CITY OF SYDNEY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

NEWTOWN

Name: Grace Schwebel

Date: 16 July 1995

Place: Newtown

Interviewer: Sue Rosen

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **SR: Interview with Grace Schwebel, 16th of July 1995.**

Grace, where were you born?

GS: In Newtown, in Angel Street Newtown.

SR: And what year was that?

GS: The 2nd of September 1916.

SR: And did you grow up in Newtown?

GS: Yes.

SR: What are your earliest memories of Newtown?

GS: Well, I was the fourth child born to George and Ellen Thompson and when I was twelve months old my mother and father moved to Fitzroy Street Newtown. My younger sister – I was the second last child born – and my younger sister, dim memories of her being born and the midwife came in and took my baby sister from the house and went away with her and I remember having to pull a chair over to open the door for this nurse to come back with this little baby doll who was my baby sister and I was two year old; I can remember that. When I've talked it over with my mother over the years, most women had their babies at home and the midwife would come in, deliver the child and then within a few days the child would have to be taken away and be witnessed in the registrar down at Newtown, Newtown Railway Station, in that vicinity of the Town Hall where the registrar was.

2.07 **SR: What kind of a place was Newtown for kids when you were growing up, say the early 1920s?**

GS: Well, I lived in No. 4 Fitzroy Street Newtown. It was a terrace of three houses - it was a well-established street. Nearly every home had two or three children, some homes there was nine, ten children, and opposite us was where there used to be the Sydney Stadium and that got burnt down before I went to live there with my parents and there was a vacant allotment and the kids all played there. It was heaven for the kids. They would go over there and play cubbyhouses and play games, skipping and all the rest of it. There was sort of a special fantastic sort of experience, I thought, and kids would sit out and play skippings, hopscotch in this community atmosphere; very village like when I look back now and it was very multi-ethnic. The next street away from us was the synagogue in Georgina Street and there was a lot of Jewish community lived there. Then there was Italians that had most of the fruit shops, the Greek people, the Greek community had the milk bars. Most of Newtown, the shops along there were Jewish people in business, trade people. Then there was the Japanese Bisho [?] Laundry and there was a Japanese man that ran that with his European wife – she was European background but Australian born.

4.06 And the kids were the community. The summer nights the kids all played outside and the families sat around on their verandahs and on their gas boxes or brought out their chairs on their front verandahs. Everybody knew everybody and it was a community village atmosphere.

SR: That sounds great.

GS: You've got to talk a bit louder.

SR: Sorry. Well, thinking about when you were growing up, what kind of a kid were you?

GS: What kind of a kid was I?

SR: Yes.

GS: We went to the Catholic school at St Kieran's - that was the parish. It was about four streets further back into Darlington; it was on the border of Newtown and Darlington. We went there at first for a while until there was a family confliction in the home with the church at the time and my father took us away from the church and then we went over to North Newtown School and we ended up our schooling in North Newtown School. The North Newtown School which was in Carillon Avenue, it was as an experimental school because across the other side of the road was the teachers college and when I look back now I think it was an excellent school because we constantly had teachers over there. We always had a surplus of teachers, actually, because students would come across and have practical experience in the kindergarten there and then right through till at primary level, right through primary level.

SR: And when you say your father took you away from St Kieran's, what was the conflict there with the church?

6.03 GS: Well, I had an elder sister. My eldest sister, second eldest sister, one day my father when she was about twelve my father found out she wasn't reading and writing and then he found out that she was inside the school, going over with the nuns and cleaning the church and polishing the brass and was a messenger boy as it were, a messenger, and doing this and cleaning the school, cleaning the church, cleaning the convent and he got very angry, very angry with it, and he felt that they were taking her away from the class but when we look back at her now we found out that she was dyslexic which got corrected when she got an adult but at that time they were dismissed. The schools were overcrowded, especially in the days there was no government funding for parochial schools and that, denominational schools. They had to raise their own money within their own parish and so on and that was

the quality of education you got. So my father was a very strong-willed person. He had a terrible row with the church and the parish and that and took us away from the school, sent us to North Newtown School and then we attended St Joseph's down in the other part of Newtown, went to St Joseph's for all our religious background and our teaching.

SR: In those days wasn't it Catholic teaching that the children had to go to Catholic schools, sort of it was a mortal sin or what have you?

GS: Yes, that was right. Catholics had to go but although my mother and father both have Catholic backgrounds we weren't strictly Catholic in the home. It amazes me when I see people saying grace before and after meals. That never, ever went on in our home.

8.11 My father was an educated man and through his bad sight and sickness he had to give up his trade and his business. He was a watchmaker and jeweller. His family before him were watchmakers and jewellers and they had a string of chain shops right throughout the country areas and because he'd contacted typhoid fever in the country town of Crookwell and then he got over that, six months' illness, then they contracted it again, typhoid fever and these serious bouts of illnesses he went into bankruptcy. And he had a big jeweller shop in Goulburn, in Auburn Street Goulburn. So then they came to live in Newtown and then they had to start from scratch and there was no dole, there was no unemployed benefits or no blind benefits, there was nothing available in those days, he went out then and started a window cleaning business to earn a living to raise the children. But he was educated. He was educated at St Patrick's College in Goulburn by his parents so he knew that there was something wrong. So he wasn't a strict Catholic, he wasn't a blind, bigot Catholic, so what he done, he knew that the problem lay there in that environment and he took us away from that environment, sent us to the public school at North Newtown because there wasn't a Catholic school for girls at Newtown over near Chelmsford Street so we went there for Sundays for our mass and all our other sacraments that we had to have; we went backwards and forwards to there.

10.13 **SR: Well, talking about your family, your parents, your father, given that he'd had the career as a jeweller and a watchmaker, was he an older parent for you?**

GS: Yes, my father was well in his late thirties before he married my mother who was twenty years younger. She was one of sixteen children that my grandmother raised. My mother raised sixteen children that

survived, she raised those, and they lived in a property outside Goulburn called Curraween [?] Pines. And my father, when he had the store in Goulburn he was probably about thirty nine when he married my mother and by the time I was born I suppose he was probably pushing fifty.

SR: What sort of a woman was your mother – what can you tell us about your mother?

GS: My mother, I felt, came from a very hard life. They were very strong and sturdy. I'm a fifth generation Australian born. The family tree shows that my ancestors came out in the Second Fleet. My great grandmother was born down at Lake George and they live all around in that area. My maternal grandfather was a Rugg [?] who was born around Camden and the John Macarthur estate and all that district. So until my mother and father came to Sydney through my father's failure in business, all my relatives on both sides they lived in country areas so they were good, strong stock to survive.

12.21 **SR: So your family when you were growing up in Newtown, your father had lost the business and so would you describe them as working people or professional people?**

GS: Well, I felt my father sort of had a middle class background and when modern things came on he started to make money, he started to make money in the window cleaning business, O.K. He was self-employed and he was also well-known in the horse racing because when he lived in Goulburn he belonged to the AJC and so on and that kind of thing, the Australian Jockey Club, and was on the stewards' committee and so his middle class background came into Newtown but that was quite common. Newtown before World War I and right through the '20s had a good mixture of really working class and middle class people - like Joe Gander who was the state Labor member for this area in the street. There were bookmakers that lived in the street yet we had some very poor families with large families. The larger family they had, well, they seemed to be poorer than those who had two or three children and then the family that had one or two children they seemed to have a very good existence and it was a very mixed area.

14.09 **SR: Were your parents politically active?**

GS: Everybody was politically active and very conscious of politics in this area. As I said, that vacant allotment – we all called it the stadium, it was always called the stadium but no building was on the site. There was no building on that site till 1930, '32, '31 – and that was always vacant there for fifteen years and there was always political rallies there.

When elections were on that would be where they would get up on the soap box and the politicians would get there and talk when the election periods was on on a regular basis because the elections would run for about two months to the campaign.

SR: You were mentioning that the political campaigns and they'd have the rallies in the stadium.

GS: Yes. That stadium seemed to be the mecca for people. That vacant allotment was quite large. It took up a block and it was sort of a mecca. It was so large that there would always be a fair there or a fete or something. Like the New South Wales Ambulance would run fairs, then the Baptist group would come in and have a mission thing there with big tents put up, there was a small circus there and our home overlooked it, the balcony, we overlooked this and there was always carnivals on there or there were political rallies and when there was nothing else occupying the place the kids took it over. All the kids came in there and they came from several streets and they played there. The trams run right along.

16.00 It was facing King Street Newtown so the trams were there and the tram stop was there where people got off the trams and it was quite a mecca of activity and I look back with fond memories of looking over there; it was just across the road and there was always something going on. My younger sister developed a very unusual virus that could've made her a cripple and in those days it was called she had a hip disease but probably it was some kind of myelitis or something - it wasn't poliomyelitis, it was some kind of osteomyelitis. And Dr Ferber(?) who was a well-known local doctor who his son contracted it a year or two before she did and she was then put into wooden splints right up the side of her leg with an iron frame across. They were specially made and she had to get the sun. So there was a special stretcher made that was put on this vacant allotment out in the sun and she was carried over there and sat there all day, propped up, and all the children played around her and she was involved and this went on for a year. Then later on she went into leather straps and then later on she was into a frame. She walks now very well, she eventually came, but it was a two to three year process of cure and all that time this stadium, this vacant allotment had no trees or nothing on it, you know. It was a building that'd been burnt down and no bushes, no shrubs. And all the kids would come over there and then when the hot weather they had some kind of an awning put over her and she was known as "the little girl there on a stretcher".

18.01 And for the two years this went on all the trams would stop and wave to her and people would bring her gifts and she got several write-ups in the paper about it and I have very fond memories of that.

SR: You know when we were mentioning before about the political campaigns, what were the big issues of the day?

GS: Well, the big issues of the day right up until when the Depression broke in 1920 [1930?], even the big issues then, there was still people were out of work. The unions weren't really off the ground then and it's like if you're in the building trade and you got a whole wet weather there was no work, you didn't get paid and there was still poverty. Another one of the serious things was consumption, TB, a lot of people had TB and they couldn't work and social security was non-existent. Jack Lang was developing then and coming up as a force on the social issues. There was Joe Garden - Jock Garden he was called. Beasley, Jack Beasley, he was a bright, brilliant, well-known person who ended up in the Curtin government as a minister but when they were young men they all used to come over and hold regularly these political meetings and listening to these people and they were great spruikers, great talkers. And, of course, there was no television, even no radio. Radio was only little crystal sets, it was just developing. I was always missing, they couldn't find me, and where was I? I was over there, listening to the speakers, spruikers, and politics, fascinated with these people talking.

20.00 **SR: Did your parents ever get involved?**

GS: My mother and father said they voted Labor for the principle involved, it's the party they supported but my own cousin who was a Thompson, because they were still in the country and still middle class - he was a journalist and he did visit our home on regular occasions – he was the foundation member of the National Party, which they call the National Party today but he was a foundation member with Dr Earle Page of the Country Party because he was a journalist and run the local newspaper up in the New England district. And that caused some confusion in the family, to have this so-called "traitor" in the house because my father then changed his politics from conservative politics to come back into Labor politics because it was the Labor area and anybody that came there talking politics other than Labor would get the rotten egg or the tomato thrown at them and the kids used to love it, sitting out there watching all the political games going on at the stadium.

SR: It sounds like an exciting upbringing.

GS: Yes. When I look back now I think my grandchildren, even my own two children they experienced a bit but my grandchildren don't experience that kind of thing. It was contact with human beings, one-to-one. Now they get in their cars, walk out their front door, get in a car, but in that it was like a village community atmosphere. That’s why I'm community minded: that’s my background.

SR: And who was the local member you mentioned earlier?

GS: Well, Joe Gander, he lived in our street on the other side of the road just down the street about six, seven doors down, he became the local member. Joe Gander was the local member for years there.

22.06 **SR: Was that in state parliament?**

GS: Yes, yes, in the state parliament.

SR: Do you remember anything that was happening at a local government level?

GS: Local government level, yes. She’s now recorded, well-known, Lil Fowler. Lil Fowler was a woman several generations before her time and she became the first woman member of the local government and the first woman mayor but that came later. That didn’t come until the ‘30s, early ‘30s, 1929 or the ’30s; the Depression brought that out. Also we used to be fascinated. There was always a lot of activity going on in that little area. The synagogue, see their Sunday was Saturday and they always had their weddings on a Sunday and before you went into that particular area where the synagogue was and come down into Georgina Street and Lara [?] Avenue - they used to call it Lara Avenue; they call it Warren Ball today – there was these lovely big wrought iron gates set on this nice sandstone and they had these lovely Moreton Bay fig trees and kids, we would all love to go down there and watch the Jewish weddings and we were fascinated that the men wore their bell [?] toppers, you know, their nice silk toppers to go into the synagogue and the church and all that. And then they would come out and next to the synagogue there was this lovely hall there that they have where they'd have their bar mitzvahs and all that now. In Georgina Street I would say that nearly every house was a Jewish family and when their festivals came on we would get all the Jewish food and the kids would go in and get them and come out and eat the bread.

24.12 And their parents were generous and there was an exchange of food all the time. There was always an exchange of foreign food, like ethnic food. We didn’t know what we were getting. Now we look back and

think “God, it was a great time”. No hostility, everybody tolerated everybody else. The Italian families, because my father became a window cleaner of shop windows and that, there was several Italian families, one of them was the Imbruglia family and they had this large fruit shop. In those days the fruit shops would open at six or seven in the morning and go through till ten, eleven o'clock of a night. And at the back of the store they had this big like dormitory type of place where they would bring the Italian migrants out and then they would serve and stay and work in the shop more or less to pay for what it cost the Imbruglia family to bring the Italians out. And then they would bring their brides out. They'd have a proxy wedding from wherever they came from in Italy, whatever village and that they came from, and then they would get remarried out here and my mother had this close association with the Imbruglias and the girls would come out, the young brides would come out, couldn’t speak a word of English and my mother would be involved with them and helping them in the care of their babies and the doctors and so on like that. And when the christenings were on we used to love the christening, all these delicious Italian cakes and the food and the wine and the fruit and vegetables.

26.08 And the Imbruglia family eventually they then left the retail fruit business and moved into the manufacturing business of shoes, quality shoes and handbags and so on, ladies’ handbags.

SR: In your home what kind of discipline was used in your family?

GS: I would say my father was a very strict disciplinarian insofar that there was one baby brother died before I was born but outside of that there was five girls so he had five daughters. He was very strict with them but we were never conscious of male chauvinism because my father had to contend with six women. So we had freedom to a degree but like most families, the girls, you're always chaperoned. If you went outside the older sisters or the younger sisters had to be together; you never went out on your own. Even my eldest sister when young men came courting her - in those days they'd say they're coming to visit or take her out or they're going out or something – the younger sisters always had to be there, chaperoning. Matter of fact, they used to have a bit of a joke “Oh, you're playing possum” to watch what was going on so that’s how it got done.

SR: So did you get to tag along on some of your sisters’ dates?

GS: Well, you weren’t allowed to wear makeup and I can remember very clearly about 1922/23 my mother went out and got her hair cut when a lot of the women were getting haircuts - the short dresses were coming

in. So my mother went and got her hair cut and I can clearly remember a row in the family when my father come home and found my mother had her hair cut, cut off her hair like into a short jazz bob.

28.21 **SR: And prior to that would she have had really long hair?**

GS: Yes. Well, all the women had long hair with buns and whatever fashion they had it in, propped up in around their hair and that but the women started to gradually rebel, got their hair cut.

SR: And your father was unhappy?

GS: Oh, yes, but it only lasted a short time.

SR: So as a child if you did something that you weren't supposed to have done what would happen? Was your father the disciplinarian of the family or was your mother?

GS: No. I would say that my father was disciplinary that he was always concerned about girls being pure and modest and all that kind of thing but he was never a male chauvinist. He shared the household chores with my mother, he helped dress and bath the kids, he helped do the cooking. He was a house father, very unique in those days. And they went off to the races together. He wasn't a drinking man and my father I think it's recorded he only got drunk once in his life and he never went up to the pub. He wasn't the sort of man that went into the pub and spare cash was used in the pub. And every Saturday he would go into the hotel and bring back four bottles of lager – that's what we knew it as, lager – and there was two put on the dinner table when we always had people in the house on Saturday and then two at the dinner table on Sundays but he never imbibed and he used to drink sarsaparilla.

30.09 So we never had that sort of cruelty. Each child had their chores; everybody had their chores to do. They all had to contribute to the household. And as he gradually started to make money again because of his background, his middle class background, then we started to get things, riches started to come into the house. And there was Holkin's [?] Furniture store, factory, there in King Street - I think Jackson's is there, called Jackson's today – and the furniture was handmade there and he would put in an order and had a beautiful sideboard and dining table with leaves in it, similar to the one we're looking at in here. That style of table was made with chairs and …….(?) and things like that. We gradually started to get rich again in those terms, not real rich. [break in recording].

SR: Most of your childhood you can always remember that there was plenty of food around?

GS: Yes. My father became practically blind but he got up and went out and provided. He went out and struggled and it wasn't known for people to go out and be a window cleaner. It was sort of a put down, demeaning job but he couldn't go out and practice his craft. He had been apprenticed to his father. His father was a watchmaker and jeweller and his indenture papers showed that he got two and six a week and his mother and father had to provide him with two suits a year, board and lodging and he served and he was trained and so were his other two brothers.

32.15 They were apprenticed and trained by their own father who was a craftsman who came from England and the original business they had was in Margaret Street City; that's where they started their first store. And as the sons got older and they were trained and got the same skills that were handed down from their father. No doubt my great-grandfather handed down to his son. And they were very artistic craftsmen where they designed, melted the gold and done all those beautiful Edwardian and Victorian jewellery designs. And they had a store at Braidwood where my father was born and then they had a store at Crookwell, they had one at Goulburn and then the other brother who was also a watchmaker and jeweller, he was up in the New England district and that's how my other cousin who became a minister in the Page/Lyons government who was the foundation member of the County Party he eventually in 1931/32 became the treasurer in the Lyons/Page government. So you see I had that flowed on very strongly by my father, middle class background, but he still went out with his background to provide for us. So while there were people in our street who were very poor through illness or lack of work and the large families, there was a mixture of people who were in those days quite comfortable until the Depression broke, until the Depression broke and after World War I things were pretty comfortable in a lot of areas in that district.

34.10 **SR: Earlier on you made the comment that on the weekends, on Saturday and Sunday you would often have people in your home for dinner. Who would come to your home?**

GS: Well, we also had two paying guests, two men, boarders. Most people, if there was space to put a bed there was always a bed, they always rented that out or gave space to people because accommodation for people was at a premium. So if you had a two-storey house and the family only used two rooms. The spare room was always rented out and that was very common practice. So we had a three bedroom, four bedroom house in Fitzroy Street. The front room was sort of partitioned off so that was rented to a man, boarder, the middle room

was like the parlour, then we had a kitchen, breakfast room, then we had a laundry and then upstairs there was another three bedrooms and a bathroom. We were very unique in our house. I can remember us getting the new bath put in. The bath that was there previously was an old tin thing with wooden surrounds and I remember when my father got the new bathroom put in and the new bath and it came in there. It was standing on legs with vitreous enamel and everybody came in and inspected the new bath and then they put in a wood chip heater to get hot water. Prior to that they would heat the water in the copper down the laundry and carry it up in bucket loads. You'd have to have three people carrying water up because as fast as you put one bucket another one would come and so on; it got cold.

36.20 **SR: Did your parents own that house?**

GS: No. My mother and father rented their house.

SR: And who were the people that were boarders that you would have?

GS: Well, one of the men that was a boarder was Mr O'Connor. He was a watchmaker and a jeweller and he worked in Murray Joseph's [?], the big jeweller that was down in King Street Newtown, a double fronted large store, well-known. That was a Jewish family but Mr O'Connor was of Irish-Catholic background but he was a bachelor and he went to Murray Joseph's and he boarded at our house. And then his relative, a Mr Norris, he boarded so the two men shared the front bedroom. So they had two single beds and they boarded at our house. Then there was always visitors. Country relatives would always pop in and out at our house because we weren't very far from Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and when country people have been sent by their local doctors or the country doctors to come down here for further tests or anything it would be done at Prince Alfred and they would always stay at our house and many a time I've been tipped out of my bed and we had pillows put in the bath and we had shakedown beds on the floor to put up our country relatives.

SR: It's really unusual now for people to have boarders. I mean people have share houses or what have you because the housing situation is different. What was it like having boarders in the house? Did they become part of the family?

38.08 GS: Yes, they did but it was always respectful. Mr O'Connor was always Mr O'Connor and the other one was Mr Norris. The kids, we were always "Mr O'Connor and Mr Norris" – I couldn't tell you their first name yet my father knew them and my father's association.

SR: And the family didn't feel like their privacy or space was intruded upon?

GS: No, they went into their room; they sat out on the verandah. The front bedroom had French doors opened out onto the front verandah so they stepped out of their bedroom onto the front verandah and there was always a cane chair or something there. As a matter of fact a lot of larger families their front verandahs was usually turned into another bedroom. There was always a canvas blind or the balconies were always turned into a bedroom, canvas blinds were there to make a bed. A family down the street, the Hammond family, well-known family, the father originally was a boxer and he died very young, leaving nine children – the youngest was about two – he died of tuberculosis and they lived in a two bedroom cottage at the bottom of Fitzroy Street and the little verandah, their front verandah was like another bedroom with a canvas blind where some of the kids slept, two or three kids slept.

SR: Were they always called the "sleepouts"? You never hear that term any more.

GS: Well, they called it the sleepout on the verandah.

SR: Yes.

GS: That's what I say, every space was a premium and it was always used. And then down the bottom of the street was Lara Avenue which is now called Warren Ball, the summer all the kids, everybody'd go down there, especially the summer nights.

40.17 After they'd have their heavy meal midday Sundays they'd have a light tea and everybody'd wander down in the heatwaves and all go down and sit down the park and watch the kids on the swings and things like that, a real community village atmosphere. I look back on it. There was always sad times when one of the children took very ill and was lingering for quite a while and on the lamppost they would have flags at the top of the street and down the bottom of the street, they would have these sort of flags on the pole to denote that there was a child dying there and, if possible, not to take the horse and carts and the buggies or anything down the street unless they could go down the next street, not to go past that house where that little child was dying. It was very sad. And when she died and laid out in the coffin everybody was taken through to walk past the coffin and pay their respects and I was horrified and I screamed and I was taken to have a look at her and it frightened the daylights out of me. It was a horrible thing to see this dead child in a coffin but that was the practice and custom that they done.

SR: What did that child die from?

GS: I would say it was a contagious infectious disease because no one was allowed to go near the family either. Although they would sing out to them across the road no child was allowed to go into the house because it was very infectious. It was the days before all the anti-serums and that came in.

42.05 **SR: And what kind of flags would they put up on the street? I've never heard of that.**

GS: Well, it was a red flag and it denoted danger, I suppose, and there was probably another. They were just like flags on a pole and just put out. It was very symbolic that there was something going on in that house. Most women too had their babies at home. Nearly all women had the midwife came in and the babies and then there was another baby born in the house and the husband went off to work. The women all rallied around and put on an extra pot of soup or something, stock, stew or something, and they all helped, came in and looked after the children and everybody took a child. If there was a large, four or five kids, they all hopped in and shared the chores of the house and took to look after because those days the women would stay in bed about ten days. They were bound up, they used to bind the women up so they couldn't move around.

SR: What do you mean, like across their stomachs, bandages or something?

GS: Yes, they would call them binders and they would wrap the women in sheets, very tight sheets. As a matter of fact it was done to me at the birth of my child but they don't practice that any more.

SR: You know how before you said that all the children had to contribute to the family, you had to do chores, what sort of things would you be expected to do and at what age?

GS: I would have to around and dust the chairs. My mother would do the heavy cooking and my father but I can always remember once my mother served the meal and finished her work was finished.

44.04 Because there's a lot of girls then the girls done the work in the kitchen, doing the washing and wiping and drying. And we used to have a large kitchen dresser, quite large. It was probably about five foot wide and the height of a ceiling, probably about eight foot, and it came separated in two parts and it had glass doors on the top and then the bottom. That was taken out once a year, probably twice a year. That would be taken out into the yard and scrubbed down with sandsoap and water

and left to dry in the sun, scrubbed down with sandsoap because the grease and all the rest of it, the fuel stove and the smoke from the kitchen.

SR: You know you talk about the five girls in the family, how much older was the oldest one than you – what was the range, age range?

GS: My eldest sister - - -

SR: What was her name?

GS: - - - was eight years older than me.

SR: And what was her name?

GS: And then the other one was six, the next one was four and the baby boy was two. He died at thirteen months old. He had the measles and they put him over in the children's hospital and they notified my mother that she could go and pick him up and when she went over to get him and take his clothes over she said "Oh, well, they've got him dressed, ready for me to pick him up" she found his cot was empty and, of course, the child had died and she didn't know of his death until she got over there to pick her child up to bring him home. And what happened, overnight he'd developed meningitis and died. And I was born then nine months after his death and then my other sister was born two years after me. There's two years between all the children.

46.07 **SR: And what were the names of your sisters?**

GS: The first child was named Maisie, the second one was Eileen, the third child was Kathleen, the boy was Clement George, I was Margaret Grace and my sister, the baby is Mary Ellen.

SR: What did your family do for fun? Would the family do anything together on your father's days off?

GS: Well, what we done for fun was, as I said, my father's family then came to Sydney to live. Eventually, my grandparents came down ahead of my father. So they had moved to Manly and they had a waterfront home over at Manly right across the Corso and we would get up for picnics and my father would take us down and carry two large suitcases and get on the tram, went right down to Circular Quay, get the ferry and go over to Manly and have picnics - we went to Clifton Gardens. We were always taken out. He was very conscious of his children and his family and, as I said, he wasn't a man that was

interested in that side. Well, horse racing was what he was interested in and, of course, it was the days before radio.

48.05 My father's eyesight then deteriorated very quickly and when he first went bankrupt in Goulburn, O.K, in Crookwell, he came down to Sydney, his eyes were deteriorating. And then he went to work for a big jewellery store as their watchmaker and jeweller at Grace's and Milverston's [?], the jewellers – they were a big store in town. That's who I'm named after, actually, Grace, that's where the second name came from. But then his eyes started to deteriorate very quickly and he started that business as I said earlier but he was still very interested in horseracing and he would take us and my mother and we would go to the horseracing on Saturdays. And as a child I learnt to read by reading the horseraces to my father and I would spell the words out to him and then he would tell me what they were and I would read the newspapers to my father, the horseracing, of course, horseracing. And I knew all about what a dam was and about the size and I knew about colours of horses so I learned to read and write and understand horseracing before I even went to school.

SR: In the evenings, in a typical evening in your family, what would happen? Everybody watches TV these days and I was just wondering – they didn't have radios then, there was only the crystal.

GS: I can hardly hear you. I think the battery's gone on my hearing aid.

50.01 **SR: What would the family do in the evening?**

GS: Well, what they would do, if the weather was nice most people when they finished the meal they would go outside and sit on their front verandah and talk and gossip and the kids would play around outside. A certain time of the night when it was getting time for bed they would come in. Mostly in Sydney here at Newtown the weather was usually pretty good unless it was wet or they would sit around and talk and gossip. Then when the first record player came in and I remember my auntie that lived down in Darlington he was a shearer and their first record player and it was a cylinder, the cylinder with the big horn and that was fantastic, that was marvellous. And we would say "Right", we'd have an early tea and then we'd walk down all the way down to Darlington to listen to this wonderful new machine, this record player, this cylinder. And then His Master's Voice, they put out a phonogram and we were one of the first in the street to get a phonogram and that was an upright one and you wound it up and my father started buying records and that was when I knew a lot about the opera, well-known

singers, Nellie Melba, Essie Ackland, Caruso, all those great artists and that; that was very common in our home we got that kind of thing. And then we got a lot of comedy shows, *Billy Williams*.

SR: Was that on radio, the comedy shows?

GS: No, no radio. It was all these records were produced and you'd go up the stores and buy them. And then later on, 'round about '25, '26, something like that, his business started improving, his cleaning business, and then he would have a good win at the horses or whatever, then there was EJ Wilkes' [?] big musical store in Sydney and then we got a Gulbransen pianola.

52.21 And then we would have the rolls and people would play that and then they'd stand around and sing, see, and people entertained themselves, we'd have little community sing-songs. When the records were playing everybody'd stand around and sing to the records and most of them knew the songs and the tunes. Even the opera singers, they would follow the tune through. They were usually the well-known ballads from most of the operas and things like that. They were all on record in our house.

SR: And you know how you mentioned comedy records, who were the comedians of that time?

GS: Well, on the records they used to have one called Billy Williams and then they would have *When Father Painted the Parlour*, I can remember that, I could even sing it for quite a while. And then they would have the one doing – it was an English comedian, I think – and then they were doing the census, *When the Census came around*, *Take the Census*, that was a funny show. See, all these sort of things were on records – quite humorous they were – and the people who didn't have a phonograph and we had one and a lot of them didn't have them they would all come in and sit around just like when television was first introduced. The first person who got television, all the neighbours come in and watch it and we had a phonogram and people come in and listened to the records being played and join and all have a laugh and a spin at it. And then the chairs and tables'd be pushed back and there'd be a little bit of song and dance, amusing ourselves in the lounge and the parlour.

54.04 **SR: And you know this comedy routine about the census, that sounds like it was a bit of political satire.**

GS: It was, it was. And it was the censor arrived at the door to take the census and it was a put-down, actually, of working class but out of the

put-down of the working class the woman still had some common sense and logic so she knew that this person was trying to get information out of her and that was the butt of the whole thing.

SR: Was that in the '20s, do you think?

GS: Well, I would say the thing was probably made in World War I, just before or just after. It was done in England and His Master's Voice they produced a lot of the stuff out here. They had a very large factory down here at Alexandria/Erskineville and a lot of them were reproduced. They were probably brought out here from England and then they were reproduced out here in Australia and the copyright laws.

SR: Can you remember any local artists?

GS: Yes. Opposite us and running down the side of what I call the stadium was Mr Ockleford [?]. He was also a very clever, brilliant craftsman, a wood turner, and he carved wood, and he's recorded really too. I think he's recorded in television, early days of television. He was also a great bone man, he used to play the bones, and when functions was on he earned his living playing the bones on the Tivoli and doing the tours but he was also a great woodcarver and wood turner. Like the legs on this table he would do that. He would do beautiful wood strips and a lot of his work was in the Sydney Town Hall and buildings around town.

56.10 **SR: And what do you mean when they say "playing the bones", what do you mean?**

GS: Well, they would have two bones and then they would click them and it's similar to a mouthorgan but they could really play a whole tune. He was clever enough even to play excerpts from some of the opera pieces, ballads in the opera. He was a balladeer, very well-known, Mr Ockleford.

SR: Where would he perform?

GS: I would say he could've been Australian born but when I think back now I think he's probably came from Europe somewhere.

SR: But were there theatres around locally where people would perform live shows?

GS: Yes. Now, Her Majesty's Theatre, we went to Her Majesty's Theatre a lot, and the *Cinderella* performance was on and it was a Saturday night and I was there with my older sisters and suddenly the lights went out and they came on the stage to tell everybody not to be frightened – I was probably about six or seven – not to be frightened, that there was

a big fire had broken out at Marcus Clark's up there in Brown Street. That was on fire and the fire had got out of control and broke all the electrical wires so that part of Newtown was plunged into darkness and they told us to be very careful, that they would continue the show. But then they found out that they couldn't so asked us to stay there, singing, with lamps not to cause a stampede because they said there's no need to be worried, best to slowly go out of the theatre because there was danger where people could fall down the steps and cause a crash.

58.06 And when I look back now and it's recorded not one person was injured. They kept it under control and people were all evacuated out of the theatre and our family came down to collect us because they had to come from Fitzroy Street down to Wilson Street. Then we were regular, my father took us on a regular basis, my mother and father, to Clay's Theatre, live theatre, and that was vaudeville but in Fuller's Theatre, Her Majesty's, that was usually light opera, musical comedy, musical opera. I saw Gladys Moncrieff perform there several times in *Rio Rita*. Nellie Collie was a very well-known artist in those days and she usually played the role of Prince Charming because she was always dressed up as a boy, playing the Prince Charming role - she had this magnificent voice.

SR: What was the vaudeville theatre called, the other one?

GS: It was called Clay's, it was Clay's Theatre.

SR: And where was that?

GS: That was on the corner of Bedford Street and right there running down the side of the Newtown Town Hall.

SR: Grace Schwebel, 16th of July 1995. God, what were we talking about? I was just thinking where we were up to in the questions.

GS: We were talking about Clay's.

60.00 **SR: Oh, yes, the theatre, that's right.**

GS: Yes, and what entertainment there was.

SR: Yes, and the local artists. Did you go to the theatre very often as a child?

GS: Yes, yes, very regular, very regular.

SR: And who were some of the big Australian artists, I mean can you remember say in the vaudeville scene?

GS: Well, perhaps on the vaudeville scene was the well-known ones because you never forgot them because they continue right up to modern days of television was Roy Rene, Mo and Stiffy whose son now, his grandson now, is the great entrepreneur.

SR: Who's that?

GS: I lost his name. Brings out the Russian Ballet. [probably referring to Michael Edgley]

SR: Big family.

GS: Yeah, O.K. And then that kind of entertainment, there was always a concert somewhere or other and all along the street there were several little studios where they taught singing and dancing and tap dancing. I'm not talking about when I was a real child; I'm talking when I got older as a teenager. So a lot of girls went up and learned how to dance and toe dance and tap dance, then they would put on a concert. They would hire the halls, St George's Hall and Manchester Unity, so I suppose there was always entertainment going on.

SR: Would you ever have those lessons, were you ever involved?

GS: No, we didn't get involved so much in dancing but my father was very insistent on us going to elocution lessons, so elocution. When we got the pianola we were going to learn piano and the St Kieran's, the convent down there, that was very well-known.

62.07 The nuns that were there teaching at the time, they were well-known international people and there were some very well-known violinists, there was a very well-known violinist family. They all played the violin and they became of international class and they all got taught down there at St Kieran's Convent.

SR: What order of nuns was it there at St Kieran's?

GS: They were Sisters of Mercy.

SR: I was wondering did your mother work outside the home?

GS: Yes. In the early years before my father, the business started to build up and he got more and more business and travel wider than the few shops around – he cleaned the windows of the shops, you see – and she went to work in town with Reuben Brasch's and she became very friendly with a woman who was called Blanche Hanks and Blanche Hanks was the manager of the Reuben Brash family. They had big stores in Oxford Street and she was a very unique woman insofar in those days when managers were very rare, a female manager was

very rare. And she used to buy these beautiful beaded dresses and clothes - I'm talking about ‘20, ’23, ’24 – where she’d wear them once or twice to a big society function or something, then she’d hand them on to my mother. I can remember those clothes very well, beautifully beaded dresses.

SR: Was Brasch’s a music industry thing then?

GS: Reuben Brasch’s was a well-known family and they had stores in Oxford Street. It was a major store, a major store about three or four storeys in Oxford Street - I think the Koala Motor Inn’s there now.

64.06 **SR: What did they sell?**

GS: General merchandise, clothing, wearing apparel, Manchester and that kind of thing, furniture. No food, of course.

SR: Who controlled the finances in your family?

GS: My father, my father.

SR: So what about in terms of managing the house and paying the rent and the food bills? Would he allocate money or what would happen?

GS: No, I think he controlled everything. I can remember them going down to the store. We used to go to the big butcher shop down there on the corner of Forbes Street and it was a big, large butcher shop on the corner there, quite large, and you would go down there for your weekend meat and you would get a half a lamb – because my father would go with my mother to help carry the stuff home – and you would get a half a lamb for about two shillings, two and six and then the chops. You usually had pork chops for breakfast on a Sunday, sausages on a Saturday. It was sort of regular, well-fed, and always when you got your order and paid the money over there was always a bag of sweets, there was always a little extra and most of the stores done that, even in the grocery stores or the fruit shops. Even if you went in and bought your weekend groceries there was always another little extra given to you as a bonus for your custom, something on the side, a bit of fruit, extra fruit in the fruit shops. In the grocery stores there was an extra something put in and in the butcher shops there was balloons or a bag of lollies or some would give away lard or an extra pound of dripping or something like that free.

66.10 **SR: How would you describe your mother’s working day?**

GS: Very hard, when I look back now how hard women worked then. They'd boil the fuel stove, then they'd have to clean the fireplace, especially the wintertime, they'd clean that fireplace, then always the fuel stove was always burning. Then the copper, the laundry attached to the kitchen, and that was lit nearly every day; there was always boiling up to be done every day with a large family. And then lift the clothes out of the copper with a pot stick; put it into the first tub, two rinsing tubs, and then they would have the blue tub. They usually had the large galvanised round tub on a stool or something with a blue rinse in it and that was the final rinse. I suppose she thought she was made if by lunchtime she had all the washing done and on the line.

SR: Was she expected to do the washing of the boarders?

GS: Oh, yes, they were boarders, they weren't lodgers. Lodgers only occupied the room, boarders paid full money; that was everything. They paid for their food and their beds changed and to have the room kept clean and do their washing although most men took their shirts and their collars and that to the Bisho [?] Laundry, the Japanese laundry, because their collars were separate from their shirts and they put them on with studs. They'd usually have a gold stud to stud the collar at the back – that was usually a plain stud, usually gold, because they were usually jewellery, gifts given to men, then the front one was a nice one, always nice, in case they took their tie off then they still had their collar on and they would be quite stiff and they could hardly be done satisfactorily in a home laundry; they usually went to the commercial laundry.

68.21 **SR: And your mother had this job at Brasch's as a shop assistant?**

GS: No. She worked there for a while in the cleaning, like in the cleaning and the toilets or the ladies' room, the cloakroom, and there would always be cloakrooms for women in the stores in those days. But then her and Blanche Hanks took a liking to one another and then she went in to work privately for Miss Hanks in her apartment - she lived in a beautiful place out at Elizabeth Bay. So she went backwards and forwards, became her private person, housekeeper and cleaner and what have you.

SR: What kind of appliances were there in the home?

GS: What kind of -?

SR: Appliances, helping cleaning.

GS: Appliances, O.K. We were one of the first to get the first gas stove, an early cooker, and I can remember it very clearly: it was quite large.

When my father was able to afford a stove a lot of people had gas on and they usually just had a little gas ring. It usually stood on the side of the gas stove, on the hob. O.K, on the fuel stove they had a little gas ring; it was on the hob of the fuel stove and then they had gas jets up the top of the head or right throughout the house and people had candles. But we ended up in getting a full gas stove and it was called an Early Kooka, Metters' Early Kooka with a kookaburra on it and it was so large it even had extension wings.

70.09 It had wings on the side of it so they fitted in so you could shift the pots across, it's quite large because my mother had a big house and then we eventually took it with us. We owned that so even though we rented the house my father kept improvement as a tenant, you know, putting all these extra things in because he had that kind of a background.

SR: And would you have got the gas stove in the '20s?

GS: Yes. That stove, I think, was bought about 1923, '23, I think, '22, '23, might have been '22.

SR: Now, I wanted to ask you about the effects of World War I. How did that affect your family? I mean your father, presumably, was too old to go.

GS: He was not only too old, he had his sight, he had his sight. Members of the family, relatives all went, different members of the family, my mother's relatives and my father's relatives went. But I was too young. The war was over, finished in 1918, but I do remember my mother talking a lot about it, that it was 'round about that time that they considered closing the hotels then. They used to be open in the early days till ten o'clock and that was when they fought hard and they voted then to bring in six o'clock closing but that was passed down to me by my mother. I have no recollection of it. All I can remember clearly was six o'clock closing and the effects, especially of a Saturday afternoon, when we started going to the pictures, when the picture shows came, the silent, and we went down to the Hub Theatre, King Street Newtown, when you came out at five o'clock and you'd walk back home to go home there were about five or six hotels you would pass on the way home coming along King Street and there was always brawls, drunken brawls, out on the footpath with the men guzzling and drinking and shocking, absolutely horrifying and the paddy wagon would be there and get them and bundle them into the paddy wagon and take them off.

72.38 **SR: I've heard a lot about these kind of brawls and I'm just surprised that more people didn't get killed.**

GS: Well, I have visions, recall visions, that they were brutal and then the people, they looked on them as an entertainment. The people that were involved in the brawls might be three or four men, boots and all situation, and there would be a ring of people, men, women and children, that were in a circle, looking down onto this and these people on the footpath, drunk and tossed out of the hotel, drunken brawl. It was called the six o'clock swill. If they went up at midday and started drinking – don't forget I think beer was only about tuppence or thruppence a glass or something – and yet even though there's these children and the wives at home were living in poverty they seemed to have enough money to have these drunken brawls and my family wasn't involved in it and that's what used to horrify me. My father never done it. He wasn't a wowser, no way, he wasn't a wowser and looked on it as sinful and nonsense, it's just that he wasn't a drinker.

SR: And do you remember people being hurt or killed?

GS: No, I can't remember anybody. Probably there was a lot of brutality there. But I can remember then when my relatives would come down, my mother's family'd come down and stay down there, especially at Eastertime they'd come down for the Easter Show or they'd come down for Christmas and usually their trek was the other way.

74.21 Come school holidays, six weeks, and school breakup my father would take us and with my mother and the kids all go up to grandpa's place up at Goulburn. Or when they died, when they all died 'round about '23, '24, then we went on to aunties' and uncles' places. So we really weren't in the city over the holidays; mostly we went away over Christmas holidays. But in turn when they would come down, as I said before, relatives always came in and stayed - don't forget there was no hotels and motels in those sort of days and because, as I said, we lived close to Prince Alfred these people would stay at our place, our home - and the men would like a drink and my father would take them up to the hotel but he would drink sarsaparilla and they were there at six o'clock. And my auntie's husband, her brother-in-law was the policeman, the local sergeant here at Newtown Police Station, and he would be drinking with them when the Black Maria'd come and he'd put the people in the Black Maria that he'd been drinking with, even his in-laws or relatives or family friends.

SR: Really?

GS: Yes. He was Sergeant McLung [?] and when the Black Hand Murder took place in Newtown, the Italian murder – it was a Mafia thing – he

arrested the Italian that committed the murder down in Newtown Station; the same Sergeant McLung was my mother's brother-in-law.

76.22 **SR: I've heard stories of the police arresting people just out of hand or for swearing at them - I mean that's only recently been overthrown. What was the general population's view of the police? Were you afraid of them, were they respected or were they considered to be corrupt?**

GS: Well, my childhood memories were always "You watch yourself, behave yourself, the policeman". Policemen were always the bogeyman; if you didn't behave yourself the policeman would get you. And we were law-abiding people. Wherever you went it was "Keep off the grass". You would walk along the path and you wouldn't go on the grass. You weren't allowed to spit; you wouldn't spit on the footpath. And on the trams there was things: you couldn't spit in the trams or fare evasion. There was always little signs around in the community what was a penalty and what wasn't a penalty. So in a way we were trained from the time we were little to be law-abiding but, of course, there was always an element that defied the law anyhow. And I suppose when you think about those days and people lived close together in the community it's always tightknit, brothers and sisters and families when they got married they only moved streets away from one another; there wasn't the exodus like it was after World War II. After World War II families broke up because they had motorcars and they moved suburbs away from one another but most of the people that were born and reared in that neighbourhood they continued to live in the neighbourhood because close by, not very far away was the industrial area where the jobs were.

78.22 **SR: And in the neighbourhood did you know a lot of people and a lot of people knew you? Like say if you went up and did something that you shouldn't have done, was that word likely to get passed back to your parents?**

GS: Oh, of course, of course, of course. That's what I'm saying, everybody knew everybody and "I'll keep away from them. They're no good, that family's no good". We were forbidden because we lived in what you call – I think they still call it – North Newtown to go over past Macdonaldtown Station to go into Erskineville and down the dip, not allowed to go there. There were areas of sin even. Even as you grew up to be a teenager you knew you weren't allowed to go there for your own safety, your own reputation, and I'm talking about moral reputation now.

SR: What areas were they?

GS: Well, we were forbidden to go over past Macdonaldtown Station and when we went down to play in the park we were given strict instructions and, of course, there was always the kids, you know, "I'll tell mum on you, I'll tell dad on you if you go down there" and all that kind of thing and because we were all girls we were all chaperoning one another.

SR: And when you talk about not being able to go past "the dip", is that that railway underpass near Erskineville near what used to be that pub?

GS: Yes. Well, the dip of Erskineville was past Erskineville Road. That was all known as a very poor area and a lot of iffies down there, people.

80.03 **SR: But you married someone from there, didn't you?**

GS: Yes, but I married but I'm talking about when in the '20s before I met him. I didn't run into him till the '30s. I'm just talking about restrictions that were put on you where your family wanted to keep you close to them and they didn't want you wandering off. We were girls and we were chaperoned all the time by one another.

SR: And so Erskineville and Macdonaldtown area, that was considered pretty rough. What about Redfern and Waterloo and places like that? Was that too far out of your range?

GS: Well, yes. Redfern and Waterloo was definitely out of my area, definitely.

SR: What about Chippendale and Darlington?

GS: No, Chippendale and Darlington is different. Now, my relatives and godparents lived down there at Darlington. They lived in Rose Street which has now all disappeared - the university's gobbled all that up – and we would go down there regularly. They were the ones that had the phonogram, the cylinder and the big horn and all the rest of it and I used to stay there a lot as a child, O.K, and we would walk down there. We would walk down there and go past the Deaf Dumb and Blind Institute which the front of it was in City Road but the back of it was in Darlington Road, O.K. And when we would walk past there they would say "Listen, listen. You can hear them doing terrible things to the children over there" and we would get these horror stories of what they were doing to the deaf, dumb and blind children in the institute, you know, and you can hear the screams, "Listen, hear them screaming and squealing". We would shake in our shoes and then we'd run and they'd frighten the daylights out of us. I'm talking about when it's dark

and you're going home at seven o'clock with your older sisters and that, family, and then we'd be walking back home to go to our place in Fitzroy Street. People did walk 'round in safety. I don't ever remember any serious crimes or anything like that.

82.16 **SR: Do you think they really were abusing the kids at that place? I mean, just methods of treatment that they thought was a good thing.**

GS: It could be a myth, children's myth. And don't forget at the back of it when you look at the back of it, it was a big stone building at the back and brick building and they had all these tiny little windows up there and it did look like a fortress from Darlington Road side; I'm not talking about the beautiful architecture on City Road with the sweeping lawns.

SR: Did you ever see kids on the sweeping lawns?

GS: Oh, yes. When you'd go past in the trams they would be there with their carers and the people who looked after them had them out there and so on.

SR: What I wanted to know, in the '20s when you had the soldiers come back, they'd come back from the war, was there a prevalence of men who perhaps were shell-shocked or who were amputees? Can you remember if there was sort of a social phenomenon of returned servicemen who didn't integrate back into the community?

GS: No.

SR: You can't remember?

GS: Never entered into my world at all. It didn't enter into my world until my stepfather - he was a returned serviceman from World War I – but in the '20s, no that never entered into my world because all my mother's family and my father's family that were involved in the war, they were in the country towns so I didn't come across them as such.

83.59 **SR: Can you remember in terms of the political discussions at the time - you know, there were supposed to be soldier settlement schemes and all sorts of provisions made – you had all these men coming back from the war in bulk [?], you'd just had the Russian Revolution, there was a concern that they might have one here with all these men that had built up camaraderie and they'd built up bonds and then they were all coming back, can you remember any discussions at the time about the return of troops?**

GS: No. That didn't come till later. I would say I must have been about twelve, fourteen, and I do remember people saying how disgusting but I never witnessed it but I would only hear the gossip about what they would say about here they went away and fought for their country and here they are on the corner, selling matches and can't get a living, couldn't even get a proper pension. Even if they had one arm missing or even one leg they were battling even to get a pension and even able-bodied men couldn't get work and yet they never turned around and gave them a returned serviceman's pension. I think they really had a hard time but my family wasn't involved in it directly.

SR: Now, you were very young but around 1919, 1920 there was a flu epidemic and a bubonic plague. I always thought it was the flu but some people refer to it as "the plague" so there might have been both.

GS: Bubonic flu they were calling it.

SR: Right. Can you remember anything about that?

GS: What I vaguely remember about that was we had to wear the masks and people were getting injections and my father refused to allow us to have injections.

SR: And do you know why?

85.58 GS: For the simple reason he said they injected people and they got the flu and died anyhow, the odds weren't good enough, and he was very strict in our days about home cleanliness. People used to have what they call phenol or common name it was called sheep dip and the toilets and all those were always in the backyard and we were always made to wash our hands before meals. We were kept clean, the home was vermin free, the drains outside the laundry and the washhouse – some people called it the washhouse – there was always phenol. It was put in there every day for like the drain. So he was very strict about that, he wouldn't allow us, and not one of us came down with it. Yet there were people down around the street, lots of people did die from it but it didn't affect our family.

SR: Your parents seemed to be quite conscious of health and that. I mean what variety of fruit and veg were available to you at that time?

GS: Fruit and vegetables of the season were available. You looked forward to the stone fruit season and all that kind of thing and the meat was plentiful, cheap, and I suppose if you had the money in your pocket you could live very well. I'm not talking about some of the people who had

large families and no work. A lot of people suffered but our house we did not suffer until the Depression hit.

SR: Who were your friends when you were growing up?

GS: Quite peculiar: my father said that because we're five girls in the family we had to make our own fun between ourselves yet we were allowed to go outside and play with the kids in the street outside.

88.22 **SR: So your father said that you had to play with your sisters?**

GS: Yes, yes, yes.

SR: So you must have developed friendships at school.

GS: Well, we did, we did but I'm talking about in the home, in the home. As I said, we had our mecca of activity just across the road, just across the other side of the footpath and we had the stadium.

SR: Yes.

GS: No building there but it was called the stadium and all the kids congregated there and then if we didn't congregate there we were in the park just down the street, Lara Avenue, Warren Ball Park. So because we mixed with everybody - and that's what I'm saying, there was Jewish, Catholic, Protestants, all kinds of people - no one was aware of any anti-Jew, anti-anything. Everybody mixed together, of a weekend and when it wasn't school time they mixed there.

SR: And there wasn't a Catholic/Protestant divide?

GS: No, not in my area or I wasn't conscious of it. I wasn't conscious of it till I got older and some of the older kids probably started it, might have started, the Catholic kids or the public kids or something like that, but I was not aware of it. I can't ever – and I was pretty observant as a child, always curious.

90.03 **SR: Well, what sort of things would you do with your friends?**

GS: Well, they always played skipping and hopscotch and then the girls would be in there with the boys, playing marbles, they were always playing marbles, spinning tops, all good, clean open fun. It was all done over on the stadium and then every kid would get bits of food out of the house and everyone bringing something and the kids - there was community feeling – they would have a little picnic and bring all their sandwiches in and put on all sorts of dos on the stadium.

SR: How far were you free to roam [break in recording] - - - any adventures that you had as a child?

GS: I remember, vaguely remember, wandering off when we was visiting an auntie at Stanmore and I disappeared, they couldn't find me. They phoned up Newtown Police Station. She was quite comfortable, my auntie. They had the phone on and they phoned the police station and reported me missing; they couldn't find me. And they "We've got a little girl here. What's her name? And her name is Bridget Freeman". And they said "Oh, no" and then suddenly they thought it might be her and, of course, it was me because my name, because I had such rosy skin, my complexion and all the rest of it, they always used to call me Bridget. I was very Irish-looking from my Irish grandmother and Freeman was my godmother. My auntie lived down at Darlington and because I stayed with her a lot I thought my name was Bridgette Freeman; I never gave my name as Gracie Thompson. And when they finally came down there I was, sitting in the police station, being looked after and I told my name as Bridget - that caused a lot of fun and games for many years.

92.07 And the most horrifying memory was down Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and they seemed to take all the kids down there from the time they were about three or four and they went into have their adenoids and tonsils removed; it was like a regular ritual. Like it was a horrifying thing and I remember going in and this horrible anaesthetic and then waking up and they had the beds, like little cubicles, up the wall right around and they must've done the kids – I look back now in horror – and they must've done them like on a production belt on a factory and all these kids were screaming and crying and all there that had their adenoids and tonsils and we were there. And then later in the night then your parents came and took you. We weren't kept in there for days. You were taken there early in the morning, your adenoids and tonsils done, and probably kids came from miles and that day there was adenoids and tonsils day and then they took you back home of a night. It was a horrible thing, horrible; it really scared you, it was scary.

SR: You've mentioned before that you were ill as a child. What was that? Are you happy to talk about what the problem was?

GS: My illness was mostly accidents. I was quite a healthy child, really. Because my father had this short sight and then the illness, what with his work and his short-sightedness and his work, plus the typhoid – two attacks of typhoid in eighteen months – weakened his sight and then he became practically blind but I was wandering around and falling over and nobody thought to see if I was short-sighted. None of the

other girls were but I was the only one became short-sighted and probably because I was reading a lot with my bad sight I fell over and cut my leg badly and it was terrible; my leg had to be stitched.

94.19 I fell down the footpath and broke my arm, had to be taken to Prince Alfred Hospital, and this sickness was always there and they didn't know why I was always having these accidents. Of course, then I was tested at North Newtown School why I was so bright in some things but then I was making mistakes what was on the board and, of course, I was down at the back and then the teacher tested me and found out that I couldn't read the board because I couldn't see it but I could read anything here and tell her everything that was in the books and I was quite good at all that. And then she sent a note home to the parents and I suppose my mother and my father never thought because he had bad sight that it was affected by the genes and it was hereditary. So I was about nine, eight or nine, before I got my glasses. And the other thing was, that's right, I fell down the school steps at North Newtown School. I went home for lunch and went back at lunchtime to school and I missed my step and fell down a row of steps and I was knocked out unconscious, you know, concussion and that and then they brought me to. Instead of taking me to the hospital they take you home, of course. They took me home and then a little while after that then they found out that my sight was deteriorating so I was becoming short-sighted.

SR: Were there any people in the area that you had to avoid?

95.57 GS: No, not in my street. I'm talking about right up till I was – no, I don't ever remember avoiding anybody. The only thing was at school – now, North Newtown School, that was a mixture of kids – there was the Lenin [?] family, Dossie and Freddie Lenin. Now, they could have been Torres Strait Islanders. They were lovely, everybody played with them, but then there was another family called the Gallaghers, O.K. Now, the Gallagher family, the mother was white, probably of European extraction, the father was probably part Aboriginal. The Gallagher family, they were all right when you were at school with them but you wouldn't mix with them socially and they lived over the other side of King Street, they lived very close to the school.

SR: And why couldn't you mix with them socially?

GS: What I'm saying is that didn't happen until I was a teenager and I was at a dance and I got up and was dancing with Jackie Gallagher, I was jitterbugging with Jackie Gallagher, and my mother when I came back she roused on me.

SR: Is that the race thing, just racism?

GS: I'd say so. But it was like now when I look back in hindsight I wasn't aware of it at the time but because of their colour I suppose like the Aboriginal people in the country towns today, they were always cast aside and pushed into that fringe situation. And they were a large family and the colour of their skin varied. Some of the boys were very dark and some of the girls were very European-looking and they were well-known around here for years, right up until the '70s; they may be still over the other side of Newtown.

98.11 Then the Chinese family, they were well-known around here, the Fonnies [?] and there was a big Chinese fruit shop up there on the corner of Missenden Road and King Street. Their family all went to North Newtown School too. It was quite a mixed school, very ethnic.

SR: And was there much racism? How were the Chinese family treated?

GS: No, no, there was none of that. The only thing was like as far as the school was concerned there was silly sayings passed down to you by your family and I suppose it was passed down to them, you'd stick the money in your mouth and "Stop doing that. Some Chinaman might've had had it", you know, that sort of racism nonsense, "Some Chinaman might've been handling that". Yet on a regular basis there was a well-known Chinaman that used to come around with his cane suitcases and they were the type that fitted in - they had no hinges on them; they fitted into one and then they had straps around them – and he would come around, knocking on the door, and everybody knew he was coming on such and such a day and he would bring out this material, dress material, clothing, and lay it out. They welcomed him into the house and he would lay his goods out as a travelling Chinaman salesman and they welcomed him and paid him their money and they took money in exchange and all that and yet this silly saying "Stop putting that money in your mouth. Some Chinaman might've had it". I don't think it was serious racism there, nothing serious.

SR: Can you remember any rituals, sort of things that were always celebrated, aside from Christmas? I suppose Easter. What about Arbor Day or Wattle Day?

100.11 GS: You got that through the school system. I don't know if they do it today. They used to put out a school magazine through the Department of Education and they came out every month and this was always recorded, Arbor Day and Empire Day. "If you don't get a holiday, hip, hip, hooray. It's Empire Day, 24th of May, if we don't get a holiday we'll

all run away". They were all kids' things that they sang, so we had a holiday. When we were involved with the church, my parents, you would have the Corpus Christi and then we'd go down on the tram, get on the ferry, then trek all the way up to Manly to St Patrick's where they would have Corpus Christi celebration. And then St Patrick's Day, that was celebrated too in the Catholic groups, Catholic communities, 17th of March. It was always celebrated on the nearest Saturday or Sunday to the 17th of March and especially in our family because being Catholic they were very anti-conscription, very prominent against the war. My mother and father voted three times to oppose when it was put up as a referendum. I know that because they spoke about it a lot; even though I wasn't born or a baby they spoke about it for years later. And the Easter Uprising affected most Catholic families; the Easter Uprising in Dublin outside the post office affected our family and was talked about for years and years later because my grandmother came out here as an adult woman from Ireland and they were very anti-British.

102.09 Our family were very anti-monarchy, we were always republican and I say it was because of the flowing-on, the Catholics. See, Boland's the Irish on my mother's side and then the Catholic's on my father's side.

SR: Looking at the year, what were the big sort of events or celebrations in your year and how were they celebrated? I mean, did you celebrate Empire Day?

GS: Well then of course the after World War I there was ANZAC Day and that was a big day and everybody went down to watch that. I suppose there was nothing major around in my life, affected my life, not till I got a bit older. I then became very conscious, more or less, of the world when the Depression hit in '29.

SR: When you were at school had a thing called physical culture come into the schools where they did these mass sort of coordinated gymnastic-type displays but it was very sedate? There were these movements and there was also maypole dancing. Had that happened in the '20s?

GS: It did in North Newtown School because they had a lovely grounds and they had a nice maypole there and they used to do a lot of that sort of thing in North Newtown School. As I said, it was sort of an experimental because it's close to the college and they were very advanced in a lot of those things. There was a kindergarten, a day nursery, in Victoria Park. We attended that as very little ones. I can remember being there for quite a while, playing in the sandpits in the

enclosed day nursery. I think it was the beginning of the day nurseries system as they've got it today.

104.10 **SR: And as part of your education at North Newtown, did you ever have to go off and do this physical culture displays like if they had special visitors or if there were big events like at the Showground? Can you remember any of that?**

GS: No. I wasn't involved in that in North Newtown School. That only came later when I left the state government schools and I returned then to the Catholic parochial system; I returned to the Catholic School then.

SR: Was that for high school?

GS: No. Primary and high school, primary and high school, and that was during the days when there was a big function and they hired the Showground or the Sportsground and you went and got involved in that.

SR: And what sort of functions would they have for that?

GS: Well, there probably would have been a visiting bishop or some notary. I can't remember anybody in particular but we were involved in that sort of thing, St Patrick's Day or some celebrations like that, but outside of that there was nothing what you're talking about.

SR: Can you remember when you were at school did you do a lot of singing of the national anthem and raising the flag and marching into school, any of that sort of thing? Can you remember any saluting the flag and any patriotic kind of things?

GS: Well, every morning you would sing 'God Save the Queen' but at North Newtown School they still also sang 'Advance Australia Fair' and they both were sung.

106.02 I can't remember actually at what period of the day or the week but you assembled in the playground like they do today and you went through the motions and then you would sing 'God Save the Queen' or king or whatever it was in those days and that was it but I can clearly remember learning 'Advance Australia Fair' and we used to sing it whenever we'd have our concerts, the kids' concerts in the park. We'd put on a concert in the house or in the backyard or something and everybody'd do their little act and what they knew and have a penny concert and put on a little turn and we always knew those songs. I didn't have to wait till the push came in the '70s and '80s; I already knew it as a child because it was taught to us.

SR: How is it that if North Newtown was such a good school and you were very happy there from what you've said, why did you go back to the Catholic system – what was happening there?

GS: Well, what happened with the Catholic system was we left Newtown and moved to Enmore.

SR: When was that?

GS: That was in 1927, '27, '28. And I moved there with my parents - they moved into a larger home – and then I went to St Pius'. So my father sent us back to the Catholic school because, see, he wouldn't have us at St Kieran's and there was none over at St Joseph's so he sent us back. I suppose we had to be confirmed into the church and I was ten, my sister was eight so they thought we'd better go back and start getting some religious indoctrination or something.

SR: Aside you didn't say grace at the table but - - -

108.02 GS: No, never.

SR: - - - obviously religion was important in your parents' lives.

GS: Yes. I would say so but I wouldn't say it was a strict Catholic home.

SR: Did they go to mass on Sundays?

GS: Well, my father went to mass and he would take us because my mother always sort of had an excuse about she had to cook the dinner or something but I very rarely remember going to mass with my mother but I can always remember my father taking us to church and going back home and my mother'd have the dinner on the way and things like that.

SR: When you moved to Enmore from Newtown - I mean you were so happy living there across the road from the stadium site and what have you – how did your life change after you went to Enmore?

GS: Well, we were only there a short time. We were only there about eighteen months or so and our life didn't change very much at all, actually. We were only in a bigger house, with more people in the house, going back to the Catholic school, walking further to the picture show – we'd have to go to Enmore picture show – and then we were back to the house where I was reared in in Fitzroy Street. Then in '28 we were back so it was only a short time in Enmore; we were back in Newtown.

SR: And why did you move from Newtown to leave? Was that because your father's business had improved and he was going upmarket?

GS: Yes. His business was improving and, as I said, their lifestyle was getting more comfortable and we were getting more in the home and everybody was quite happy with their life.

SR: I wanted to ask you was there any sex education, did you get any sex education?

GS: None at all, not at all.

110.00 **SR: Really? Well, what would happen when you started to menstruate?**

GS: Well, I was rather late menstruating - I was fifteen – and I didn't know what had happened to me and my oldest sister they had to tell me and sort of came over to me. They were over at Stanmore and they came over and looked after me and told me what to do and what not to do and I suppose when I think back it was sort of kept from the two younger girls. See, there was four years between the next sister. The boy that was in the middle died so there was a spell of fourteen. See, I would be ten when she was menstruating. We were sort of kept away from that, we never saw it.

SR: And you know when they say "tell you what to do and what not to do", did they have sort of funny myths and things? I can remember being told that you weren't allowed to wash your hair when you were menstruating and that was in the '60s.

GS: Oh, yes.

SR: I mean what were some of the sort of more bizarre beliefs about it at that time or even the ordinary? They don't have to be bizarre, just what was sort of said. I mean I was always living in fear of catching my death of cold – that was the sort of stuff. Were there stories like that around then?

GS: All I know is I had a bad time. My sister went up and bought me a bottle of dry ginger ale and heated it up and pouring all this ginger stuff down my throat to take the pains and aches away and all that kind of thing and it was horrible and the hygiene and then you finally had to be taught how to look after your own sanitary pads and make your own and what you had to do.

SR: Because they had to be washed then. They weren't disposable, were they?

GS: Yes, no. They had to be taken out and soaked and hid somewhere in a bucket of cold water and then you left them and then you had to rinse them off and then they were boiled up in the copper and then they had to be dried and that was the whole secret: they had to be hid.

112.21 You couldn't go and stick them up in the middle of the line and let everybody know the red flags were flying or something. There was all sorts of silly jokes, "Your country cousin's came to visit you" or things like that, "Your country cousin's came to visit you". They all had funny little sayings. Periods. Menstruation, I didn't find out about that word till I was married; married and having children before I knew what menstruation was.

SR: And did you know that menstruating was linked to having children?

GS: No, not until I suppose I was about fifteen. And matter of fact I saw my first noticeable pregnancy when I was fifteen, sixteen. I saw a woman walking along King Street and she was in advanced pregnancy. The Depression was on. She was very thin, she had a tight dress on and she had this round, very round stomach. I suppose now she would probably due to have her baby within a couple of weeks and that was the first time I noticed a pregnancy; I was quite shocked.

SR: Gosh.

GS: As a matter of fact I was married and pregnant and I still, even though I'd read books – I'll look at later, Loretta's got it here; it's called the People's Family Library – I used to devour that and read it and read it but there's still no information in it and I was still not convinced how could that child come out, how could that child come forward; couldn't understand it.

114.11 And I've spoken to a lot of my women friends and it appears that they all went through the same thing. Even though they were pregnant and had a married life and had intercourse still couldn't work out, didn't know the phenomena of the pelvic bones and the contractions and the pelvic opening to deliver that child. I was pregnant with my first child and my cousin was telling me what to do in the labour ward: bear down. I said "What do you mean 'bear down?' What have I got to do? My mother told me nothing". She said "You'll find out early enough". Nothing at all.

SR: You must have been terrified.

GS: Yes. We knew nothing. You knew you had all normal hormones and body function, you've got thrills out of boys kissing you and touching you and you went around with boys and kissed you and some girls I know said that they thought if they kissed a boy they'd fall pregnant. There was all these fears and scares and I think society and that atmosphere that you lived amongst, they imposed those values on you and I suppose the ignorance and the values that they imposed on you kept a lot of girls, really, from having children out of marriage or whatever because they were really scared because the person that you knew of that did have a baby went away, she disappeared for a while, then came back and she probably had her child and it was adopted out. That stigma was terrible.

SR: Can you remember that happening to girls?

115.58. GS: Not like I know. I can't even remember it happening to anybody until I was about fifteen or sixteen and my mother went to live at Richmond. I was only up there a short time and the girl up there at that time, she had a child and her parents brought her home and the child was reared but they were ostracised because Richmond in those days, in the '30s, early '30s, was like a village; it was a country town attitude and mentality.

SR: And was the whole family ostracised or just the girl?

GS: I think the whole family. They sort of cloaked their shame and hid their shame.

SR: Did you ever hear anything of abortions?

GS: Now, when I was fifteen, fourteen, just on fifteen, when we came back to Newtown we were put in a boarding school, I was in boarding school then for quite a while. So the Depression hit and things were getting harder and my father was getting older and things were deteriorating in his life trying to rear us because he won us in a court battle. Because my mother had went off with a man and they were Catholics and they couldn't marry we were in the court, in the Children's Court, and my father got custody of us. That's what happened in those days.

SR: The whole four of you?

GS: Well, that's right because they were all under eighteen except the eldest girl - she's already married and gone off somewhere else -but my second eldest sister was seventeen and a half, O.K, so the whole four of us my father won. He went out and got custody of us and my mother lost custody of us so the two older girls were put in a convent

over at Leichhardt and because they didn't want to go with their father, they wanted to stay with the mother because they ran off.

118.02 When my mother went off they went with the mother but my younger sister and I stayed with my father and we were then sent away, supposed to go down to a convent at Camden. My father took us and they put us off the train at Narellan instead of taking us on to Camden and we walked for miles up to Narellan, up to this convent, the Mater Dei. Orphanage it turned out to be and it was a horror, horror story, horror story.

SR: What happened?

GS: Well, they'd just finished building this magnificent, magnificent building, structure, and lovely arches and a verandah and tiled verandahs and the dormitories. It was all window-dressing – wonderful place. And the Mother Superior interviewed us and seeing that my father had walked for miles up this hill – it was all barren around, only farmlands, cow paddocks - - -

SR: This is the third tape of the interview with Grace Schwebel, 16th of July 1995. Grace, you were just talking about when your father took you out to Narellan and you were describing this Mater Dei Orphanage.

GS: Yes. Well, what happened was in 1927/28 when this incident happened and the family breakdown my father got custody of us so he had one of his widowed sisters mind us for a while and that didn't work out. So it was too risky having girls roaming around on their own, two young girls – see, I was eleven and my other sister was nine – so he thought it best to send us to a boarding school and he wanted to take us away from the influence of my mother.

120.04 And so he was given these directions to go to Camden, to a boarding school out at Camden, and I don't know what happened but somewhere there was a breakdown of instructions and the train stopped to put us off at the siding called Narellan. It was only a little siding, little, and we got off there and we walked up and father walked up there carrying our suitcases and we seemed to be walking for about an hour up the hill to Narellan to the Mater Dei Convent. And then we went through the big gates and then walked and walked for miles and got to the convent and this magnificent building then was just about late stages of being completed and we were taken over this place. And so my father found out that we were at the wrong place but of course this impressed him so much, this beautiful new building with its dormitory and its basins and hand basins and all the best of everything there and

then the nuns – the Good Samaritan Order, it was and they showed my father all the beautiful needlework. And the children were there from the age of very young children till eighteen and then further down the hill towards the river there was a section there for little boys because boys always were in the care of nuns until they were about seven or eight and then they went onto brothers; that was the system in the church. So we said goodbye to our father - and we never saw children and we just sort of looked over these premises but we didn't see any children - and when we said goodbye to our father then we were sent out to the back. We had our fruit and we were eating our oranges and apples and we threw our banana skins, put them down, nowhere to put them in a basket, so we threw the skin down and the children that came around they pounced on the orange skin, they pounced on the skin and we couldn't believe it – as I said earlier, we'd been well-fed and well cared for children.

122.18 And then we were given our beds and the food came around that night and it was dry bread with black treacle, what they call treacle, not golden syrup but treacle – blackjack, the kids called it – and they got two slices of that each and a glass of milk and that was their tea. So that night we cried ourselves to sleep in this orphanage. And they had large buckets, they were on the verandah, and the kids had to get up in the night and stop wetting the bed at eleven o'clock. They were put in bed at eight o'clock or something. About ten or eleven o'clock, even in the middle of winter, the nuns would come around and make all the kids get up out of their warm bed and go out and queue up and go and use the big buckets. They were quite large, they were probably about twenty eight inches high, and they turned inwards. So they weren't flat, they sort of curved inwards, cylinder shape type of thing, and children had to go out there and urinate and to use their bowels or whatever because they weren't allowed to wet the beds but in spite of that children still wet the bed. Come the morning everybody had to go on a roster and then they had to carry these buckets down the stairs, the children had to carry these buckets down. Two children had to share a bucket between them and they had to go down a flight of stairs, then walk some distance away, I suppose two or three hundred yards where they had to walk them down.

124.01 And then there were some men – they used to call them roustabouts - and they lived about a mile or a half a mile away in the grounds and then they came and got them, supposed to take them then to scour them and bring them back and left them there because they weren't allowed to come into the gates where the children were, you see. So then the buckets were left there and then we used to have to get them

and take them back up to the dormitory for the night. The next morning for breakfast we all had to get up and go down and wash our face and hands, say your prayers, then you went in to breakfast. And they had rolled oats for breakfast, no milk, no nothing, and this horrible rolled oats and that's what the children got, plus a slice of dry bread with blackjack on it. Midday lunch when the school broke up, midday, you went and then done all your prayers and the whole thing and then the children, all regimented, you sat down in the dormitory. And in the refectory, what they called the refectory, and they had these large, big, deep pots – they're quite large, it'd take two people to lift them – and in that pot pumpkin was put in, just washed and thrown in, the seeds taken out, pumpkin was thrown in, all the onions and stuff and the big shin of beef, the whole bone, the whole thing was thrown into these. And I suppose they must have had about three hundred children there at various ages from eighteen down because a girl wasn't allowed to leave the convent or the orphanage till they were eighteen in those days and the children would fight over this food. And the breakfast, the breakfast, the children would fight to see who was going to do the cooking because if the porridge stuck to the bottom of the thing they got the extra brown baked pieces of rolled oats at the bottom of the pot.

126.08 This went on for weeks and weeks and they were getting ready to open the orphanage. There was going to be a big celebration throughout the community and I think Bishop Kelly might've been the bloke, Archbishop Kelly or something, came up to open it. My mother found out through me, I think, directly or indirectly. I wrote to my sister and they found out where we were and she came up there with all the other people that flocked in - it was quite a celebration throughout this beautiful orphanage being opened. And all the children had been starving and all our clothes were taken off us and we had to wear ordinary clothes and the celebrations were on out in the lawn so my mother found us and my two older sisters and then my father saw us there with my mother – he came up for the celebrations - and I told my mother about the treatment of it and how we were treated and the cruelty that they done to the children. We had to carry from the riverbed – we walked three Ks to the riverbed where the men, the roustabouts, cut this turf, they cut it in blocks and we had to put our hands out like that and carry it for three miles and this queue of children. Just like in China when you see them carrying the stones and building the dams these children carried this to lay out the turf. This is all done prior so by the time of the opening of this orphanage was set up in the church and the chapel was done all this beautiful lawn had been laid out, quite a few feet of it, probably a square acreage, I suppose, of turf was carried by the children. For weeks this went on

and then it was top-dressed and then it was dressed and watered and by the time it was opened this beautiful lawn was laid down and I knew how it happened.

128.10 I was eleven at this time. O.K, then we had to go down and share the milking. Everybody had to do chores and get up and do the milking and do all this - different ages had to do different types of chores. I went down there when they were husking the corn and that and I saw the boys' quarters and the children were starving and these kids had broken into the cold store where they kept the meat and that and they'd broken in to steal the sausages to eat them raw. They got the child and they shaved his head particularly in the shape of crowns and they had him with straps and that around his neck saying that he was the devil and he was paraded around for stealing the food because he was hungry and because they wouldn't allow him to go then they strapped him and chained him to the bed and that's where he was kept all day. I'd collated all this in my mind and kept all a record of this and all this cruelty and the starvation. I reported it to my mother and they went back, they returned to Sydney, and the Child Welfare or whatever it was in those days, they notified the church that they'd got this report about the treatment of the children. My father said "I'll have to take them out and put them somewhere" because he didn't know what was going on because we never saw them for six months or something like that till they arrived up to the opening of the church and so suddenly one day we were called in because there was no mail. Any mail that was addressed to us the nuns took it from my mother or anybody. It was like a prison: here we were by accident we were in this place in with children being sheltered.

130.06 So suddenly we were dressed up, we were all put good clothes. The kids got a good breakfast that morning and suddenly their lunch was good. They got fruitcake, one slice of fruitcake on a Sunday, and they were walking around with it in their hands and they'd take out a little crumb at a time to make it last for about an hour, this piece of fruitcake – it was only about four inches by six or something like that. And we were called into this room and these two men were there and I didn't know who they were and the nun was sitting there and then they asked me - they questioned me and they questioned my younger sister – and they questioned me about all these complaints that my mother had filed. I wasn't aware at that time what I was being questioned for – I found out later - and the nun was there and I thought "Well, damn it". I felt so strong about it and it was quite a shock to me and I repeated it all to him. They must have sent word down by the police or the telegram or something and my father had to come up and take us and we were

taken away from there, we were taken away from there. When I look back and see what happened to children in Dachau and Auschwitz outside the gas chamber I found then that if you were poor, in the church there was a treatment for you if you were poor but if you were wealthy in the church then you got a different treatment. We were then sent to another boarding school which was totally different. We then went to St Joseph's Hunters Hill, Villa Maria, and we were quite happy there but because we were paying there and it was a different standard, the treatment of you. So I started to become very cynical even at that age about religion. I still wasn't convinced about it until I got a big older. Very sad, terrible, horrible things that went on in the name of religion and it was because the children were there as orphans or children of broken marriages or their mother's sick or their father was left trying to raise children. And I think it was pretty common and we all know now today what's happened over in Western Australia, we know about the Liverpool Children and all that and that went on in the '20s, '28.

132.28 **SR: Do you think any changes came about because of your complaints?**

GS: I couldn't tell you. I never went back to it but later on the place gradually disappeared and then finally it became not so much – because orphanages disappeared, they're not in existence any more – but what happened, I believe then it became a place for handicapped children and our ex-Premier Fahey, that's where his parents became the housekeepers of it. That's where he grew up when they came over from New Zealand as a young child. It's indelible on my memory and my sister's memory, my young sister. Horrible thing, the children and the hunger and the starvation and the cruelty and you had to get down and scrub the refectory. Well, as I said, there was about three hundred children in there – it's quite large, enormous – and everybody had to go down and you had to scrub the floor snow white, all spotlessly clean, scrubbed and cleaned. I don't think any infectious diseases broke out but it's just starvation and exploiting of children in the name of the religion.

SR: And you know how you say kids fought over the food. I mean weren't children sitting at tables at allocated places and someone would serve it out?

GS: Yes, that's right. You went down. The big pot was at the end and you got your plate and you went down and everyone knew where they had to sit. It's like in the prison system, I suppose; it was institutionalised.

134.09 **SR: Was there any warmth or love there?**

GS: No. I can't ever remember any, can't ever remember any because I was a rebellious person. I just came through a terrible emotional experience, my mother and father breaking up and our family split up and a broken father who'd gone through a terrible traumatic experience.

SR: How did that affect the family standing in the community, the fact that your parents' marriage broke?

GS: Well, then my father gave up the big house in Enmore. It was a large house – it had about eight rooms were in it, quite a large house, probably more - we returned then back to the smaller house at Fitzroy Street and then we would be back home during the school holidays. When we were at boarding school we would come back so we were there on and off at Fitzroy Street. And so we were in and out, we were there, back at school, then back home during the holiday.

SR: When you were at school locally at Newtown North did most of the local kids go there?

GS: Yes. All the children who weren't Catholics went there. Even Catholic kids went there if their family had had a row. The parish priest was Father Shearer(?). He was a very cruel man. It can be recorded if anybody is alive around there at the time. When you went up to the altar to get your communion, if you didn't hold the salver straight he would slap the kids while they was going to receive the sacrament.

136.04 You would go in to make your confession - you were so scared of him you used to tremble in fear. And I made my First Holy Communion there at St Kieran's and I was probably six and go in to make your confession before you received Holy Communion, go in on Saturday and then you'd have the Holy Communion the next day at mass and I hadn't committed any sins; I had a happy life, I hadn't done anything. You'd go in and you'd "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned" and "What's your confession, what sins have you committed?" I'd make up and I'd say "I swore. I hit my sister, I said a naughty word" and would be making up things; I hadn't committed any sins. And then "Bless me, Father" and then go out and say three Hail Marys and the next day you'd turn up and this brutal man who'd roar at kids, he'd roar at them in the confessional, he would slap them. He would come out in the playground at St Kieran's: he'd have a stick and he'd wallop the kids. He was a brutal man. Today they'd put him in jail. So when it all broke about my sister – see, parents I suppose with all their children, when their children left the home they didn't really know what happened to them at school.

SR: The Catholic community, many of the parents, it's a wonder they didn't stand up and complain about that priest or it just wasn't done?

GS: Yes. Well, priests, a lot of them probably or the Irish hang-ups like in the villages in Ireland, they dominated their lives; they dictated what they done and what they didn't do. And when my mother and father's marriage broke up the church was very involved, the priest was there even though my mother had been off with somebody. Oh, it was awful, awful.

138.05 And then when we left Enmore, then when we came back and as I got older I kept saying that my mother had remarried but if anybody stopped to think my father wouldn't give her a divorce. She couldn't get a divorce because they were Catholics so they lived de facto till my father died and when my father died my mother immediately went and got married, got married in the Catholic Church because she was a widow.

SR: Did the priest take it out on you kids? Were you children considered as being tainted because you had a mother that did that?

GS: Well, probably yes because when we finally left St Joseph's the Depression was really getting very bad then. In 1932 or '31 – the Depression broke in 1929 and '32 then the Depression was starting to have another wave. There was a second wave of the Depression and I then was going back to St Kieran's. Then I went back to St Kieran's, O.K, and I was in high school there, and I felt that I was tainted and ill-treated because my mother was somewhere living in sin and so on. And because I didn't have to stay at school because I was fifteen, another friend, so I started wagging school and especially in the summer we would walk all the way down to Sydney Domain Baths. Kitty Butler, she lived in Georgina Street, and she was like me: she was a rebel. She was fed up with school and we had to stay there at high school and we started wagging and I'd go to school with my sister and I'd say "I'll come in later. You go on. I've got to go to the toilet" and soon as they're all gone – I'm hanging around the toilet until the school bell went and everybody was off – and then I'd sneak out and she'd sneak out, Kitty, and then we'd run off and we walked from Newtown all the way into Sydney Domain Baths, stay there playing in the pool all day.

140.15 And then finally the nuns'd come down, knocking on the door, "Want to see your father". "He's not home. He's out". And then this went on

three or four times then finally they were cunning enough to go when they knew I wasn't at home and then they told him that I hadn't been attending school because in those days truancy was an offence, very bad – they don't have it today. So finally they said, well, they can't make me at school because fourteen was leaving age. So what happened then, I was taken out of school and my father then decided he would have to settle the problem with my mother and so we then went to live with my mother. My younger sister and I then returned so we were united with my mother and my stepfather. My father then continued to live on his own because he knew there was a problem with two young girls. He couldn't go to work and look after them. My auntie wasn't a success at looking after us, my widowed auntie.

SR: So your early years were very, very happy years and then it all went awry at eleven.

GS: It went wrong when we moved to Enmore and we got a larger household and we brought a family of brothers into the house, a family of brothers, and the three brothers, he wasn't married, the youngest one. He was about twenty eight, twenty seven, and he started a relationship with my eldest sister at home, the second eldest sister. And then the middle one, he had no children, the middle brother, and then the eldest brother who became my mother's husband, his wife had died with the bubonic flu and he was a returned serviceman so he had two children. Terrible, terrible.

142.14 **SR: Were they living with you too, the children?**

GS: No. They were living with their mother's grandparents, lived out in Enmore/Stanmore way and Auburn. They did come back. When they got older they came back from time to time, on and off sort of situation. But I was politically affected by the Depression. Then my mother moved to Richmond to start a new life up there and that turned out a disaster and I went up there to stay with them and I didn't like that sort of semi-country, rural atmosphere. It was very parochial and very class sort of thing. You know, Catholics didn't mix with Protestants and the people that worked on the farm and little squatters around there and there was all this class there and I didn't like it, plus I liked the city and I was into dancing. The Depression was bad – it was 1932. My sister, the one older than me, four years, had died at nineteen years of age in Prince Alfred Hospital.

SR: What had happened to her?

GS: Well, she was ill and sick. She wasn't very happy at home with my mother, my stepfather and the relationship that was going on there.

She went into service somewhere over on the North Shore and she developed very serious kidney trouble and she was very anaemic. And this is the days before Red Cross when they knew what blood groups were and all the rest of it – I'm talking about '31 – and she took very sick and got pneumonia and she got all these problems in her stomach and that and her kidneys.

144.14 And so she came back home and then they took her to Prince Alfred Hospital and the doctor said that they'd have to go and operate on her and find out what all the problems were and she didn't want to have the operation – she was scared. And I went down and stayed with her until she went up to the theatre and stayed there till she came back and they brought her back and they operated on her. I don't know if they actually cut or removed anything but she collapsed under the anaesthetic because of lack of blood - you know, they didn't have the equipment they've got today. They told me that I had to run all the way home to tell my mother what happened to my sister. They were living at Stanmore then so I went all the way home and told her – no phones, no telephones. And we went back to the hospital - and this is on a Friday – and we kept going in and out, looking at her and she died about half past eleven on the Friday night. She was nineteen years of age. Awful, terrible shock to us. And after that then my mother, they decided to leave Sydney and start a new life in Richmond because my stepfather worked on the railway and he was a returned serviceman and while they were sacking people left, right and centre on the railway returned servicemen got preference, soldier's preference, so he was still employed, plus he became very active in the trade union movement, in the railway union; he became an activist in the railway union. And in those days young men who at the height of the Depression if you worked in the railway or any government, any government work, to reduce the public service, if you weren't married by the time you were twenty one, only married men got kept on.

146.20 So once you went over twenty one and you weren't married you were put off work because you were on adult rates of pay and that was a strain on the budget and so there was so many marriages: men rushed into marriage by the time they were twenty to hold their jobs when they were twenty one. And so my stepfather, we had a working relationship on and off, you know. I sort of blended a bit, I suppose, but I wasn't happy living in Richmond so I came back to live with my auntie in Newman Street Newtown and stayed. Then my father got a bigger flat so I went to live with him in Georgina Street. And my friends, some of my school friends that then was grown up, the season was on in the IXL jam factory and it was called the IXL Jam and Preserving Company

and that's the beginning of IXL Elders now and they would have seasons, the fruit season, the canning season, what do you call it, and it was very, very big in December and then very big 'round about Eastertime with all the stone fruits, apricots and peaches, towards the end of the season. I put my age up. I was fifteen/sixteen and I put my age up to eighteen/nineteen to get the adult rates of pay and she would write me a letter and I come down to get this job and queue up and got put on and she made sure that I got a job because she worked there all year round, you see, so she tipped off somebody to give me a job.

148.10 And that was another nasty experience for me when I went in there and saw these women working, my first factory experience where I saw women being involved in work, and they would push around these big preserving vats and it was as large as that table here and they were on rollers and all the women were working there doing male work because the male rates of pay was about three pound a week and the women's full adult female rates of pay was one pound twelve and six a week. And the men were all queued up outside right down Forbes Street, would come there of a morning and sit there all day because it was casual work, seeing if they could get put on for the work but they had women in there doing the men's work and the men would be home minding the kids and doing the washing and the housework. They talk about houseparents, the men done it during the Depression while the women went in and did the male's work for female rates of pay. Then it changed during the '30s, about '32, '33. The government of the day – I'm not too sure if it was [Jack] Lang or 'Tubby' [Bertram] Stevens – they then introduced one week in three. Instead of giving you the food coupons you got one week in three and preference went to married men. So then they started a canal system. You know the canal system that started right out near Drummoyne – not Drummoyne – came right down through Ryde and Stanmore and right through here to Newtown and right out. The men were expected to go in and work up to their hocks and necks in this slush and mud. Then they went on strike and that was terrible, that was awful. The men on the dole wouldn't even work one week in three. [break in recording]

150.13 **SR: Amelia Pankhurst.**

GS: Amelia [Adela] Pankhurst Walsh was one of the daughters of Emily [Emmeline] Pankhurst, the suffragette in England. Amelia Pankhurst Walsh was the wife of Tom Walsh who was a seaman of the Seaman's Union right during the war and he was a big of a rogue. He played a renegade position because they were English and during the conscription years and all the rest of it they supported old Billy Hughes supporting conscription and then to go to fight over in Europe in the

Catholic community carried the weight of the votes and never, ever got off the ground even though there were three of them. So this person, this Tom Walsh, became a bit of a renegade in the union movement and he was like head of the Seaman's Union at one time. So Amelia Pankhurst, she was very involved in the Australia First Movement and the New Guard, all that was developing here in Australia at that time during the Depression where they go out and belt up the men, used to belt them up over there on the stadium before that was built. All during the Depression years they would go around and break up these demonstrations where the people on the dole were demonstrating for more dole or whatever. So this terrible thing that hit the headlines, that "Scandalous. These people won't even work when they get one week in three" but it was the conditions that were being imposed on them by the government of the day and this Amelia Pankhurst Walsh, while she took some of her friends and one of them was her daughter and they were the Women Against Socialism Party and the Australia First Party.

152.04 During World War II they were put away in concentration camps, they were all rounded up as being subversive. She went out there and got all the publicity in the newspapers of her jumping into these trenches with the shovels to do this work, O.K. So the next thing, I can remember her then turning up at the IXL jam factory. And it was a three-tiered structure, it was three stories and on the side where all the factory workers had to enter, employees' gate, there was a long stairs and it went up to the first floor and then there was a landing, you went into that floor, and then you went up another flight of stairs, all straight and only broken by the landing when you reached the floor. You understand?

SR: Mm.

GS: So the kitchen quarters where the staff and workers – the workers, they weren't staff, they were workers, casual working – at their lunch, they could either take their lunch and sit down on the footpath outside in the sun or they could eat up in the tables for their lunch. Amelia Pankhurst Walsh came in to talk to these women to try to get them to talk to their men. She took it for granted. She was doing the rounds all around Sydney to talk to wherever women congregated to tell their men to go back to work and to work because they were starving their children. Now, this is my first experience of union activity, really one to one, and those women, there were some strong women that may have been involved in the Depression years here and was opposing the eviction of people, they were experienced in all that and there was a movement growing there, there was a movement growing. They got her and got

abusive to her and literally, literally, threw her down the stairs and her cronies down the stairs.

154.02 And ……. …… it's fascinating stuff. And anyhow they won that strike and they ended up getting the big rubber boots, the big blucher and all the rest of it. Across the street in City Road, beginning of King Street and the beginning of City Road, the junction there, there was a Mrs Hunter that lived there and she had about nine or ten kids. The women would go across there and have the abortions - she would insert a catheter into them. I'm sixteen and seventeen at this time. I done this for several years, going backwards and forwards working there. And the women would come back home over, work in the factory. Come midday or afternoon or whatever, whenever they had a couple of hours off they had the catheter inserted. You'd go out and there they were, had had an abortion. Everything come away from them in the toilet and the crying and the screaming was horrible. It was brutal butchery, brutal butchery and they would take them off to hospital; there was many deaths, many deaths; they went over there to have an abortion and their hygiene was disgraceful. And everybody knew she existed, the police knew she existed and they closed their eyes to it because she probably paid them off. The house is still there now, the house is still there. And these women would have these abortions and then they would pay her. They never had the money - I think she used to charge five pound for the abortion - and then they would be months and months paying off the abortion that she'd committed on them.

156.01 **SR: Many people were relieved to have somebody willing to help them have an abortion. Was she well regarded or was she not well regarded?**

GS: I don't know of anybody went up and tried to destroy her or anything. No, you accepted it. She was there, she was there.

SR: But was she reviewed as sort of wicked and evil?

GS: No, I don't ever remember that. Goodness knows, if it hadn't been her it'd have been somebody else.

SR: So she was somebody who would provide a service that was needed in the community?

GS: Exactly, exactly, yes. She was well-known. My mother tells of an incident when she was young before we went to Enmore. She went down the street and you see Mrs Hunter walking around the street and she saw her walking down with a catheter hanging out of her coat pocket. She related that story to me but you would see Mrs Hunter

walk down the street and people knew who she was and Mrs Jones or Mrs Smith she would visit her and a short while after Mrs Jones would be laid up for about seven or eight or ten days or the ambulance came and took her to the hospital, she died or had to have a curette or whatever. It was well known, very well known.

SR: Let's see where we're up to. You've often spoken through this about the community, sense of community in the area, and how important the stadium site opposite was. Would you describe that as the social focus of the area or was there anywhere else?

GS: I would say as far as the children, the people who had family and all that, it was because as I said there was a small circus there, there was carnivals there, the razzle dazzle, it's quite large.

158.08 And then in 1933 or '32 Matthews and Thompson's [?] got built there, a large wholesale grocery they got built there.

SR: So that must have been a big loss to the community, that space.

GS: It was. Well, of course, then a lot of people had moved on, the kids got older, the Depression. Probably about '32, '34 Matthews and Thompson's got built on it.

SR: How did the Depression affect your father?

GS: Well, it affected him so much that I can remember him saying to me – Jack Lang introduced workers compensation and he was frightened. He had to go around and sell himself again to all his customers because they thought that they would have to turn around and if he fell off the ladder or tripped or whatever he would have to be and he said no and he had to point out that he was self-employed and workers compensation, really, is only for employer/employee and his relationship with his customers was a customer and he was self-employed.

SR: Right.

GS: So I was very conscious of that. I was very conscious too of the stadium also being used there, '31, '32 – we were probably home from boarding school - when there was an election on and the people were gathering there and holding protests and then the New Guard would come and belt them up. I was also very conscious right through the early '30s of all the people being tipped out. One by one the families were tipped out of Wilson Street, all that area facing the railway line, and those houses finally stayed there right up till World War II and they were sort of gutted, nothing was left in them - even the empty house

would become empty. A little while after all the palings and people would raid them and strip them, take them for fuel, the lead was stripped off around the chimneys.

160.16 **SR: And they were put out presumably because they couldn't pay the rent?**

GS: Yes. And the rent, if you were sensible, landlords were sensible, they would have turned around and let the people accumulate the rent and when they got work pay it off even but, of course, once the house came empty and it stayed empty for very long it was stripped anyhow. The coppers were taken, the leads were taken, the timbers were taken, the floors were ripped up and they were standing there for many, many years, all those terrace houses along there, stripped and gutted, everything was removed from them.

SR: What do you remember of the Unemployed Workers' Movement?

GS: Well, as I said again, when my mother moved to Richmond I stayed with my auntie down in Newman Street, O.K. She lived down the bottom of Newman Street Newtown and there was a well-known family around there, the Lewis family - they were printers and signwriters and that – and my young cousins they used to play with the kids in there and it turned out the uncle that lived there with the family, he was blind from World War I, he was a blind person but he belonged to the Workers of the World Party. I was very naïve, O.K, and still now I respect them and I respected them then but I wasn't very aware of the significance of what they were doing. And my cousins played with the boy Lewises, Ray and Leon Lewis, and then the daughter was called Freda Brown – Freda, she eventually became well-known as Freda Brown.

162.07 You might have heard of Freda Brown talked about. Freda Brown was well-known, eventually well-known as a militant Communist and that. So my cousins, we would all go around there to sing in the Lewis' house. They lived in this beautiful big freestanding house in Erskineville Road just around the corner from where my auntie lived and while a lot of people were going off to church and all the rest of it we would go over there and they would have these songs and workers' songs and you'd go in there singing 'The Workers of the World Unite' and 'Red Flag' and the 'Internationale' and all that sort of stuff. Really had no serious significance. I just went there because I was involved with my cousins and all the rest of it and that's where I first met Freda Brown who was Freda Lewis for many, many years as her maiden name.

SR: Was that in the 1930s?

GS: ’32. That was when I went to live with my auntie, in ’32. Now then there was the workers that were forming these parties and these groups to prevent the evictions as I told you about and the evictions that were taking place was terrible. And many a time because I was free, you know, had no work and staying there with my auntie, I then picked up work wherever I could. I worked over at Dawson’s and I'd walk from Erskineville up through Newtown, down Australia Street, across Parramatta Road and go over to work. Because I was getting seven and six a week I couldn’t afford the penny tram fare to go down to Grace Brothers and then around - that was tuppence. Well, I couldn’t afford that so you walked.

164.02 Took you three quarters of an hour to walk, three quarters of an hour to walk home and I gave my auntie five shillings a week for my board and the other two and six I had to clothe myself. I'd go out and buy some material for sixpence or thruppence a yard and make my own clothes. And then they would go off to dances and there was always what they called the “dole dances” were on and they would only be sixpence in and water, tea and bush biscuits would be put on and they were usually of a militant nature, the dances that were put on, raising money to help the people to get food, food parcels for the unemployed. And the evictions, especially those that had a lot of children, their stuff was piled up on the footpath.

SR: Did that happen a lot?

GS: Very common, very common. There’s a lot of photos of that stuff around - the *Tribune* probably have a lot of that stuff, the *Tribune* or the *Guardian*.

SR: Can you remember that big battle I think where they shot somebody, the Etock? [?]

GS: I remember like you mean the Rothbury Mines?

SR: No, no, that was at Bankstown. So there was a big eviction battle in Newtown and Bankstown was where they first shot somebody, the police first shot somebody resisting an eviction and there was quite a famous one in Union Street Newtown.

GS: Yes, that’s right. Well, I just lived ‘round the corner from that with my auntie when that all took place, was involved in that. I personally wasn’t involved in it but I was there, living with my auntie, when all that occurred.

SR: Well, what can you remember of that?

GS: Well, just that it's a horror story and, as I said before, a very close-knit community. If people weren't sort of conforming I suppose you could say or they're really a little bit below then those people were respectable and they had their standards and they had their code and even if the men got drunk and came home they would go in and take him inside, the wives would take him in and that was their business and nobody interfered; you know, it was a domestic thing and they had to handle it themselves.

166.19 But outside of that when people were in trouble they rallied around and it was a community; they all helped one another if the wives were sick or they had a baby or illness or something. And it was the same here and where I lived here and when I was at Newtown and wherever the women all hopped in and helped one another. They went down and shared the housework and minded the kids and done the washing and took the food down; there was always that atmosphere. They had their own standards: it was working class standards.

SR: And you know after the big evictions, mass evictions, really, that would have happened in the '30s and then the war. Was it the post- World War II period or did it start in the '30s where the communities were broken up? Because you were talking in your childhood in the '20s and around that time that it was very stable.

GS: Right through the '20s to the '30s – I was married in '36, January of '36.

SR: So you've talked about very stable communities. The start of the destruction of those communities, was that the '30s?

GS: World War II broke it up.

SR: Right. And so the evictions didn't really destroy the communities – what, people just moved around?

GS: No, it tied people closer together, made them more responsible about here their husbands or their fathers or whatever just went through World War I, all that terrible loss of life and all their contribution that Australians had made to World War I effort, and here they were starting, no food and no money - people were very conscious. And the food coupons and if you were a family of four or five and there was one member of the family working there was no dole.

168.05 No one else got dole. You all had to live on that one person's wage. And the other thing was that these dances, we would follow the dances around and there was a lot of songs developing, like ballads were

developing or what they would do, the latest song that was out at the time, whatever, they would put parodies to it and they would talk about the basic wage and "Don't vote for this person". It was a rising consciousness of the class system and why were they suffering and others. And they would say there's all sorts of people at different levels that was unemployed no matter what education you got. That may be so but I still believe that the working class were very badly treated, especially returned servicemen. If you were in the private sector it made no difference if you were a returned serviceman or not, you still went on. And then the saviour, the saviour of all this was [Premier] Jack Lang and then he came forward, the great Jack Lang.

SR: What can you tell us about him?

GS: Well, he was like the great saviour equivalent that was going to be like Moses, lead them out of the wilderness, you know. And he was fighting what was happening over in England, imposing on the banks and the closure of the banks and he was going to fight to reopen the bank and then I can remember very clearly all the rally that went on for quite a while, when they had the big rally in Sydney and then they all marched, the people all marched right out to Moore Park. And then they sacked him and then they had to call another election and the people that were in work and everywhere you had the New Guard going around breaking up these demonstrations over the dole and these Labor Party meetings and members of parliament, their soapboxes on the street corners, outside the pubs.

170.18 Wherever there was a group of people the politicians were out there on the footpath, out there shaking the flesh, they were doing it most days with the contact with the people. People couldn't afford newspapers and when they got newspapers they were treasured, they were used for shelving or whatever; nothing was ever wasted. So you see Jack Lang, all this thing was going on about Jack Lang and those people that were in work were told that if Jack Lang got in in the elections which was going to take place for them on the Saturday they needn't report for work on the Monday and Jack Lang never got returned because he was a terrible, terrible person: he was going to introduce socialism in this stage.

SR: And locally in this area this would have been Lang's supporters.

GS: Well, Lang started off in Auburn, Auburn, you see, but all the people around here – Stuart Robinson was another Labor family and they had a big home over there in Stanmore. Then there was Burke. Burke was the federal member here for west Sydney in those days and now Burke

in those days, that Burke, Frank Burke then, is the grandfather of Brian Burke from West Australia …….. So Frank Burke, the original father, grandfather, he was the member here and then they went over to West Australia and Brian Burke’s father went over to West Australia and he became an MP over there, switched over to West Australia.

172.05 **SR: Most of the people who lived in this area, were they mostly factory workers?**

GS: I would say that that developed after World War II because during the Depression they would be factory workers, they'd take whatever they got. So it was difficult, even if you were educated or whatever you had it was very difficult. Even though the Depression hit a lot of people, my father really didn’t get that much knocked around by the Depression because he was self-employed. People still had to have ladders to get up and clean their windows and doors, so he was cleaning a window for a shilling or something – he cut his prices down.

SR: Well, when you were growing up, where did most people who lived in this area when you were a child – back to the ‘20s – where did they work?

GS: Well, they worked at factories. The only industry was factories.

SR: Was it local?

GS: Yes. But the only thing – you spoke earlier about sectarianism – it was well known that you couldn’t get a job in Brennan’s for instance if you weren’t – only a Catholic got a job in Brennan’s, O.K.

SR: You had to be Catholic?

GS: M’mm. Because a lot of their stuff and shirts and flannels and a lot of the material and stuff that they sold, their goods that they sold, and men’s pyjamas and their own products with their own brand – and they also had another store up at Rockdale – they were made in the orphanages and convents and these places where Catholic girls were, single mothers and all that kind of thing, so this cheap labour was used in there and like in the Brennan’s family you had to be Catholic. And the same like with Mark Foy’s you had to be Catholic but then by the same token Anthony Hordern’s you hid that you were a Catholic and became Protestant to get a job in the ‘20s and ‘30s in there – they were Protestant.

174.04 So that existed at that level but I don't remember really any serious threat to one another in the proximity to your home. For instance, up in Newtown you had Sweet Brothers. Well, they were a really Jewish

family and that was a large store. They had about four shops, it was all opened up. Then the next block there was Hattie's Arcade. This was one of the best, the main shopping outside of the City of Sydney; it was bigger and better than Parramatta.

SR: And did most people shop locally?

GS: Yes. As a matter of fact Newtown in the '20s and right through the '30s and right up before I was born was people would come because of the railway station, the trams, and all those new suburbs that were springing up. Like part of Marrickville and Undercliffe, Earlwood and Dulwich Hill, they all would get on the trams and come in to shop at Newtown. It was well known for shopping because it had Brennan's and then when Selfridges opened up - that opened up in the '30s too. That opened up when they closed down Hattie's Arcade and they took that over, Selfridges.

SR: Can you tell me if the area was polluted? Like what sort of smells do you remember?

GS: Well, certainly the IXL. The IXL jam factory, the canning factory, you could smell the tomato sauce and the canning and the preserving of fruit and that. That permeated the air; that permeated the air. No matter what you were doing around five o'clock you knew the whistle went and that was down here, closing down of the railway workshops, O.K. And all those sort of smells permeated the air.

176.01 **SR: O.K, look, I've just about run out of questions. I'd like to thank you. We've got about three minutes left. Is there anything you wanted to say that we haven't covered in all of this?**

GS: Well, I used to love hearing the men - you know, the whistle'd blow at Eveleigh Workshops. It was five o'clock and the men would stream out there and they'd pour out of the gates. Both sides of the street like the railways was gates. People that lived over on the Erskineville side, they went out the gates that were there. Then the others that came up here onto our side of the railway, they would come out the gates there and they'd come just up the street and go onto the trams and would go off wherever they lived.

SR: What, streams of people at different times of day?

GS: Yes, yes. And you'd hear the whistles blowing, then you'd hear the factory whistles blowing.

SR: It sounds like it was a very vibrant sort of area.

GS: It was. As I say, this thing was always here, this sort of Newtown, and I think it was related to the centre of activity because it had this fascinating, wonderful shopping centre, ribbon development. Friday night was a big time and you'd go home from work and get washed and clean up and go up the street on Friday night shopping because the shops were open till nine. The boys and girls'd be making eyes at one another and whistling and all that kind of thing. Or you would walk all the way down to Paddy's Markets and shop down there. Then the Newtown Markets, oh, we used to love the Newtown Market. When you'd go to the picture shows, you could go in there and buy a little plate of peas and vinegar and pepper and salt for a penny. Kids'd be all down there just stuffing themselves up with plates of peas, probably getting wind all the way home.

178.16 **SR: Thank you very much, I appreciate it.**

Interview ends