This is corrected draft of interview – 18 February 2012

This is George Lewkowicz for the Don Dunstan Foundation Don Dunstan Oral History Project interviewing Lynne Chatterton, who was known as Lynne Arnold when she worked for the South Australian Government in the ’70s, the period we’re exploring with Lynne. The date today is the 17th September 2011 and the location is Umbria in Italy.

Lynne, thanks very much for doing this interview for the Don Dunstan Oral History Project. Just so people reading transcripts know who you are, can you just talk a bit about yourself, your brief bio – your education and how you got into the areas you did, like the ABC and others, which eventually led to your employment in the SA Government?

I was born in the Riverland and I grew up amongst war service land settlers. We grew grapes for wine and dried fruit and oranges, apricots and vegetables. The ABC had a Rural Department up there and they asked me to come in and do editorials on problems that were affecting the growers. Later I went to the city where I did a degree in History and Politics. I contributed a chapter on rural politics in South Australia for the Blewett and Jaensch book, “Playford to Dunstan”. I was also employed by the ABC as the first woman to contribute to the ABC Country hour.

We used to do a daily program that had to go live to air every day at 12, so obviously I had to interview heads of industry organisations, the workers, the unions – I insisted on interviewing the representatives of the rural unions, which had never been done before, but I felt it was important that, where there were strikes and problems, their point of view should be put across. In the Riverland I had been very deeply involved in rural organisations and knew everybody, farmers, growers and industry representatives.

When I finished my degree, I was offered a job as tutor at Adelaide University, but I was also asked if I’d go and work as an adviser to the then Minister of Agriculture, Brian Chatterton. I was a bit doubtful about it, but my colleagues at Adelaide said, ‘Look, you’ve got a very good degree in political science; you’ve got all the theory; now, here’s an opportunity to get in and find out what realpolitik is about.’ And in those days very few academics, particularly political scientists, were employed in this capacity, so I decided to take the job. I found it very stimulating, because the previous Minister had been rather inclined to just work with interest groups during lunches and dinners.

That’s Tom Casey, was it?

Tom Casey, yes. It was also a challenge for me as a woman, because I’d been asked to apply for the job when Tom was Minister. Just before Tom moved on Don had introduced this idea of having policy advisers, and I’d been asked to go and be interviewed by Tom. When advising me that I had not got the job he said, ‘You know, Lynne, you were the best candidate. But you’re a woman, my dear, and the farmers would not be happy.’ So, you can imagine the challenge.

I’d met Brian Chatterton briefly when I interviewed him for the ABC when he was kicked out of Parliament House for wearing the wrong clothes. I used to do a
weekly commentary for the ABC “This Week in Adelaide” and this was part of one of my programs.

Oh, right.

When I got to speak with him about his forthcoming Ministerial appointment I felt that he was coming in with ideas to really modernise the Department of Agriculture and to make it much more relevant. And also he was given the portfolio of Fisheries, and fisheries management in those days had only been attempted in Canada, and we were going to be the first people after Canada to do this, and that really interested me: resource distribution.

Who was the economist who did that study? I can’t remember his name.

It was Professor Parzifal Copes. Brian also had the portfolio of Forests, which I knew very little about, and again there was the possibility of selling woodchips to India, and so that also promised to be an extremely interesting experience, working in that international field. And, of course, this was before we ever had the idea of the dryland farming transference. I felt it was a really exciting time to be in Agriculture.

Where did the lead come from for the invitation for you to apply for the job, or did you just see the job advertised?

No; John Lamb was Brian’s press secretary, and he and I had worked for the ABC in the Riverland. He was the rural reporter there, and then he went to work for Brian. And he kept saying to me, you know, ‘You should come and do this job with Brian’ – He was working for Tom Casey first, and then for Brian. I’d also been asked by Peter Ward to apply for another policy job.

Peter Ward had asked me to come and work for Len King. But I wasn’t really keen on getting into the legal field. And also I have to say (laughs) that, at the time, I suppose because of the media representation of Don, I felt he was a bit flashy as were all the people like Peter around him, and I wasn’t terribly keen to go. And in fact, just after I started working for Brian, Don had had a bit of a problem in his office – yes, Don – and he came to me and said, ‘Lynne, would you come and work in my office for a while?’ And I said, ‘thanks Don, but I came to work on rural things and I’d like to stick where I am.’

Oh, right. Interesting, yes. So what was happening in the rural sector around that time? You mentioned the various areas you were interested in yourself, but just generally was it an expanding time or were there problems restructuring?

Well, one of the first things was the three-year drought, and that was a very interesting time because the drought had been administered by the Lands Department and it was suddenly transferred to Agriculture. I had, many years before, worked in the Lands Department in Barmera, so I knew a lot of the people in there who’d then transferred to Adelaide and that was useful in understanding the administration of the scheme to that time. The initial problem was that there was a 30-page form for farmers to fill in before they could receive a penny in aid. It really only provided money for feed for their sheep or to agist the sheep; it gave nothing to
support the families or the community. And it also meant that they had to apply to the local Departmental office for every single penny they spent. I’d seen this with the war service land settlement people: it was humiliating and distressing, and they all felt repressed and angry. Brian also had seen this. The administration of the loans was dreadful. So Don when moved it to Brian’s department there was an opportunity to do something about it.

Oh, yes – from Lands?

From Lands. Alby Joy, who used to administer it, talked to Brian and was told that one of the first things we were going to do was to shorten the form to about five pages, make it a loan to farmers who could prove that their farms were viable in ordinary conditions, and let them have the money at a low interest rate to do with what they felt would support themselves and their farm through the drought. And that meant they could keep their kids at school, run their cars, shop in the local area, keep their machinery up-to-date, buy their seed and fertiliser to be ready when the rains came. Alby said, ‘That’s a disaster, Minister. They’ll all go off to Surfers Paradise and you won’t get your money back.’ So he resigned.

Oh, really?

Anyway, Brian and I drew up the new form and Brian took it to Cabinet and it was approved. The farmers were delighted because they started getting some money and they could cope with the drought. But then we had a blockage. We were getting phone calls from farmers saying, ‘My money hasn’t come. What’s going on?’ So Brian sent me down into the Department to find out what was going on and I discovered that they’d run out of file covers.

Oh, no!

So they were told to go to the local stationery department and buy some file covers, and money flowed again. And I have to say that, when the rains eventually came, the farmers could finance their crops and pastures and their communities had been able to operate relatively normally and those loans were repaid, 99 per cent. We didn’t have trouble with anyone.

But there was another big problem to overcome. The State Government had an agreement with the Commonwealth that after a certain amount of disbursement the Commonwealth would pick up the tab, and that had been agreed at a ministerial meeting. Then Ian Sinclair’s office rang me one day and said –

He was a federal minister.

– yes, ‘Listen, Lynne, there’s nothing in writing about this. We’re not going to pay over these funds without the written agreement.’ I blame the Treasury, because they were supposed to have done all the paperwork to tie this up. Anyway, I told Brian and he said, ‘Well, ring back and say that, if they do do that, then we will go public and say, “The Federal Government has refused to pay their agreed contribution to drought relief and farmers are in trouble.”’ It was solved in that backroom fashion. But I was quite shocked because I had expected that
the Treasury administration would tie up things. Brian had to take a submission to Cabinet and this was passed to the Federal government and they agreed to pay over the funds.

In the thinking about the rural sector, was there a broad overview of what Brian was wanting to do and the government was wanting to do and Don, and these were areas you were going to sort of address and fix up? Or was it driven by crises, like, say, the drought?

No, it wasn’t driven by crises. When Brian first took over, Don had instituted a system whereby each minister was to go to their departments and ask them to provide details of what they actually did, and the Department of Agriculture sent their review forms back saying they’d answered 5,000 telephone calls and other trivia. One official had heard Brian talking about the social consequences of rural policies, and so one of them wrote that they’d studied the social consequences of sheep-breeding – it was ridiculous, you know, just putting in the buzzwords.

I was quite surprised at the way the public servants reacted to things. I had some idea, because when I was working for The ABC country hour, I used to have people from the Department of Ag come to me and leak things to try and put pressure on the government – for instance, not to move to Monarto, and things like that – and whenever they felt that the Minister was trying to put policies through that they didn't agree with they’d come to me and say, ‘Oh, the government are trying to do something terrible’ So I had a pretty fair idea of how sneaky they could be.

But I was surprised at how incompetent they were. They could never find the files for the Minister when he had parliamentary questions to answer, and they were very bad at answering the questions of farmers – particularly replying to letters. The Fisheries Department was particularly bad. I remember going down to the Fisheries Department because fishermen started to complain about no answers, and I found that the guy who was responsible had heaps of unanswered letters like this on his desk (indicates), and I said, ‘Why don’t you answer these?’ And he said, ‘Well, because the legislation might change.’

But, to get back to your original question. Don sent this demand out and Brian said, ‘This is no good. We have to be much more relevant.’ And so he then got the Departmental heads in and he developed a strategy of regionalisation to send more responsibility out to the regions and to make it possible to get promotion while remaining in the region if you were a particularly good regional officer. This meant that farming problems became more important than bureaucratic statistics and procedures.

Was there a rural policy statement that Brian would wave and say, ‘Listen,’ or you would wave at people?

Well, yes, Brian had a rural policy statement which had been worked out through the relevant Caucus committee and accepted by the Party. For instance, we were concerned about the loss of land on which to produce food around Adelaide, and also the way the markets worked and the need to make sure that transport of food was hygienic, and to promote local foods. We tried to sort much of this out. There was a huge amount to be done, and the whole idea, really, was to try to make the Department of Agriculture a support for the farmers and a monitor for good fresh
food and not to just men going off doing bits of research, and stomping around in gumboots – – –.

Yes – sort of self-driven, rather than driven by what the rural community was needing.

That was the whole idea. And it was a big job to change directions and attitudes.. A lot of the people who’d been senior heads resigned. Because they had little fiefdoms, you know and they were unhappy to lose them..

Yes – did lots of travelling, from my understanding.

Yes. That’s right.

Conferences and – – –.

Another important event was the matter of the pastoral lands: that was another thing we managed to save, thanks to Norm Foster. And that was a very dramatic incident.

What was going to happen to that?

The pastoralists wanted the leases to be translated into perpetual leases because they said that they would then be able to raise capital and improve their land. They’d had the land for nearly a hundred years and they’d done nothing – no attempt to increase pasture; they’d just eaten it out – and, really, there was no justification for keeping sheep in those pastoral areas, none at all. There was no wool market, there was no meat market for pastoral sheep, and all they were doing was destroying the environment. The Liberals tried to pass a bill that it should be made perpetual lease, and we opposed this on the grounds of environmental damage.

Oh, yes – that was under Tonkin.

Norm Foster had voted with the Tonkin government to support uranium mining, and he was terribly distressed that day. He really felt that he’d betrayed the Labor party, but he also felt that he had to protect the workers up there. It was dreadful. And he’d actually rushed out of the chamber, and when pastoral bill came up we needed Norm’s vote because it was terribly close, and Brian said to me, ‘See if you can find Norm and see if you can talk him into coming back.’ So I went out and I found him in the parliamentary car park, sitting in his car, crying. He had been a great friend of my stepfather; they were in the War together; and I talked to him for a while and I said, ‘Look, Norm, if you feel up to it, could you come back?’ And he did, and he voted for it, and we saved it. I don’t know what’s happened since.

Gosh. So when you were looking at the rural sector there were there pastoralists, there were the blockers, there were the –

The wheat growers.

– yes, the wheat growers, and then the blockers and then the dairy farmers, if you like, and whatever else.
We had problems with the dairy officers— not the dairy farmers. The Department of Agriculture wanted to keep a dairy herd testing scheme going that was costing a lot of money, and Don was trying to cut down on a lot of this waste of money, I remember the guy who was running it nearly punched me in the nose, because we were having a discussion about it at a Departmental Christmas party and he was furious with me. He was a big, burly guy, and David Corbett, who was a great friend of mine, stepped between us.

Oh, really?

I’ll never forget that. It was at some Christmas party.

Unbelievable. Which areas took up most of your time when you look at all these rural industries and people?

Well, I suppose agriculture mainly but fisheries was interesting because we introduced Fisheries management and that required delicate political soundings and much thought. Don and Brian were keen not to have the fisheries licences become marketable assets but the fishermen and the processors were loud in support of saleable licences. The fisheries were the property of the state and when the fisheries were managed then fishermen were granted licences to a virtual closed shop. The government had to pay for research and administration and Don and Brian believed that the fishermen should pay rent for their licences and then pass them back to be reallocated when they retired.

Along the way we also had to change the fisheries legislation because Mick Olson who was Director of Fisheries had written a most convoluted Act – which was described by a judge as ‘devious’ among other words.–

Oh, really?

Essentially Mick had written it so that if he liked a fisherman he could let him do what he wanted, and if he didn’t like him he could stop him. We had to have a much simpler Act both to cope with the requirements of fishermen for administrative clarity and also to encompass a system of fisheries management. So Brian decided to have it rewritten and made clear and easy to administer. And we did that.

Don had set down a calendar for a legislative program and each minister had to put forward a list of legislation they wanted to put through. Don then said, ‘Well, we’ve got time for so many pieces of legislation to be debated.’ and he allocated Ministers accordingly. Brian was allocated five, and one of them was fisheries legislation; we got them all through in the end. Bob Dougherty (The Parliamentary Draughtsman) was a very competent and efficient draughtsman. I used to have to go over with the public servants to keep an eye on what was written into the Bill to be presented to parliament. They’d say, ‘Oh, we should put this in, we should put that in,’ and Bob would say, ‘Oh, yes, yes, yes.’ And then he’d ring me and say, ‘Will you ask Brian what he thinks about this?’ And Brian would call the public servants in and go through it again and take out all the extra bits and pieces they had tried to insert. The Act was passed and proved effective. We also put through the bushfire legislation, which modernised the Country Fire Services and the Bushfire regulations. I can’t remember the others, but we did five altogether. It was
interesting, working with parliamentary draftsmen and the Minister and the public service and the public and finding out how legislation was formed and went through the various processes to become law.

Having read Brian’s book, *Roosters and feather dusters*, in it he talks about all these groups lobbying him all the time, and he mentioned Tom Casey used to like going to lunches. What was going on there, the lobbying? Were there certain people who – – –?

No, it’s just a natural part of politics. I mean, political lobbying is a perfectly acceptable thing in a democracy. It’s only when you start getting favours and payments that it becomes corrupt. But, you know, the ministers have to be open to, first of all, hearing what the industry representatives have to say, but also – as you know from Don’s office – you have to be open to individuals telling you their circumstances and how legislation and policies will affect them, and you have to know how to put this into a context. Brian was not very good at going out to lunches and dinners, and I used to be quite unpopular because potential lobbyists would say to me, ‘Oh, Lynne, what about getting Brian to come?’ He would say ‘If they want to see me, they can come to my office.’ He felt it was better for industry and interest representatives to come to the office and sit down with their facts and figures. But lobbying was constant. I mean, that’s what political life’s about; and the important thing is, I think, to make sure that individuals have the right to lobby as much as the industry people, because the industry people tend to get a bit caught up in their own politics, and you need to be aware of what’s happening to people who are the victims or the recipients of legislation.

Yes. So what tended to sway the cases? Was it the logic, or the power, or both, with some of these people and groups?

Well, I think with Brian it was logic. He’s a very practical, down-to-earth person, and he’s a farmer. He’s really a farmer to his fingertips. And he believed that the people who will be at the end of policy and legislation are the people who really have to be listened to. He’s a good administrator, and he was a good judge of character – he wasn’t a politician in the sense of gladhanding, he’s not like that at all; but people respected him. I mean, even, towards the end, we had people who had been devoted Liberal supporters, farmers, who got in touch and said, ‘Look, we’re supporting you because you’ve done good things and we respect what you do.’

Don valued the rural communities, he didn’t just dismiss them, and he always supported Brian in what he did because he felt that Brian knew what he was doing. With regard to the dryland farming initiative, Don picked it up and ran with it after the department of agriculture had put it in the pending basket. He saw the potential and gave it to Brian to develop and negotiate. Don was completely supportive if he felt you were doing what he believed was a good thing for the community and for the state. But he was very quick to tell people if he thought they were misusing their power or influence. Brian says he never humiliated anyone. He’d just say, ‘We’ll just put this aside and talk about it next time,’ and then he’d talk to the person privately and quietly.

Yes – not in front of Cabinet people or whatever.
No.

Yes. One of the reasons I’m following this through is just to get or try and get a bit clearer where Don saw the rural people; and we’re talking about doing the best for them, but also in the politics of the time. There was the Legislative Council and the drive to get more seats from some of the wider areas. What was that sort of political edge to a lot of what was going on?

I think Don’s attitude was that if you did the right thing by people and listened to them seriously and tried to address their problems, then they would over time change. Obviously the Labor party had never done well in the rural electorates. The extended franchise for the Legislative Council gave them opportunities to get Labor members in at that level and Brian and Cec Creedon were among the first. The Riverland – the seat of Chaffey (war service settlers and irrigated properties) was different because that had been an independent electorate for as long as I was there. Bill McGillivray was the independent MP. Reg Curran eventually took over when McGillivray died. Curran was a Labor MP. That was the result of a deal and when Reg Curran retired the seat went to the Liberal Party.

Generally, the farmers in the wheat-growing areas, voted for the Liberal and Country Party because they felt it represented their interests. You have to remember that the Labor Party came into being due in large part to the rural unions – particularly the AWU – their members had a class dislike of landholders who they felt exploited their labour. It eventually became what we now call the rural/urban gap. Rural people felt (and still feel) that they were misunderstood by “city folk” who made up a large part of the Labor party. They were not as ideologically right-wing as you would expect. I think rural people in Australia feel that central governments and state governments really don’t consider them important. Once the economy became dependent on mineral resources instead of wheat and wool country people lost the influence they had had over the Liberal and Country Party. They soon found that they were always the last in the line to get amenities; their problems with drought and with disease, their need for hospitals, schools and so on make the TV but do come low down on the list of most government priorities. But I thought – certainly I had the feeling, during Don's time – that they were beginning to feel that a Labor government could do things for them. But, of course, then Whitlam came in with that Coombs” economic rationalisation about farming and that was just terrible, and that really put the farmers off the Labor Party.

What was that, particularly?

Oh, Coombs came in and did an economic study of subsidies and recommended that farmers had been favored for too long – they should get big or get out and there was a hint of a ‘slash-’em and burn-’em and kick-’em-off-the-land’ thing The result was that Whitlam was booed everywhere he went for years after that by farmers.

Didn’t really help.

Didn’t help, no.

I just want to get back to the department heads or the department senior people.
When Brian was talking to them, what was their reaction to – you know, they’d had Tom Casey and previous Ministers, the Liberal Ministers and whatever; but his new broom, what were they saying and then actually doing?

Well, that was very interesting, because during meetings with Brian in his office they would all say, ‘Yes, Minister. Yes, Minister. Good idea, Minister.’ in front of him. And then they’d go outside and, in front of me, they would say, ‘That’s bullshit. We’re not going to do that.’ And I tell you, George, I was amazed. Brian eventually, as the old lot retired, brought in new people, including a new head of department. But it just shows you how institutions affect people, because some of the people he brought in had been very good in private areas of rural operations – very sensible, down-to-earth people who got on well with farmers and growers and so on and seemed ideal people to bring in. A couple of them only lasted a few years; they just found they couldn’t cope with the way things worked, the bureaucracy, the internal politics, hostility to an incomer. The new director he brought in, who’d seemed a really good guy, simply became just as self-serving and duplicitous as the old lot and in many ways worse.

Really?

It was terrible to see people change. The same thing often happens to people who go into politics. They go in with good intentions, ready to fight for things, and gradually they make compromises and in the end they lose their integrity. And this happened particularly, I think, with the officials involved in the dryland farming overseas projects, because it provided opportunities for all sorts of patronage. It was that that finally ruined the whole project.

This particular head of department was obviously involved in federal meetings and he saw them as an opportunity for a big junket for himself and his wife. He was not alone in this, most of the departmental heads were of the same mind. Brian used to say when a junket was proposed, ‘Look, we can’t be part of this. The country’s in a bad way.’ But his departmental head would go on to authorise the round Australia junkets in spite of that. He became in many ways a great problem. He once said to David Corbett that there was government policy and departmental policy and he was there to make sure that departmental policy took precedence.....

So did Brian set up like a phalanx of people who’d go in and drive as much change as they could – – –?

Well, I think bringing in new people did have an impact. A lot of the change from the old days did take place. The regional people were really pleased with it because, up till then, they’d had to put in requests to head office all the time to change their pens and so on. Brian also was concerned about the women in the offices – the typists and the receptionists – who were treated like pet dogs – when we visited regional offices the male officers would say ‘This is Milly,’ as they would about a pet dog. Brian used to point out that very often the front desk was the first point of contact between farmers and officials and that these women had to be very competent to deal with this. As women they couldn’t move up the promotion ladder at all. And, in fact, Brian's own secretary, when she wanted a new typewriter,
couldn’t have one because she wasn’t a high enough grade. So, he tried to do something about that, too. I don’t know whether that succeeded. Many of the Department of Ag blokes were decent and well meaning, and there were also a couple of women officers at the time who fitted in well. Later, when we went overseas on these dryland farming projects we took Department of Ag people with us, and I think they were surprised at the way we worked. They’d never really seen us working to get projects and things, and in the end we all ended up being really good friends. We appreciated each other a lot more, I think.

**But Brian didn’t set up a policy unit, for example?**

_I was a policy unit. (laughs)_

**You were the policy unit. Why didn’t you enlarge it?**

Well, he didn’t have the money. We worked with the Party – you know, we had a Rural Policy Unit within the Labor Party and everything went to Caucus committees and Cabinet and matters became policy if they passed through Cabinet. But there was no money for more policy research – after all one policy adviser and a whole department was not a bad resource to have. And a Minister is elected to provide judgment and leadership to the departments he or she is responsible for.

**Yes. Brian brought in David Harvey to kick along the marketing side of things.**

Marketing, yes.

**What was the origin of that, then?**

Well, Brian had known David and he was very good at marketing and he also got on very well with farmers. And he was very progressive with his ideas. Marketing was something the Department had never thought about, and so David came in and I have to say he did a lot of good work. And we had Hugh Winter who came in to take over the drought administration, too, and he was good; but he left in the end because he found the atmosphere too depressing. Brian used to call the heads of department in – nothing was done without consultation – it was just that some of the older people, some of the more stick-in-the-mud people really felt that what he proposed and the policies that he espoused were a threat to their own careers. But I think he was always liked and respected; he certainly was, out in the rural community, the fishermen and the forestry people.

**We’ve been talking about the Department of Agriculture and Brian Chatterton’s work there. Just to switch to Don Dunstan, you mentioned that he’d spoken to you about various things and what you ought to do and what Brian might do and his relationship with the rural sector. When did you first come across Don Dunstan – was it personally, or just heard about him?**

It was personally. I had met Gretel who came up to the Riverland once to talk about women in professional life. I used to be involved with adult education there – in fact, I did my matriculation through that. We used to get speakers up from Adelaide, and she was one who came up. That’s how I met Neal Blewett, too. But then I met Don once or twice, I think at functions for the Adelaide Children’s Hospital, I was
on the Board of that, and he came and spoke about the Children’s Hospital and the
funding of it, and I met him briefly there.  But my first real meeting with Don was
when I was down at Carrickalinga with Neal and Jill Blewett and somebody came to
the door and Neal said, ‘Oh, Lynne, see who it is, will you?’  And it was Don.
And I said, ‘Oh, hello, Don,’ and I called out, ‘Oh, Neal, it’s Don.’
And he said, ‘Don who?’
I said, ‘Don Dunstan.’
‘Oh, my god! Oh, my god!’ said Neal, because he’d never met him before.
Oh, really?
And so, you know, there was a big flurry; and Neal said to me afterwards, ‘How
could you be so casual?’  (laughter)
But I didn’t see much of him.  I only saw him occasionally – didn’t really know
him much at all.

Right. But what were your impressions of him when you met him?

Oh, I thought he was charming and charismatic and so on.  I knew Adele, too; she
was a great friend of mine, and I shared fellow-feeling with her because, you know,
the politician’s wife always gets it in the neck from the blokes.  But I really didn’t
have much to do with him until I came into government, and I found my admiration
for him just growing until, as I was saying the other day, he provided an example of
good governance that is very rare today.  He was a very capable administrator; an
excellent politician; and a man who really never lost his ability to really listen to
people.  And he was strong and supportive – he certainly supported me when I
really needed it, and he supported Brian whenever he needed it.  He was a good
man.  He was a good Premier.  And, being a political scientist, I had a lot of
background, a lot of academic knowledge about what government is and how it
works; and so I was able to appreciate the way he governed.

What were some of the features, then, of what you’d call ‘good governance’?

He understood exactly how a democratic government worked.  He understood the
limitations of political power, he knew when to lead and when to hold back, he
understood that policies are all very well but administration has to be set up to carry
them out, he understood the power of legislation and he realised the value of
keeping in touch with people.  He gave his colleagues and party people respect.  He
never humiliated his ministers or fellow members of parliament and he made public
his respect for them.  He gave them authority and demanded that that authority also
be respected by public servants and the public, which is something that’s almost
disappeared now.  If he had to deal with difficult things, he spoke to people
privately.  He never humiliated them in Cabinet, either – and Brian has told me that.

He was careful to research policies before announcing them.  His Policy Unit, as
you know, was supposed to think up things, test them out, research them, try and get
some idea of how they would be accepted in public.

He kept the public service in their place.  They were administrators, but they
were really not there to tell the government what to do, and while he respected them
he did not allow them to override government policy; and he brought in people like
me and you, policy advisers, to try to be that bridge between the constituency and
him, as well as providing an alternative to the public service. Now, that latter strategy has gotten out of hand, I think – that’s my opinion, anyway – and it’s a pity, because I think the people who’ve come in as advisers are not always qualified to be so.

Don was also good in Parliament. He was quick on his feet. He was also the first premier I knew who instituted a press section which monitored what was said in the press but did not manipulate it, which is what happens now, of course – but really to see what was being said and see what we had to take notice of.

But above all he had judgment, and so many ministers and premiers don’t have judgment. They listen to a small group of people around them, and then the last person in the ear is the decision they make, whereas Don would go away and reflect on all aspects of the matter and then he would come back and say, ‘Okay, this is what we’ll do.’ And his judgment was excellent.

And the role of the ministerial advisers, what did you see that as?

Well, I saw it as an independent adviser with experience in the constituency, someone who knew the reality of the particular sector; could deal with the public service, and respect what they did but not let them overwhelm; and to be intellectually able to think up policies and to help ministers with their policies – you know, help them with testing them out and putting them into cabinet submissions and policy documents.

I found towards the end of my time that one of the problems was, of course, that you are very vulnerable as an independent. As a woman I was attacked several times by frustrated interest groups or irritated members of the opposition, but both Don and Brian told me to ignore it and do my work and I did. I didn’t get a big salary at all and I didn’t get a big pay out when we lost government; but many of the guys who came in as press secretaries negotiated huge salaries and payments out and so on, and also they started to play power games – you know, ‘I can deliver the Minister to you,’ *et cetera, et cetera.*

Oh, really?

I felt that was not on. But in the end I put in a submission to Don that advisers be made public servants in a category of their own, simply to protect us from the fact that we really were very vulnerable when people wanted to attack us because we were influential but “unelected” - as indeed public servants were..

What happened to that?

Well, we lost government. Don retired.

Ran out of time on that one.

Yes. But it was only just before he collapsed that I put that in, to try and create some formal status for policy advisers.

And the idea of the ministerial adviser as a ‘minder’: what do you think of that?

I don’t think that was a good idea. To some extent, you do become a focus of people
who want to influence the Minister, and it’s hard to avoid. But I don’t think that’s the place of the policy adviser at all. The Minister has a secretary who’s supposed to organise the appointments and things. I found that I used to have to organise itineraries and things, simply because nobody ever thought that you had to get from here to there and you had to allow the time on the itinerary for this. But I did not feel it was part of my job description.

Simple things, yes.

And also you had to have the files available for the Minister, so he had the relevant documents for various meetings, and to travel with him to provide advice if needed. But apart from that I don’t think their role is as minders.

Yes; or not a shield, either?

No. I mean, your job is policy.

Yes. I’m just trying to get this fairly clear, because these days these ministers seem to have all sorts of people marching them around all over the place, and I was just wanting to get an idea of, with your experience, what the role was. That’s certainly the policy side and the logistical side. But then, well, is the Minister there and the Minister ought to be driving the thing –

Exactly.

or is the Minister sort of listening to everybody, not knowing where to go, and, ‘Okay, what do you think, my adviser?’

A lot of the advisers were journalists to start with, and I honestly don’t think that’s a qualification for a policy adviser. I mean, you’ve got to know how government works and you’ve got to be aware of the hierarchy of authority in government – how much with the departments, how much with the cabinet, how much with individual ministers, how much with particular interest groups and so on – and I think Don’s great strength was that he understood this perfectly. But I think these days ministers are just figureheads and they do what they’re told. A trivial example - I remember one guy coming up to Brian from the Premier’s Department saying, ‘Well, Lynne, you must tell Brian he’s got to get his hair blow-dried and puffed up, because he’s got terrible hair.’

Oh, really!

(laughter) I said to Brian, ‘Do you think you ought to do some – – –?’ ‘Ugh!’ he replied. But no, I think this minder thing has got out of hand and I think that ministers shouldn’t be ‘kept on message’. And certainly not on Message designed by minders. These days they would have their hair done.

So you became a policy adviser to the Minister – I forget whether it was ‘of’ the Environment or ‘for’ the Environment. How did that occur?

Well, that happened because Chris Schacht and his mother and Des Corcoran were really getting stuck into me about being married. They said that it was alright for me to work as Brian's policy adviser before we married but when I became a wife
they said that I should resign because I was keeping some man out of a job. They harassed me and threatened Brian that they would make sure that he lost his preselection if I didn't resign. And so Don said, ‘Come over and work in my office,’ and I said, ‘Well, I don't really want to; I want to stay where I am.’

I had got my job because of my qualifications and I was doing it competently and I didn't see why I shouldn't continue. The Department of Environment had just been set up and Don Simmons was running it, and so it was suggested that I go over to Environment but actually keep doing my ordinary job as well as doing some policy work in Environment, because they were really feeling their feet and all the other departments were giving them hell because they had to lose sections of their departments to Environment. So I went over to Don Simmons.

I didn’t have an office; I was stuck in a corridor with a phone, and that was all I had. Bruce Muirden was Don Simmons press secretary and one day Don S called me in and said, ‘Lynne, I want you to write my press releases.’ I said, ‘Why?’ He said, ‘Well, Bruce doesn’t write well, you know, I don’t like his press releases.’ He said, ‘Will you do them?’ I said, ‘I’m not a press secretary, Don; I’m a policy adviser.’ I forget what else he asked me to do, but I said, ‘Sorry.’ So he more or less left me alone after that.

But Environment was interesting because I did have quite a hand in drawing up the legislation concerning what Environment would do with regard to land. For instance there was a policy being developed to try to retain a lot of the eucalypts and the nature strips around farming land. Land clearance had become quite a problem as bigger paddocks and bigger machinery became part of cereal farming. I can’t at the moment recollect the whole thing, but we had to write a new environmental Act and I had a lot to do with that. But then, of course, Simmons retired and Des Corcoran took over the Department and I went to Don, as Premier, and said, ‘Look, I’m sorry, I won’t work with Des.’ And he said, ‘Well, in that case, you have to come to my office.’ So I did, but I went on doing the same job.

Oh, right. So you went into Don’s office. Where did you actually fit in there? Were you part of the whole group?

Yes. Don had an Enquiry Unit attached to his office with Eugenia Koussidis and Fred Hansford there, and I was given an office there. I would go into the staff policy meetings and Don would ask me to contribute whenever there was anything involving rural, fisheries and forestry matters.

These were meetings of, what –

The staff.

– Peter Ward and the press – – –?

No Peter had almost gone by then.

Oh, was it Dempsey then? Right. Rob Dempsey, was he there then?

Yes, Dempsey. It was a good crowd, Mike Rann, Graham Maguire, Bruce Guerin.

And how did that work, that group? They’d bring Don up to date on things, or
he’d want certain things done?

Well, we’d sit down and he’d tell us what he was doing or what he thought, and we’d report back on various things that we were working on, and it was just a general keeping-up-to-date thing. And also I did parliamentary questions on rural, fisheries and forestry matters, Don came to us for the answers for parliamentary questions – I don’t know if you remember after Don retired and Des took over he immediately reinstated Graham Inns and his administrative office as his conduit for parliamentary questions and answering letters. It lasted about two weeks, I think, (laughs) and then he came back to us.

Were there any crises at the time that you were there when Don was the Premier?

Yes. We had the farmers’ strike, which was quite exciting. I’m just trying to think. That was one of the major ones, I think. We had the woodchip deal, but that was sunk by the Tonkin Government. And what else did we have? Oh, the dryland farming thing was going quite well by then but that of course was undermined during the Tonkin period and came to grief absolutely under Bannon who would not pursue the corruption and mismanagement that was going on. The fight over the sale of fishing licences and the increase in licence fees was another big dispute.

Did you sort of look at how – where Don might have an idea, not necessarily in the rural area, and some people might have thought, ‘Aw, that’s being pretty courageous,’ and how would Don sort of respond to that sort of thing? Because one of the observations about him was he was a leader and if he thought something was needing to be done he’d get out there and explain it and get people to understand and come onside. Did you see any of that?

I certainly did. And I remember when we were having a very bad economic time. I don’t know whether you remember: It was the time of the concept of the ‘industrial prisoner’, in sociological studies. There was a lot of thought of how to get people out of factories where work was repetitious and boring and how to develop enterprises that would provide them with satisfaction in their work. People were unhappy when the factories were closing down, but then what could they do? And Don thought we should consider policies to develop various industries and craft centres that would give people a good life based on work that they were paid for, and in doing so to build an alternative work environment. And I remember Bruce Guerin and I, and I’m not sure – were you involved in that? We were all asked to come up with ideas.

And, of course, then Don retired and I think that just went into the ground. But we did a lot of work on that. And he did a lot of work explaining it. He was courageous. For instance, – with abortion law reform; decriminalisation of homosexuality; discrimination against women; all those things he initiated and he kept at them and he got the public onside. And, let us not forget appointing an aborigine as Governor of the State.

I’m just exploring this because I’ve talked to some people who worked in his office, some of the key – well, like Bruce and others; we haven’t caught up with Rob Dempsey or Peter Ward yet –
No.

– but did people say, ‘Well, listen, this idea’s a bit too way out. What are you doing, Don? Are you going to get into trouble on this?’ Or how would the staff react to some of these ideas?

I don’t remember any great opposition to it. As you were saying the other day, I think we all rather felt at the time – although we didn’t put it into words then – that it was a sort of Camelot; that we were all working towards a better life for everybody; social justice, equality, - all the aims of democratic socialism - and it was such a change after the years of Playford and we took it seriously. We had to do a lot of research and ask people about what they thought and so on, but I think Don’s judgment was so good that when he did decide to go for something he would persist and take the criticisms and brickbats on the chin.

When – you mentioned Don retired; what was your reaction when that news came through, or had you known about it before he made the dramatic announcement down at the hospital?

Well, I knew he was in a bad way. I’d been with Adele right up until the time she died, so I realised the strain he was under and I knew how difficult the whole thing was for them both. And I was actually in his office with – I’m just trying to think who was there. I think Mike Rann was there, and I’m not sure whether Graham Maguire was there too. There were about four of us in Don’s office down at Parliament House, and they were saying, ‘Look, he’s in a bad way. What are we going to do? He’s really not going well, we have to convince him to try and ease up a lot,’ Because he wouldn’t give up – you remember he went mad on work. And I said, ‘Don’t worry. His body will give up very soon.’ And suddenly – because we had the speakers on – we heard a crash, and that was Don collapsing.

Really?

Oh, I’ll tell you who was there: Steve Wright, . And Stephen rushed into the chamber and I think came out and said, ‘Where are we going to take him? Out the front door or the back door?’ And I think Don said, ‘Take me out the front door,’ and they did. And that was it.

Well, then, of course, he saw his doctors and a few days later I had to go into hospital for a minor operation, and just before I had my pre-med Brian rang me and said, ‘Bad news. Don’s resigning’ And then Mike Rann rang me and said, ‘Oh, Don’s going to resign.’ And it came over on the news at 12 o’clock, and I was due to go in to theatre at 1 o’clock, and the nurses and the doctor came in and said to me, ‘Would you like to postpone this, because we’ve heard this terribly sad news about Don?’ But I went ahead and had the operation; there was nothing I could do. So that was how I heard it.

And what was the reaction when the decision was made? You were in hospital, but what actually happened after that?

Well, I went back to work. And of course we were all terrified, because Des Cororan had hated us all. He used to refer to us as Don’s wankers –When he got
rid of Barry Hughes I remember him boasting that he had sacked – ‘that Welsh bastard’.

But he got rid of us, one after the other, and I was wondering what the hell he was going to do with me, because he really had it in for me. To my amazement, he called me into his office at Parliament House and he said, ‘Lynne, first of all, I want you to know that I’m keeping Brian on and, secondly, that you can both go overseas to do this big dryland farming thing and sign up these projects.’ And he said, ‘I don’t know what to do about John Cornwall. What should I do? Should I sack him or keep him on?’

Oh, no.

I couldn’t believe it! (laughs) And I said, ‘Well, Des, you’re the Premier now.’ And he was just about weeping on my shoulder about what he was going to do about his reshuffle. I thought, ‘God Almighty!’ And then eventually, when he lost government, I just resigned. He actually wrote me a letter which was sacking me, so I could get my $3,000 payout. I mean, there was no point in going on.

Well, just to wind up, unless there’s anything else –

No, I don’t think so.

– you want to talk about, just your views about Don’s legacy for the State of South Australia and perhaps nationally and internationally?

As far as the State of South Australia is concerned I think he really brought us into the 20th, even the 21st century, and I think it’s a pity that there’s not a much stronger record of his achievements and that people don’t remember this. The press did him great harm and it is a disgrace that most people remember him for pink hot pants and other trivialities. Nationally, he suffered terribly from jealousy from other politicians and the Labor Party generally. He was treated extremely badly by the national people. I think he would have been a wonderful Director-General of the ABC; he could have done marvellous things; he was a very capable man. Politics is full of jealousy.

This was Hawke and Keating, was it, after that?

Well they had their own fish to fry, but they could have done more to provide Don with a useful appointment. Jealousy and egotism is rife in politics. In Don's time he kept things on an even keel – he made sure that petty jealousies were under control and that we all worked for the good of the people of the State. Factionalism was not allowed to become dominant. All that changed once we were into the into the Corcoran, Bannon era and you found that your worst enemies and the obstacles to doing decent things were the vicious factions within the party. That’s the sad thing.

Internationally, I have to say that I am even now constantly amazed by people I meet in Europe and in Britain who remember Don. They knew him as an enlightened, very exceptional premier, and they say, ‘Oh! Somebody told me you were with the Dunstan Government. My goodness! What a wonderful experience to have had.’ Or
say, ‘Oh, I met Don. He was an extraordinary man, wasn’t he? So capable.’ So internationally he’s still remembered, but I think in South Australia recognition should be given to Don’s achievements that made the tiny State of South Australia and those of us who lived there a sense of pride and a commitment to a civilised community that is not often seen.

Yes. Okay. Well, thanks very much, Lynne.

You’re welcome.

That’s been great