, filling the peas and all the things. They made sauce and washed bottles and packed their own vinegar and that. I can't think what the name of it was. They also had a grocery chain of Goodlands in the different suburbs and Friday night you'd go out there and get a little extra money by working in the suburbs.

49:36 Then when they wanted someone in the office you went down into the office and eventually when a job became available you got it in the office. Well I stayed there for a while, I don't know how long, then I transferred and I went to a jeweller. I went and had a refresher course at Miss Hayes Business College and then I got a job with a jeweller, S M Wallace, in the Haymarket and I stayed there for about three years and then went to Orlando Wines until I joined the Army and I left there then.

Before we get onto the war years let's talk a bit more about the Depression years, what do you remember about those times?

50:24 It was very hard. I remember at one stage I wouldn't have had a pair of shoes for school only for the St Vincent de Paul. In St Patrick's they had a ladies' sewing group and they sewed clothes for the poor and that and I got a pair of shoes from them, otherwise I wouldn't have had a pair.

So you really felt it.

Very much, oh yes.

Were there any dole payments in those days?

51:00 No. I believe really only the men seemed to get dole because aunty was out

of work for nine months and she didn't get anything. I don't think they gave them money - I think they more or less gave them food coupons.

So how did your family manage to get through the Depression?

51:23 Well when the widow's pension came in my grandmother got the widow's pension and for some years we had a few lodgers and that helped us through. We also had a friend of my grandfather's who came out from England with him and he came there and he lived with us all the time until my grandmother died and then he went into the old people's home.

A man called Mr O'Donoghue, was he your lodger?

Jim. Yes he was.

What sort of character was he?

52:09 He was a nice old man, absolutely spotless. He was an old seaman out of work for a long time. Couldn't read or write but he could speak on anything. To fill in his day when he wasn't working, he couldn't get work, he'd go to the picture show and stay there all day. Get in for a shilling in the morning and stay there all day. A group of men used to sit down in Argyle Place and they'd talk and some of them were very well educated. There was a Mr Leonard, he was very good, and others and they'd talk about all subjects and everything. He had originally been on one of the boats that laid the cable across the Atlantic, Valparaiso, that is the Pacific, he was on one of those boats. He could speak about anything and he'd fill his days sometimes by going to the courts and listening to all the big court cases and then he'd go to parliament and sit in parliament all day and hear them.

Interesting how people used to pass the time. Now can you tell me what sort of activities went on, on the wharves, what sort of ships you used to see coming in and so on.

53:41 There were Huddart Parkers and I've forgotten that one. The Aiwaitea -that used to come from New Zealand. The Manundra and the Manoora, all those, they'd all berth down there. Then the overseas ones would be round Walsh Bay and that, Burns-Philp were in Walsh Bay. I remember the New Zealand soldiers marching up, the first contingent going away to the war, marching up Kent Street when they arrived. You could sit on the front veranda and watch the boats go out on a Saturday morning, they all generally went out about twelve o'clock, and people would come travelling, they'd arrive by tram and have to walk down to the boats and that. I've sat

in the tram on a Saturday morning. After my brothers left and I was old enough. I had to go down to what we called the stores in Sussex Street, just round from Liverpool Street, I'd have a Gladstone bag and I'd bring eggs and butter up from down there, Mr Lowry's store. I wasn't allowed to go down by tram because I'd have had to have crossed George Street, so I had to walk down and then get the tram back with the bag with the eggs and butter and the ham at Christmas time.

What were the names of the lines that used to come in on the wharves?

55:34 There was the Union Line, the Blue Funnel Line. I can't remember any of the others, there were Dutch boats and German boats. The Jervis Bay Lines, they all came in down there.

Was this down at Walsh Bay?

55:52 At Walsh Bay and Darling Harbour, round there. Later on the Strath boats used to be over at Pyrmont across the way. Then they had the little boats, they had the Illawarra Line, I think it was called. The little boats would leave here about nine o'clock at night and go down to Wollongong and that. Then there were the Newcastle-Hunter River and they went up to Newcastle. When I was with Orlando Wines I would have to arrange for the orders for Newcastle and Wollongong and that to go by boat and they'd go up at nine o'clock and they'd be up there in the morning.

So you were a secretary?

56:41 No I did the telephone and taking orders and doing the orders for the travellers and that and typing the orders out and giving them to the cellar and then arranging for the transport of the wines.

Must have been a busy job.

Yes it was really.

Can we talk now about the war years, what do you remember about those war years and your own experiences of going to New Guinea.

57:19 I joined the NES before I was in the Army, which was the National Emergency Service. They had started to build the tunnel for the railway across Circular Quay and they had to finish it, so they set up in there a command post for the NES for our area and I'd go down there some Saturday nights. They had stretchers and that there and we could stay there and you'd practice getting in touch, practice there for if

there was an invasion. Then the night the submarines came in the harbour I'd come up from Manly, could have been when they were in the harbour, I don't know, but I'm not very long home when the sirens went off. My grandmother wouldn't get off the lounge and you had to open your windows a bit and then I got under the table and there we had to sit until the siren went off.

This is the submarine attack in Sydney Harbour when the Kuttabul was sank?

Yes that was the night.

You'd just come up from Manly on the ferry?

58:37 Yes. I'd been down to Harbord. My father had moved down to Harbord, or Freshwater it was then, I think 1928 he went down there. I used to go down there Sundays or weekends.

59:10 END OF TAPE MP-FH43 SIDE B

00:04 START OF TAPE MP-FH44 SIDE A

00:04 Tape identification

Alice that must have been quite exciting those war years.

Yes the sirens went off, didn't go off very much, we were fortunate.

What else do you remember about the war years?

Rationing.

Tell me about the coupons you used to get for the rationing.

00:41 Oh you used to get coupons for clothing I think that was all. I can't remember if we had coupons for food but I know for clothing and things like that. A lot of people made their clothes out of curtain material because that wasn't rationed. Of course you went without stockings because they were coupons.

Did you get enough coupons to at least clothe yourself?

Yes but you had to be very careful. Some people would help you, different members of the family, if necessary.

Now you joined the Army. Tell me why you joined up and where you were sent.

01:30 I felt I wanted to do something and my cousin had been in Malaya in the Battle of Bua (?) and my two brothers were in the Army and my half brother had been bombed. He ran away to sea when he was about fifteen and he was on the McDhui when it was bombed in Port Moresby Harbour, he got out of it all right. I just felt, you know I'd like to and then when they called for volunteers for New Guinea I applied for that and I was fortunate to get that.

Did you have any training before you went to New Guinea?

02:24 Yes. We were taken up to St Lucia University in Brisbane and there was a camp there. The university hadn't been finished then I don't think. We were there to get fixed up for New Guinea, I think we might have been there about three weeks and then we went across on the *Duntroon* to New Guinea.

How did you find New Guinea when you got there?

02:54 Very hot. We were at Lae, our place was at Lae, in huts, quite good huts. 1st Aust Army Headquarters was there and we worked there.

Was the threat of a Japanese invasion pretty strong?

03:18 No, it was over there then really. It was quite calm around Lae and that and the different units were allowed to invite us out of a weekend and they'd take us a little bit out, but they had to be armed and that. We went up to Nadzab with all the old damaged planes and that up there, it was interesting.

Which year was it Alice that you actually went to New Guinea?

1945.

At the end of the war or during?

04:01 During the war. We went up early in the year and then we came back in 1946.

I believe one of the best things that happened to you in New Guinea was meeting your husband, tell me about that.

04:15 I met him there, he was in a unit that used to take us out on a Sunday. Then he came back before me and didn't expect to see him again but he was waiting at the station when we came back. I don't know how he found out we were coming back that day but he did.

What was his name and what was his position in the Army?

04:38 He was a WO, his name was Edward Charles Brown and he was a WO. He

was attached up there to a mechanical unit but I didn't exactly know what he did up there because he used to take off and he'd go round different places, to Rabaul and Honiara and all those places.

Did he see any action in the war?

Not really, I don't think. He was in it for quite a few years but he was here at LHQ for a while.

Did he propose to you in New Guinea?

No, over here.

After you got back. Was he a Millers Point person?

No he came from Newcastle, Merewether, Newcastle. His people were Welsh.

So when you came back from the war where did you live in Sydney?

05:45 Kent Street, same address. Aunty and my grandmother were there then and I stayed there until I was married.

Which year were you married?

January 1947.

How many children do you have altogether?

Four. Ann is the first.

Tell me their names and when they were born.

06:18 Ann was born in December 1947. Paul was born in the early 1950s and Sue was born after him and then Noel was born in 1954. I can remember that because that was the year the Queen came.

Which church did you get married in?

St Patrick's, Church Hill.

Being a Millers Point girl you did the right thing.

07:02 Well my mother and father had been married there and everything I'd done, like confirmation and everything, was there. Then I took the four of these back, they were all baptised down there.

What was it like having children at Millers Point?

07:23 It was all right. I stayed down there with them for a couple of years, it was different. There was nowhere to play or anything, you didn't play in the street. When

we were growing up the street was our playground, unless you went up the Flagstaff. You had to have someone with you to go up there. I think they were all right because we had a car and we used to go out a lot on Sundays and that type of thing, they did well.

Did you send your kids to the same sort of schools in Millers Point?

08:15 Ann went to St Brigid's. She started off school in Newcastle. We went to Newcastle for six years after we were married and although my husband was a motor man his brother was a butcher. Of course when he got out of the Army he didn't know what to do or that and he went to work for one of the big motor people, but he didn't like it, he'd always been his own boss, so his brother talked him into buying a mixed business in Adamstown. Then we got married because there was a flat and everything with it and we stayed there for about four years and he wasn't very happy. Then we bought one in the city, in Newcastle, for two years and moved from Adamstown. But he eventually went into his own car business.

Was he a motor mechanic?

09:32 Yes, he went through as a motor mechanic and he was doing automotive engineering or something by correspondence when he joined the Army and he gave it up after that. He'd worked for Ford and when he was twenty-one he came out of his apprenticeship, it was five years then, and he went as foreman to the big Ford company in Newcastle.

Which year was it that you actually left Millers Point?

1956.

That is the last time you lived there.

Yes.

Have you made any visits since, have you been back a lot?

10:20 I used to go back a lot when aunty was there and she didn't die until about fifteen or sixteen years ago.

That is Aunt Helena?

Yes.

When did your husband die?

My husband died in 1970.

You have been a widow for many years.

10:47 Yes. He will be dead thirty-six years at the end of December, he died 29th December.

How old was he when he died?

Fifty-four.

That is very young.

He had his first heart attack at forty-nine.

You miss him a lot?

Oh yes.

Do you still identify a lot with Millers Point, Alice?

11:21 Yes it is more or less home to me and you always feel when you go down there you know the place, although there is no one down there now that I'm really close to.

How much do you think your life has been influenced by living at Millers Point?

11:47 A lot I think because when I grew up and I was speaking to other people it was a different life to the way they lived. I think it brought you more down-to-earth and you took things as they come, as life. Being connected with deaths and funerals and things like that you begin to look at them as life and they don't worry you, whereas I find that a lot of younger people it does. To me it just comes as a normal life, that is life and it just goes on.

So living at Millers Point has made you a more down-to-earth person, more able to cope with things you mean?

I think so, I think so.

What are your most cherished memories of having lived at Millers Point?

13:01 Oh I don't know. I suppose being close to people there - see I had cousins living there for quite a long time. I don't know, it was different to these other places.

Why was it different do you think?

13:34 I don't know, people were different and they had different outlooks on life to what you see here. When I started to mix with people from other suburbs, when I was working and that, they seemed to live a different life to what we had down there and had a different bringing-up.

Do you think it could be because you didn't have a lot of things when you were growing up, people didn't have the material possessions they have today, they didn't have cars necessarily, they didn't have all these things like television, do you think that was it?

14:14 You had to go without things and that was it, you couldn't get them, and you couldn't get them. But we didn't do too badly. I know I didn't have a lot of toys but I know I was given a big teddy-bear and dolls and things like that, but you didn't get a lot of things like the kids do these days, you were thankful to get those.

This was in the era before Playstations and things wasn't it? Did people have less expectation, do you think of wanting things in those days?

14:58 Some people did. My grandmother could have left the Point after the Depression but she would have had to have left some of her friends. The McGraths and the McGuinnesses, they were very old Irish people there, the Silvers and the McGraths were her friends and people on the other side of the road. The people were different, they were very friendly and everything, but you didn't spend time in one another's houses. But if you wanted anything they were there.

How would you describe the community spirit at Millers Point?

15:41 Very good, particularly when the boys went to the war and that, they were very good.

That is probably the most important single thing that you had a sense of community there.

Yes.

So when I say the word Millers Point now what kind of picture comes in your mind?

16:01 Well it comes in as I knew it. As I go down now I see it hasn't changed a great lot, not up in the Point itself. Of course down on the wharf the edge it has. What comes to mind too is how peaceful it was at times. On a Sunday the Trinity Church bell, Garrison Church, would go about half-past seven of a Sunday morning and it was cracked, but you could hear that bell. Then about eleven o'clock St Phillip's bells would peal and they are lovely bells. I can remember when I used to go across to Balmain in the ferry I'd walk down to Erskine Street for the Balmain ferry and you'd hear the eleven o'clock bells across the water, everything was so quiet and peaceful to what it is now. You didn't have those high buildings blocking things out. I don't know whether the bells peal now because a lot of people don't like bells pealing, do they, on a Sunday.

So a totally different era we are talking about here, we can only imagine. Do you feel

yourself lucky having lived through that era?

17:36 I do yes, I do. I had to work hard in a way and I had to do my share of the housework as I grew up and old Jim used to do the stove in the earlier days, when he was younger and all that. He'd get up early in the morning and light it, he'd always have hot water on the stove. In the winter time they'd be a big pot of soup on it and you'd just leave it there and it would cook beautifully. It was hard in some ways but other ways it was really good.

Do you have any regrets about anything you didn't do or could have done at Millers Point?

18:30 No, not really. I think whatever was there I did. I was a lot luckier than some of the other kids down there, I suppose. Of course I wasn't allowed to do lots of things they did, my grandmother was pretty strict, but I think because I wasn't her child and because she was looking after me for my father I think she worried about me more.

Do you ever miss not having had a mother?

Yes, many times.

Do you wake up in the middle of the night and worry about these sort of things?

19:07 No, but when I was having children and that I thought about it, you do miss it. I play cards on a Thursday now with some friends, not my age but not far off, just turned eighty and that, and you hear them speaking about their young days and their mother and things like that - well that is when you realise what you missed out on.

A very interesting and very moving interview, is there anything else you want to talk about?

20:00 I don't think so. One thing I remember about the butcher, meat, you'd have to go down every day and get it. Well when I was working in Jamieson Street, Orlando Wines, I'd go home for lunch every day and I'd have to go down the butchers and it was a family butcher's shop. There was Mr Duggan, the old man, and he had three sons working for him and I had to be served by the eldest son or Mr Duggan. If one of the others served me I'd have to take the meat back, because they wouldn't give her the cut she wanted. To get your weekend meat you'd go down on Saturday morning about seven o'clock and of course as I grew up it was my job to do it and I'd have to go down and ask for a sirloin of beef with a good bit of fillet in it. Now can you imagine going to a butcher today and asking for that?

I was going to ask you one more question - who were the Knights of the Southern Cross you

mentioned them, what was that organisation?

21:31 The Knights of the Southern Cross was a bit secret wasn't it. It is a church organisation, a very strong one, for men and it is still going now, they still have it, and quite a few Catholic men are in it and they do a lot of work. They've just not long ago built a retirement village over at Marsfield, back of Curzon Hall, and things like that, they do a lot of charity work. I didn't work for them but this man sent us down to this place where there was a job going when they were hard to get. But they were not Catholics and bit against them so he said, 'Don't say you've been here or know me.' He was a Catholic but the fellow that give me a job wasn't. In those days sometimes some people wouldn't give a Catholic a job once they knew that. I can remember applying for a job at a scale place in Queen Victoria Building and I thought I had the job, I was talking to the fellow, and then he said to me, 'What work does your father do?' I said, 'He's a waterside worker.' The blind went down like that.
What do you think their reason was?

23:10 I don't know but waterside workers were not popular.
Was Millers Point a safe place to live and grow up in?

Yes. You could walk up the Cut at twelve o'clock at night and you wouldn't be frightened, over the hill.

Were there many police on duty?

23:32 Not many, no. Of course the police station was just round the corner, round in George Street North, but you didn't see a lot. Mainly they were there for a long time and they got to know the people, they'd know them. The only thing was when the Bridge came, when they built the Bridge, if you came over that way they had the underground that you walked through, they had a couple to go across Bradfield Highway, well you wouldn't go through them on your own because at times you had perverts there. When Fort Street Girls' High, when they were going to school every morning there was always a policeman up the top there and when school was coming out. Otherwise you'd just rush across the highway, which wasn't like it is now. That was the only thing.

Some of our other interviewees have told us that Millers Point had a pretty fearsome reputation, people used to think it was a slum and a bad area for crime.

24:57 Yes they did. If you said you lived at Millers Point they'd just look down on

you and a lot of people wouldn't say they lived there. But that has all gone now, they all want to live there.

They are even going to build houses for up to 20,000 people or more to live there, in the new development on the wharves. Patricks wharves are being vacated this year.

25:26 It will be a shame if they build them down there right on the water.

What do you feel about that?

I feel very bad about it because I feel that should all be left open space. As the years go on and the population increases here they want so many people - they are not going to have anywhere to get to the water. I don't know whether I am right or wrong but that is my feeling.

You think they are going to prohibit access to the foreshores.

25:56 Yes. Not complete access but there won't be the space. I think it should be left to the people.

What do you think about Millers Point without a maritime activity?

Wouldn't be the same.

That is what the future looks like.

26:15 It does. Of course the whole atmosphere has changed, I suppose the people are all different now.

Okay Alice I think we've covered it pretty well, unless there is something else you want to say.

26:37 Oh I remember the Hero of Waterloo Hotel, Carroll was the name of the people there. Milly Reid – that was one of my friends. I think that is about all.

Thanks very much for the interview Alice.

I hope it was all right.

Very good, thank you.

27:17 END OF INTERVIEW WITH ALICE BROWN AND END OF TAPE MP-FH44
SIDE A.