
Interview with Mrs Molly Byrne, the first Labor woman elected to the South Australian Parliament in 1965 representing the seat of Barossa and later the seats of Todd and Tea Tree Gully until 1979. The interview is recorded by Dr Margaret Allen at Seacliff Park, South Australia, on Thursday, 1st March 2007.

RECORDING COMMENCES

I just want to say thanks very much, Molly, for agreeing to do the interviews. And I just wanted to ask you, you know they've got various things about women in politics in the State Library, but I was shocked to see they didn't really have anything about you because you were elected in 1965 as the first Labor woman in the Lower House.

Yes, that's correct.

(adjusts microphone) I'll just put that a little bit nearer you, because you've got a softer voice. If you could just try speaking up a touch that would be lovely. And I was going to say when you were a girl, did you think you'd be involved in politics?

No, I don't think, looking back, that I showed any leadership qualities. I was born at Hahndorf, South Australia – then it was known as Ambleside – and my parents lived at Mylor, and I went to Mylor Primary School and later we shifted to Berri, went there for three years, and then came back again and I went to Scotts Creek Primary School. And from there I went to Adelaide Girls' High School and what I had to do, I had to (laughs) get up at quarter to six every morning, leave home at quarter to seven, and ride a bike to the railway station at Heathfield and catch a train at quarter to eight, to the city. And then just about every day we had to run up to Adelaide High School and repeat that at night, catching the train at quarter to four, getting back at five o'clock, and then, by the time I rode the bike home, it would be six o'clock and you had to do your homework.

Now, the reason I went to Adelaide High School was my mother had three brothers and one sister, and one of her brothers and her sister, they were both school teachers, and *they* went to Adelaide High School. And so my auntie insisted that I went there, too, and she went and enrolled me. As far as my mother was concerned, she left school at fourteen and so did my father. My mother never did any paid work; my mother got married off the farm – and, incidentally, she was the youngest of five children and her father died when she was two. So her mother brought up the

family. And on my father's side, he was an orphan and he was brought up by a maiden aunt and two bachelor brothers. So he left school when *he* was fourteen, you see, and had to go to work. And at that time Dad was a market gardener. But he didn't own any land. My mother's mother owned quite a lot of land at Mylor and one of the sons, he was a market gardener. That part of the property was next to the Onkaparinga River; my father helped him.

And that's how your parents perhaps met, up at Mylor?

My parents met because my father (laughs) played football and cricket and my mother played tennis and it was all on the same complex, and that's how they met one another.

Oh, really? And what was your maiden name?

My maiden name was McGavisk, M-C-G-A-V-I-S-K, and my father's ancestors came from Scotland. And my mother's maiden name was Lapidge, L-A-P-I-D-G-E, and they came from Cornwall.

It's interesting that you went to Adelaide High, because I went to that school too and I'm working on the centenary history of that as well as doing the Dunstan Foundation, so it's lovely to find you in relation to the school.

They did invite me back once to address the students.

Oh, did you do that?

Yes, I did that.

Oh, marvellous. And your mother didn't go to Adelaide High School?

My mother left school at fourteen. She had asthma and she stayed home on the farm. It was only my auntie and uncle that went there, who became school teachers.

So they were older than her?

They were older; she was the youngest, she was only two when her father died. But her mother was originally a dressmaker and her and her two sisters had a business in Hutt Street. But her husband – that's my grandfather, whose surname, as I've said, was Lapidge – he was an engineer. I think the Lapidges were what you'd call probably 'middle-class', and he was quite well-educated and he went to Pulteney

Grammar. And they had shops, the Lapidges: one in King William Road, Hyde Park; and another one on Unley Road. And my great-grandma also had a mixed business shop at Mylor.

And you went up to Berri to live when you were a small girl.

Yes, I went there for three years, but I went to school there.

Why did your family move there?

Mainly I think because my father felt that he had a better opportunity. But I think probably they moved back because they were disappointed.

And then they moved back to Scotts Creek?

They moved back to Bradbury, and I went to school at Scotts Creek.

And is that where you did grade seven?

Yes, I did grade seven at Scotts Creek.

Oh, right. And who were your teachers at primary school? Men or women or -- --?

Well, there was only two teachers: a woman teacher from grade one to three and then a male teacher from four to seven. And, looking back, I think it was a (laughs) disadvantage, because it's much better – like later we shifted to the city and my sister, for example, was in a class where they just had one teacher –

To a bigger school?

– yes. That was the beginning of third-year high school, that was when we shifted to the city, and we lived at Clapham and my sister went to Colonel Light Gardens Primary School.

And what did your father do when you came back to live in Adelaide?

I think that was during the War years that he was in the Army. And then, after he came out of the Army, he just did labouring jobs.

So he went away to the War?

No, he didn't go overseas. As a matter of fact, he got an injury on embarkation leave and couldn't go. And then he became a military police officer.

And you said your mother didn't go out to work at all?

Never.

And was your mum involved in community activities or in the Church?

Involved in the Church when we were in the Hills, but not when we came to Adelaide and Mum didn't take much interest in outside activities.

What church was it when you *were* in the Hills?

We went to the Church of England, now known as Anglican. And we always went to Sunday School, we were encouraged to do so.

And what about your father? Was he involved in community activities at all?

No, he wasn't; but when he came out of the Army and lived at Clapham he became Secretary of the Colonel Light Gardens Sub-Branch of the ALP.¹ And I got elected Delegate to the State Council and Convention.

Oh! So how old were you when that happened?

Well, I think I joined the ALP when I was twenty. So I can't say (laughs) exactly when I was elected a delegate. But I used to go and sometimes speak.

Oh, really? Were many women speaking at the Colonel Light Gardens Branch?

I can't remember many women attending, actually.

You went along with your dad?

Yes, I went with my father.

And did any of your brothers or sisters come along?

No, my sister was not interested in politics.

Now, I don't think I've asked you about your brothers and sisters, have I? How many children were in the family?

Only the two: my sister and myself.

And you were the older one?

¹ ALP – Australian Labor Party.

Yes.

And were you a dad's girl?

Not particularly.

I just wondered.

(laughs)

So could I ask you about going to Adelaide Girls' High School – or it was 'Adelaide High School' when you were there, wasn't it, the boys' and girls' school?

Yes, they were next door to one another in Grote Street. And I can tell you about my first day there – you don't forget some things. Because I came down in the train, and of course there was another boy came down but of course he went to the boys' school. But I didn't know anybody there and I can remember standing back next to the wall and I felt (laughs) very, very nervous, I suppose. And then along come two young ladies who were obviously, I suppose, going to be prefects, and they went and introduced me to somebody, I remember that. And then I met her sort of after that in the lunch hour, and then we were separated in different classes, but that's how I started there.

What year did you start at the school?

I can't remember now. (laughs)

Well, could I be rude and ask you when you were born, Molly?

Yes, but you'd better not publish that. - So it would have been during the War, I was going to say about 1942, but I'm not quite sure.

And do you remember how old you were when you started at the school?

Well, I started school when I was six. And I can remember the girl next door, in the next farm, she started school on the same day and her brother took us to school – and he could have (laughs) only been perhaps a year or so older; you'd never do that now.

No, you wouldn't, would you.

And we walked about three or four kilometres to school.

How marvellous. That was at primary school.

And I'm still friendly with her today.

How lovely, how marvellous. You can talk about things that many other people just don't know existed, I guess. And nowadays people go up in the Hills and they're back in an instant, really.

Yes, that's right. Well, then I can remember we only came down to the city perhaps two times a year, and it was a big event. We used to come down and we used to (laughs) sit on the back of my uncle's truck and go to see Father Christmas. And then the Church had a picnic and it was down here at Seacliff, we used to come down to that.

And so you must have been about twelve or thirteen when you went to Adelaide High School.

Well, I started when I was six, so I suppose it was probably thirteen, I should say so.

So it was your aunt who insisted that you go to the school.

Yes, my auntie took me down and enrolled me. I was enrolled in the wrong course, I've got to say that. I should have been enrolled in a general course and I was enrolled in a commercial course.

How did that happen?

I don't know, just one of those things.

And what did your mum think about you going all the way down there by yourself in the train?

No-one seemed to take any notice. It was just accepted. And then, after a while, a family came to live next door and the parents of those children owned a munitions factory and they had a housekeeper to look after the family because they shifted them out of the city because the War was on. And one of those boys went to Urrbrae High School, and then he used to wait for me at the gate and we used to ride together.

So when you rode home from the train station ---.

Well, when I *went*, depending, he would ride home with me if we caught the same train home.

Yes. So sometimes when you got home in the winter it must have been nearly dark.

It was, and pouring with rain. You'd get off the train about five o'clock and it would be dark. I remember sometimes when I felt a bit frightened, looking back I don't know how I did it; but now, of course, there's a high school at Heathfield.

So the girls you went to primary school with, they didn't go and do secondary education much?

There was only one other boy; there weren't many children, of course, in grade seven, I think I was the only girl. But a girl afterwards, who was in the class below me, her father was the teacher at that school and *she* went too to high school, but she was at Scotts Creek and so she rode on a different route.

So what do you remember about Adelaide High when you were there?

Well, nothing in particular I suppose, but being the War years I remember at one stage we were put across the road in the old church. But of course the yard was very restricted and really there wasn't much opportunity to play much sport or anything like that. And of course after school I had to catch the train home, so I couldn't really stay after school and involve myself in many other things.

So there was quite, in a way, an investment by your parents in – the train fares would have added up, I guess, and also the fact that you weren't working – an investment in your education.

I don't know. It was never discussed, but I can remember, because being during the War, there were – I forget what you call it – you had to have some sort of tickets to buy clothes and that –

Rations?

– I don't know whether it was a ration, but it was some sort of a ticket, wasn't it?

Coupons or something, yes.

And of course resources were scarce, and I can remember (laughs) I had a uniform made out of some old black serge trousers of my auntie's husband.

And what subjects did you do at Adelaide High School?

I mainly did commercial subjects, where as I said before I think it would have been better if I'd been enrolled in a general course and then you could have specialised later in a commercial course. But anyway, it turned out all right for me. (laughs)

So who was the Principal when you were there?

Well, it was Miss Drummond.

What was she like?

A lovely person. I can remember talking to her. And I remember the first – I can't remember the names of all the teachers, but no, everybody was very pleasant.

And was it seen as quite an honour to go to Adelaide High School, or – – –?

I don't know, I never thought about it. Most of the children coming down on the train got out at Mitcham and went to Unley High School. And there was only a couple of us that went to Adelaide High School.

Well, it would have been much closer, I suppose, Mitcham.

Yes, that's right.

Unley High School. And how many years were you at Adelaide High School?

Three years, and then I passed my Intermediate and I went to work. And then my sister started there.

And so your parents came to live in Adelaide when you finished at the school?

Yes, a year before I finished.

So the last year was a bit easier.

Yes, because I caught the train (laughs) at Clapham and it was much easier.

And did you study English at the school?

Yes.

And History?

No, not History.

And do you remember any of the teachers, looking back, that you think they might have had a real effect upon you, or maybe helped shape your political views in some way?

No, none of them.

Was Veta MacGhey there when you were there?

I can't remember the name. I remember there was a Miss Phelps there.

Oh, yes. She was there when I was there.

Yes. She took hockey, didn't she.

Yes.

Because my sister played hockey. And I think there was a Miss Tilley[?], but she was older, like Miss Drummond. One was Miss Torpey, I think she was the first-year teacher I had. But I think she came from New Zealand.

And how did you get your first job?

Well, I don't know, but I think the idea was to keep you out of the city or off the train, so I got a job in an office locally, but I can't recall how I happened to get that job.

So you mean up near where your parents lived?

Yes, that's right. And then I worked in the city in an office. But I joined the Clerks' Union and I'm a great supporter of unions. And my father was, too: he was a member of the AWU² at that stage. And then the rep where I worked said there was this position vacant at the Trades Hall in one of the union offices and I applied for it and got it.

So when was that?

That was – I can't say; probably when I was about eighteen, I think. That was the Federated Ironworkers' Union. And then I think they had to reduce their staff, I'm not sure whether it was three girls there working in the office. And then I went to

² AWU – Australian Workers' Union.

work for the Miscellaneous Workers' Union, in that office, and I was the only girl there.

So it would be you and the Secretary.

Yes, that's right; and an organiser.

So that was in the Trades Hall at Grote Street.

Yes.

So you've had a very long involvement in the Union Movement and the Labor Party.

Well, the Secretary of the union that I worked for there was Stan Bevan, and he of course was active in the ALP and he later became a Member of the Legislative Council in South Australia. And I can remember he invited me (laughs) to the Parliament House to lunch and I was so shaking I couldn't eat properly! I never thought I'd ever go there myself. (laughter)

So was it your father – in a way, when you look back – was it your father's interest in politics, perhaps, that – – –?

I think my father was my greatest influence.

And did you discuss politics round the tea table?

Yes, we did. But not in a heated way. I suppose we agreed. My mother's family, they were mainly LCL³ because they had a farm. I don't know about – my mother's brother and sister, of course, became teachers, I don't know about their politics.

But there was a sort of view within your family that you were union and you were Labor.

Yes. Well, my father was. My father said, 'There's something wrong with this system when so many people have got so much and others so little.'

He was right there, wasn't he? And of course I guess those days, when you were up in Berri and then back, were just coming out of the Depression, really.

³ LCL – Liberal and Country League.

Well, yes, it would have been during the Depression. And I could add this: that lots of people from the city came to live at Mylor on crown land, and they put up sort of temporary buildings, I suppose, and I got to know lots of those children because I used to go to school with them. And also I can remember people coming and camping opposite where we lived, under one of the trees there, and they were, like, men going around the country looking for work. And I think my uncle used to give them some of the vegetables off the property, off the vegetable garden.

So they were destitute, really. Or out of work.

Well, they were out of work and they were just moving around, looking for work.

And that's the sort of thing that then your father would have some comment about.

Yes. Well, I haven't forgotten it, I suppose. It didn't show the system up very well, did it?

No. And when you were at Adelaide High School, did you ever get any sense of any of that sort of political comment like that from anybody, or people commenting on that or saying this was unjust or that was unjust?

No, I can't remember any of that.

Are you okay?

Yes, fine. What time is it? Ten to three.

Terrific. And so there you are, working at the Trades Hall in the Miscellaneous Workers' Union –

That's right.

– with Stan Bevan, and you're about probably eighteen or nineteen at that [stage].

I would have been eighteen at Ironworkers and twenty when I went to work for the Miscellaneous Workers' Union.

And that's the year you joined the Labor Party at Colonel Light Gardens, too.

Yes. And at the Trades Hall I became, I suppose, the rep for the Clerks' Union.

So you were the rep on the Trades and Labour [Council]?

No, rep for the Clerks' Union in the Trades Hall, like joining other office workers up.

And most of the office workers there were women, were they?

I think they were all women, I can't remember any men.

And what sort of wages did you get paid there when you worked?

When I started work – oh, I can't tell you what (laughs) I got paid there, but it was the award wage, anyway.

Was Harry Krantz in the Clerks' Union then?

Yes, Harry was Secretary. And he died not long ago, as you know. And I greatly regret I didn't get to his funeral, but I didn't hear about it till afterwards.

It's terrible when that happens, isn't it?

Then I rang up his wife where he lived and I couldn't get any answer and I suppose she went to stay somewhere else for a while and I gave it up after a while.

Yes, what a pity. I interviewed a woman, I think she worked years ago – Mary Miller, did you know her? She worked for the – I think she was an organiser for the Ironworkers during the War.

I can't say I met her.

So what work did you do when you were working for the MWU?

I just looked after the books and typed letters, took the money from shop stewards and paid it in.

And what about with your work as a rep? Did you have to collect dues from any members?

Yes, I used to collect the money.

And in the Clerks' Union, did you go to meetings with them?

No. But I can remember once I went and I think I helped or made suggestions about amendments to the then existing award.

And can you remember what sort of general things you were saying?

I can't remember now.

And so then your father, had he been in the Colonel Light Gardens Branch ever since you moved down to Adelaide?

Well, what happened: while I was working – I don't know whether this is relevant now – but while I was working for the Miscellaneous Workers' Union, I got asked to go and work in an electorate office. I think I became Secretary of the Boothby Campaign Committee or Electoral Committee, as it was called then, and because of my activities in the A.L.P. I was approached to go and be the private secretary to Senator Ryan. And so I went to work for him in Commonwealth Parliamentary Offices.

I don't know who Senator Ryan was. I haven't heard that name before.

He was a Labor Member.

Yes. I haven't heard that name before.

Well, he retired and I worked for Senator Ridley. And during that time I got married to a union official.

So how old were you when you got married?

When I married him I was twenty-eight.

And what union was your husband in?

He was Secretary of the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemmen.

So you would have been pretty unusual, Molly, wouldn't you, in that time, for a woman, for your involvement in politics and in the political organisations in the Labour Movement. I mean, were there many other women, do you think, that were involved in the same way that you were?

Oh, yes, I think there were other women. I wasn't the first woman, as you know, to be endorsed and stand for Parliament representing the ALP. There were others before me. There was Marie Skitch, she stood in 1938. But the point is that those that stood before weren't successful.

Yes. It's important to remember those that had a go but didn't get up, as well.

Yes. And I met and knew some of them. But they would have made worthwhile Members, but they didn't get elected.

Yes, exactly.

And there were other women who could have been worthwhile members that never stood for preselection.

And did you know women who stood for preselection and didn't get preselected, or any that you remember?

No, I can't remember any.

And I just want to ask you about Senator Ryan, what was his first name?

I can't remember now.

Did he come out of a particular union?

Yes, I think he was originally Secretary of the Bakers' Union – no, it might have been the Bread Carters. No, I think it was the Bakers, I'm not sure. And Senator Ridley, he was from the Vehicle Builders' Union.

And so you were working there when you got married?

Yes, I was working for Senator Ryan when I got married to my husband.

And then you kept working there?

I kept working until I became pregnant, and then I retired from work.

And by the time you left work, you were working for Senator Ridley?

Yes, when I left work I worked for him.

And what year was your child born, or you were pregnant? When did you leave work?

Must have left work, I suppose, (laughs) not long before my daughter was born in 1960.

Oh, right. So you must have been in the workforce about sixteen or seventeen years before you ---.

I suppose I was. Never thought about it.

And so – I'm sorry to keep asking you about your age – but you were in your thirties when you left work?

I suppose I must have been thirty-one when my daughter was born.

And in those years, in your twenties, when you were working in the Union and in the Labour Movement in various ways, what did you do for your social activities?

Well, I played softball. And so I can remember I became President of the Club and then I got on what I thought was the Executive of the South Australian Women's Softball Association but they have got another name for it because they recently published a book. So I did that. And I can't remember what else. Yes, singing.

Did you use to go dancing?

I did when I was younger, yes, used to dance.

And did you go to union dances or some activities that maybe your union ran or Trades Hall ran or to other things, or a mixture?

I went to, I suppose, fundraising activities that the Party held.

Yes. I bet you did a few raffles in your day.

Yes. (laughter)

So how did you feel about leaving work?

Well, I suppose you just accept it. And then, actually, I shifted to just one street away from where I'm living now –

Good heavens.

– strange enough, and then when I shifted over here I became Secretary of the Dover Gardens Sub-Branch.

And you'd already been on – – –.

Well, I was active in Boothby, you see, when we lived there, and then when I shifted down here I became Secretary of the Sub-Branch here.

But you'd already been a delegate to State Council?

Yes, and I still was, from here.

And so you were a delegate to State Council for a number of years from Colonel Light Gardens?

I suppose I must have been.

Did you ever hold any further office in the State Branch?

I did after I got into Parliament, but not before I got into Parliament. And after I got into Parliament, later, I had no ambition to be a Member of Parliament but I did want to get on the State ALP Executive because I thought I had something to offer there. And I did get on the Executive after I got elected to Parliament, and I think I was there about ten years.

And what did you feel that you had to offer, what did you want to put across?

I felt I was good at organising.

What sort of organising were you thinking of there.

Well, I mean electioneering.

So you ran a few campaigns in Boothby?

Oh, I wouldn't say that I ran them entirely on my own, but then I remember I was Assistant Campaign Director once for the seat of Unley.

Who was running then? That was before Gil Langley.

Dr Savage, and Cyril Hutchens was the Campaign Director. So I couldn't have had anybody better to teach me. (laughs)

So who was Cyril Hutchens?

He was the MP for Hindmarsh, I think his seat was ---.

What did you say the first name was?

Cyril.

Cyril. Oh, I misheard you.

Hutchens, H-U-T-C-H-E-N-S.

Yes, he was an MP.

Yes, and then he became a minister.

And so you didn't get Dr Savage elected, or you did?

No. Subsequently – I don't know who stood next, but Gil Langley finally got that seat.

Gil Langley. And that was quite an important seat to win, I think, wasn't it? His sporting thing was one of the things that -- --.

Yes, that's right. He was a cricketer.

Yes. And Boothby would have been a very hard seat, I think.

Ah, well, we had no hope of winning that seat. So the point was that the likes of others and myself, we often used to [be], in election time, standing on the booths all day. Just on your own.

Because you didn't have -- --.

And you'd take your lunch and then do the count at night. I remember I stood on Springfield once, (laughs loudly) not many people took our card. And then another day I stood down on Cross Roads⁴ and it was something similar there.

You must have felt like you were out of your position very much in those things.

(laughs)

And I suppose the thing was to hope you got a few votes into the Legislative Council for a few people.

Yes, that's right, and in the Senate federally. And others did the same, I wasn't the only one.

No, of course.

But of course our helpers there were sparse. (laughs)

Yes. Makes it hard, doesn't it? Okay. So you wanted to be on the State Executive for some time before you actually got there.

I got on the State Executive *after* I became an MP.

Did you stand for it before?

No.

So that was after; okay.

Yes, after.

And so here you are living at Dover Gardens and you're the Secretary –

I lived here at Seacliff.

– but you were the Secretary of the Dover Gardens Branch.

That's right.

And what sort of work did you do there?

What, as Secretary of the Sub-Branch? Well, just the usual thing that you do. Can't remember when there was an election during that time, but just arranged the meetings, I suppose, and I was still a delegate to State Council and Convention. And I can't remember whether there was any elections at that time, but if there were, well, you'd do the usual electioneering.

And were you also involved in organising social functions to raise money?

I can't remember whether we had any or not, looking back then.

But thinking also when you were at Colonel Light Gardens, did you do that or did you have to bake cakes to sell and raise money or do anything like that?

I can't remember.

Molly, if you're getting very tired I'm happy to stop whenever you want.

(laughs) No, that's all right.

You're okay?

Yes. Would you like a drink now?

Yeah, that'd be nice. Thank you.

Stop and have a drink. Would you like a biscuit or anything?

Yeah, that'd be lovely, thank you. (recording continues with approximately 15 minutes of general conversation) And did you learn typewriting at school?

Yes. That's what happened at Adelaide High School, I did the commercial course there and I did Bookkeeping and Shorthand and Typewriting.

⁴ Formally 'Cross Road', but frequently referred to by South Australians as 'Cross Roads'.

And then a few other subjects, like English and – – –?

Yes, Geography, English, Maths and I can't remember. There were seven subjects; I can't remember what the other one was. – It was French

And so when you got home you had to do all your homework?

Yes. It was a long day.

I bet it was.

Looking back, I don't know how I ever did it. And one thing, (laughs) I can't help notice, but when I became a Member of Parliament I had some parents come to me and complain that they should have a bus (laughs) that would take their children to school. Well, they didn't have to go far, put it that way. I just sat and listened. (laughter)

A few times you probably felt like saying, 'Well, in my day – – –.'

Well, I mean up there now they would pick the children up by bus, and so they should.

Yes. That's right.

It's different here in the city.

That's right. It's terrible when you feel that – and certainly I, as a child, you could catch the bus, you could walk around, you could ride your bike around and you felt pretty safe.

Yes, that's right. But you don't feel safe now, do you?

Not really. You lock up the doors.

Yes, that's right. Well, looking back on my childhood, I don't think we even had a key to the door. Nobody ever locked the door. But now I run around at night and I double-check the doors. (laughs)

Yes. That's right. Are you happy if I turn the tape recorder on and do a bit more?

Yes, might as well continue.

Yes, all right. (handles microphone, volume increases) Now, I'll just make sure – –.

Where are we up to?

I just thought I might ask you just to say something again, if you didn't mind – you mentioned that you had a lot of pretty strong women in your family background. You just said something about your grandmother and what she did.

..... say about my maternal grandmother. My maternal grandmother was widowed when she had five children and her youngest child, my mother, was two; and she had an apple orchard at Mylor and with others the apples were picked and she drove through the Adelaide Hills on a wagon to take the produce to the East End Market for sale. I also had two great-aunts on the Lapidge side who were nursing sisters and went to the First World War.

And one of those worked in the Social Welfare Department, you said.

Later I think they both worked in the Social Welfare Department. I know one of them was something to do with adoptions. Adoptions and placement of children in homes.

Yes, orphanages and – – –.

Not orphanages; what's the [word]?

Oh, the boarding-out system, perhaps in private homes or fostering them?

Yes, like foster children.

So there were a few women who, in a way, were perhaps an example of getting on and doing things a little bit on their own?

Yes, that's right. So they did things in their own right.

You said your dad was quite an influence on you politically. Do you ever remember him making any comment about what women could do or what opportunities they should have?

No, I can't remember him doing that.

But he encouraged you, I think, to be Secretary – would he have encouraged you to be Secretary of the Branch?

Oh, he didn't encourage me but I just seemed to fall into those roles, probably because I had a commercial background and I could do shorthand and type. So I could take down minutes, *et cetera*.

And just one other thing about your dad and at home, was your family a family of readers and read books and read the newspapers and talk about what was in them?

Not particularly. I'd read a lot of books, but I don't think my parents did.

They were probably too busy doing everything else. So I think we got down here and we were talking about all the work you did at Dover Gardens when you were the Secretary of the Branch there.

Yes. Well, while I was Secretary of the Sub-Branch, my parents in the meantime had shifted from Clapham out to Tea Tree Gully, where my father worked in a brickyard there and he formed the Tea Tree Gully ALP Sub-Branch.

But you were still living down here?

I was still living here. And I started to go and address some Sub-Branch meetings and I went out, I was going out to speak at the Tea Tree Gully Sub-Branch, which was in the State seat of Barossa, and the State Secretary at the time, he said to me that they'd like me to consider nominating for the endorsement for the seat of Barossa.

And who was the State Secretary?

Mr Martin Nicholls who later became a Member of the House of Reps.

And you had a young child at that stage?

Yes, I had a child. What I was going to say next is that, as I didn't have any parliamentary ambition, I said to him, 'I think I'll go and talk to Clyde Cameron about it.' And his secretary was Doris Bradbury, who later became his wife. And I was friendly with Doris. And the reason I got friendly with them is when I worked for Senators Ryan and Ridley, their office was next to mine.

So you'd really known them for quite a long time.

Well, yes. And of course I'd seen him at State Councils and Conventions. So around I went; but I think Mr Nicholls probably rang up and said I was coming. (laughter) I don't know for sure. And when I got round there I said what had happened, and probably they knew, and I said, 'Well, what about my father standing?' And he said, 'No, we want *you* to do it.' And I said, 'What about my

husband?’ He said, ‘No, we want *you* to do it.’ And I can remember Doris saying to me, she said, ‘Molly, you can make a speech (laughs) at the drop of a hat, you’ve got to do it.’ So I still wasn’t convinced; I really didn’t think I was good enough, actually. Although I had an industrial and political background. So I remember I wrote my father a letter, because they didn’t have the telephone on out at Tea Tree Gully, and asked him to ring me, and he rang me and I told him about it and I said, ‘What do you think I should do?’ And this is what he said: ‘Molly, you don’t get offered much in this life. This is too good an opportunity to miss. You may not win, but if you do a good job they might endorse you for something better later.’ So I nominated. (laughs)

What year was that, Molly? When did you nominate, what year?

I got elected in ’65 so I suppose the endorsement probably took place in – well, I think the endorsement took place in early ’63, but that was probably, I suppose it was late 1962, I suppose.

So late 1962 they spoke to you.

Yes, and the endorsement took place, I think, early in 1963. I can look all that up for the dates if you want them. Yes, it was early 1963.

I wouldn’t mind. And were you the only candidate who stood for endorsement?

No; there were three men. And from memory one wasn’t eligible because he didn’t have the two years’ membership, and I can’t remember whether the other two – I think one didn’t turn up at the Convention and the other one did; but in any case I won the endorsement.

And why do you think they wanted you to do it?

You’d have to ask them. (laughs) I don’t know. I suppose because over a long period of time I’d worked for the Party and was familiar then with policy, I suppose, through going to State Council and Conventions, meetings.

And you must have put up things to State Council and Convention from your Branch before?

I can’t remember that.

And you didn't live in the electorate?

No. I've got a photo taken when I was endorsed. (laughs). Also a newspaper article headed 'Housewife endorsed by ALP'.

Yes, it would be marvellous to look at.

I lived here, of course, just on the corner there.

Good heavens.

And I had to shift, so my husband and I, we sold our house and shifted out to Tea Tree Gully, where I lived with my parents while a house was being built at Ridgehaven.

How old was your daughter then?

My daughter was two. And there was little or no child care facilities then, so my mother looked after my daughter while I went out and knocked on doors each day. And my husband supported me.

And your husband was still the Secretary of the Union?

Yes.

And so his work wasn't in any special place, like he didn't have to be here –

No.

– to do the work, he had to come into the city, I guess, to his office.

Yes, that's right.

He had an office in Trades Hall?

Yes. And, at the same time, Mr Don Dunstan was appointed by the State Executive as my campaign director.

And had you met him before?

Yes, I knew him.

When did you first meet him?

I don't know.

What was your impression of him, when you first met him?

He was always very polite to me, but we didn't have any in-depth conversations at that stage. I suppose the opportunity wasn't there.

So you would have probably met him in the '50s, before ---?

Yes. I would have seen him at --- I was endorsed in '63; well, I would have seen him coming and going, I suppose, I would have seen him, but I didn't really know him that well.

And did people have views about him even back then ---

No.

--- in the Party, or ---?

No, nobody seemed to. Oh, except they said he was very able, a very able person, and certainly no critical views.

He came from probably a different social background than some of the people I guess, in the Party. There were few, probably, people from that social background, do you think? You mentioned Dr Savage, though, just now, a little while ago.

Well, I think there were a mixture of people in the Party: trade unionists and people from all walks of life in the Sub-Branches.

And so what did you and Don do when he was appointed your campaign director, what did you do first up?

He started to go out door-knocking with me, but then he didn't have much time and so what happened, to start me off, other MPs went out with me, like Mr Jennings MP, Senator Drury. And so I really concentrated on the outer suburban section, and during the end of the campaign it was then I started to go off to the country towns and I knocked on doors like in the country towns but not all the farms. And two more Sub-Branches got formed, I helped form them --- one at Highbury and one at Modbury --- but a couple of other people from Gawler helped form the one at Williamstown, so there were four Sub-Branches. But Williamstown was the only one in the country.

So there was also a Gawler Branch?

Yes, there was a Branch at Gawler. But that wasn't in the Barossa electorate.

Oh, right. Right. And so it sounds like you were working at it all day, every day.

I used to go out almost every day. I don't know whether we had a car then or not, but in any case I had to catch the bus and I'd catch one of the buses to a certain area and I'd walk around there. So I went out in all weathers.

I was thinking about you before when you said you came when you lived here, up to Tea Tree Gully, to give a talk. Would you drive up or would you go up in the bus?

I went out in the bus.

And then you'd stay overnight with your parents, perhaps?

Yes, stayed with my parents.

And leave your daughter here with your husband, perhaps?

Oh no, I took her with me.

Oh, right, and she'd have a night with her granny. (laughter) Oh, my goodness. So sometimes you were going around by yourself doing the door-knocking, too.

Yes, that's right. Sometimes I had other Members of Parliament with me.

And what sort of reception did you get from people?

Well, the fact that I was a woman didn't seem to make any difference. And I never hurried. I didn't actually talk politics unless they wanted to; I talked about other things and what they were mainly interested in.

So what sort of things did you find yourself talking about?

Well, you'd walk up the garden path and say they had a lovely garden and so forth, and I might say that, going out like that, you didn't get a good reception (laughs) from everybody, but very few people were rude. And I can remember one woman said to me, 'How *brave* you are, my dear. Do you think you'll get your deposit back?

And you did. No, you didn't need to get it back, rather. And what were the issues out there in that area?

I don't think – lots of people were just moving in, as you know, and so they didn't expound the issues to me. But of course, as it was a developing area, actually they wanted other facilities that weren't there, and that's what I concentrated on when I got into Parliament. But at that time people really didn't talk about issues. And what we did at the weekends, I used to go out with my father and husband and sometimes other people and we used to put the people on the roll, because lots of people were shifting into the area but they weren't putting themselves on the electoral roll. And at the same time we put them on the Legislative Council roll if they qualified.

So that was quite a campaign, I think, to get people on the Legislative Council roll in those days.

Well, that was in the seat of Midland and we were trying to build our numbers up in the Legislative Council because we only had four out of twenty.

And you had to own a house to be on the roll?

Yes property ownership, ex-servicemen or women. I'm not quite sure about all those qualifications now; but they were restricted.

And what were people's reaction when you said to them, 'You're entitled to a vote here or in the Legislative [Council]?'

Most of them didn't know what the Legislative Council was. They didn't realise what its role was in the South Australian Parliament.

So they'd been kept pretty ignorant, in a way they'd been kept quite ignorant?

Well, I think most – I mean, I might be a political animal but everybody else isn't, you know?

Yes. And so when you went up to talk to them and knock on their door, when you were door-knocking, you had something to give them?

Yes, I had an introductory card, and if they weren't home I used to leave it under the door or put it in the letterbox.

And did you have a phone number on it?

No, because initially I didn't have a phone.

Oh, right.

I didn't have a phone until I moved into my house at Ridgehaven, and I didn't move in there I think until the December before the election, which was I think in the March. Because my parents, you see, I was staying with them and they didn't have a phone.

So people couldn't contact you about issues.

No. But quite a number of people had problems which I passed on, say, to the appropriate Member of Parliament, might be a Federal matter or a State matter.

And who was the State MP out there at that time?

The sitting Member was Mr Condor Laucke, who represented the LCL, and he was the Government Whip at the time. He was a flour miller.

Yes, we all know that name, Laucke's Flour Mill, don't we? And was he doing a lot of work in the electorate?

Not in the outer metropolitan section. I think he mainly concentrated on the country section. And I might say that people used to say to me – well, those that seemed to know who was the Member (laughs) – when I knocked on doors they'd say, 'Well, what about Mr Laucke?' And I used to say, 'Well, he's a very nice person, but the point is we have different policies.' And they told him back that I was going around sort of praising him up. But I couldn't say anything bad about him and I wouldn't have even if I could have because I don't think (laughs) that sort of electioneering pays off.

Often it does.

And I might mention that he later got endorsed for the Senate. I rang him up and congratulated him and I said, 'I did you a favour.' And he said, 'It looks as though you did.' (laughs) Then later he became President of the Senate, was knighted, and then he became the Lieutenant Governor, and I later got an OAM,⁵ and when the ceremony was on he came into that ceremony to be there when I got it.

Goodness me.

⁵ OAM – Medal of the Order of Australia.

And I attended his funeral. Now, people think we're all at loggerheads and it's not the case, do you know what I mean?

Yes.

They might be representing a different political party, but the point is that you can still respect them.

That's right. And they're humans after all.

That's right. You may not agree with their policy, but ---.

That's right, that's right. And if he had a bit of a following out there you would have gained nothing anyway -

No.

- by saying horrible things about him, anyway. And once you started working a lot in the more metropolitan parts of the electorate, when you were campaigning, did he start to do some more work in those?

Yes, he did. But the population kept building up, you see, and so really what happened is the Government then really left electoral reform, as *they'd* see it - I wouldn't call it 'electoral reform' - too late.

So the Liberal Government did nothing about the need to change the boundaries.

I can't remember whether they tried or not, but in any case what happened of course is that - not just there, but on the rim of the metropolitan area houses were being built further out and they were bringing Labor voters from, say, Port Adelaide or other areas.

And I did some work on Salisbury and Elizabeth and how that area was changed, but you know Salisbury, down there on the Main North Road, there were little subdivisions with inadequate sewerage, no shopping centre, muddy roads, no bus services: I think these are the sorts of issues that people were dealing with out in Tea Tree Gully, was that right?

Yes. Well, when I became the Member they were issues: extension of sewerage, widening of arterial roads, more schools or extra buildings built at schools; and then kindergartens became an issue, things like that. And that's what occupied my time, trying to get these things done for the area, those facilities.

And when you were out campaigning did you get any people who were hostile to you as a woman – in fact, you were a young married woman, really, weren't you, with a small child?

No, I didn't.

Nobody saying, 'You should be in the kitchen'?

I had one man say that to me, but that's all. And later he became a supporter.
(laughter)

Wonderful ironies of life, aren't they?

Yes.

And so this campaign ran for quite a long time, then?

Yes, two years. And I might mention at the same time that I got endorsed Hugh Hudson got endorsed for the seat here against Sir Baden Pattinson, who was then the Minister of Education. I'm not sure what the name of the seat was, it might have been Glenelg.

It might have been....

Yes, it's Bright now. But the boundaries have changed.

So were you meeting with all these people discussing or were just you and Don and perhaps your family and local supporters working on the campaign more or less alone out there?

I think we probably – I used to ring head office all the time and tell them what was happening, and I can remember I think by then Geoff Virgo (laughs) was the Secretary and I remember him saying every time he picked up the phone it was either Hugh Hudson or me. And I set a program and I stuck to it.

What was the program?

Well, the program was this door-knocking and then the door-knocking in the country section, and if I can say about Christmas before the election I had it all worked out what would happen each weekend, what leaflet would go out, and then I organised through head office a doorknock of the whole Tea Tree Gully – well, the outer suburban section – by other people to remind them that I called. And then of course there was that leaflet put out, and I think it was mainly by the university students,

about that electoral reform was needed, that there was a gerrymander, and I think that helped. I've still got a copy of that. You've probably seen it.

I don't think I have.

It's worth seeing. (laughs) And also I had a leaflet, and Don Dunstan and Gretel his wife, I can remember we all worked out what was going to be put and wrote it on my kitchen table. And I had that put out in my handwriting.

And you've still got that one?

Yes.

And that was, what, the last leaflet that went out before the election?

I can't say whether it was the last; probably was. But in that we said how we'd build the Modbury Hospital, that was part of our platform.

So you heard some horror stories, I suppose, from people not being able to get to a hospital, did you –

No.

– when you went round?

Not really. But it was obviously that it was needed in the area because it was going to expand.

I noticed on the Modbury Hospital website that they mentioned that they got you out there one time when they were having an anniversary.

That's right, not long ago I went out there. That might have been last year; but it was the same time as that demonstration here about going to the War in Iraq, and I got involved in that with the present Member out there, and she put her car in front of Parliament House and we couldn't get out because there was a hundred thousand people there, so I was late getting there.

Oh, yes. Well, it was a big demonstration. You wonder what good we did, frankly.

No. Well, no good came of it.

No, terrible business. So whose idea was it to put the leaflet out with your handwriting on it?

Yes.

That was your idea, was it?

Yes, my handwriting. And I think it did impress people, because most things are printed.

That's right, yes.

And I should say this: that during the latter end of the campaign, Don Dunstan practically gave up looking after his seat of Norwood and left Gretel there in charge while he came and helped me.

So they were very, very concerned to win your seat.

Yes. Well, they needed two more seats to make the government after thirty-two years.

So it was Tea Tree Gully and Glenelg that they were – – –.

It was called 'Barossa'.

Of course it was.

It was altered later to Tea Tree Gully and Todd, but it was Barossa then. And it took in a big area, and that's where I've got all those names there, you see. Do you want me to read them out?

Yes, please.

The seat of Barossa had three subdivisions: the Birdwood Subdivision, which took in Birdwood, Mount Torrens and Foreston; the Highbury Subdivision, which took in Chain of Ponds, Golden Grove, Highbury, Houghton, Kersbrook, Lyndoch, Modbury, Paracombe, Rosedale, Rowland Flat, Sampsons Flat, Sandy Creek, Tea Tree Gully and Williamstown; and the Freeling Subdivision, which took in Daveyston, Ebenezer, Freeling, Greenock, Loos, Roseworthy, Sheoak Log and Wasleys.

So it was huge, really.

Yes. And what I decided was that I had to have all the booths manned for the election; that even if I only got two or three extra votes at these country polling

booths it could be enough to swing the seat in the ALP's favour. So on election day I had people standing on every one of those booths. And of course those like at Tea Tree Gully end, they were of course well-manned; and Williamstown the same, in the country.

And were there booths where you didn't get a single vote?

No.

So your strategy was a good one.

Yes, I got votes in all of them. And I don't know that you want to put this in, (laughs) but it's interesting to note that – I think they were probably going to the University at the time, I'm not sure – but Peter Duncan, who later became an MP, and Chris Schacht, who became Secretary of the Party and he became a Senator, they both went up to these small polling booths and stood there all day for me.

Well, a lot of people in rural towns, Labor people, can feel very unrepresented, can't they? So that you were trying to reach them.

Yes. I think probably what happens is that they take a card from both political parties and then they go in and nobody knows (laughs) if they vote Labor or not.

And some of those towns, depending on who your employer was –

Yes.

– you probably in those days particularly have to be very careful. And so what did you do on election day, Molly, on that first election day?

I've got a feeling – and I'm not quite sure about this – but I think I went and visited all the polling booths throughout the electorate, because that's what I did, it was customary to do that, and I think that's probably what I did, with someone else from our end who was a Party supporter. No, I may not have done that, I'm not sure, because we were always told to keep away from the booths so I may not have done that, I might have just stayed home.

And when the election was happening what did you think your chances were? When you woke up on election morn, how did you feel?

I felt I was going to win. Because I felt that I'd put enough work in to win, but I felt that if I didn't I know the Party would have given me a second chance, but I felt I couldn't do it again.

You couldn't do that much.

No, because I was just about exhausted.

And did you get a feeling, as you talked to voters, that there was a sort of – you know how you can go and you can get a feeling that things are moving your way? Or was it a bit hard to tell?

I think it was hard to tell. But I got a good reception from the Tea Tree Gully end so I felt confident that we'd win those three booths.

Well, I might just ask my last questions for you about that evening: was there a function somewhere?

Yes, we had a function at my home.

And by then you were at Ridgehaven.

Yes. And I can remember as the booths came in I ended up, like I had people ringing the house with the votes, and I ended up from memory with 640 in front on the night, but there were still absent and postal votes to be counted. And I can remember Don Dunstan rang me to see what the result was – I think he was on a television station or a radio station – and he said, 'You've won, Molly.' And I said, 'No, we've got all these absent and postal votes to be counted.' He said, 'Oh, no, you've won.' Anyway, I was never convinced that I'd won until (laughs) every one of them had been counted, and then I think I had about 610 votes over the sitting Member, and as there were four candidates overall – I can't remember – but I had a majority.

Well, congratulations.

(laughs)

It was very important.

And I'd like to add this: that Clyde Cameron and Doris came out on the night and I can remember Clyde saying to me, 'Molly, you're going to get X amount a year now you're elected.' And I can remember that I was astounded because I never ever

thought about how much money I was going to get and I would have done the job for nothing.

Well, good on you.

Yes. And he, incidentally, the returning officer was at Lyndoch and so Clyde went up as a scrutineer for me, subsequent to the night of the poll, and acted as a scrutineer at the count. And people came all night to congratulate me. People would just go past and come in, absolute strangers, and I never went to bed all night and I can remember at six o'clock in the morning one of the Party members at Williamstown (laughs) rang me and he said, 'I want to be the first to congratulate you.' (laughter) And I didn't say I'd been up all night.

Marvellous. So people were very thrilled. And I don't remember exactly, but was it quite clear on the night that Labor had won the election?

Yes.

It was.

Mm.

So you had two reasons to feel jubilant.

Yes. Well, see, Hugh won the seat here, too. It's a shame he died, he's dead now, because he had a lot to offer, the same as Don did.

Yes. Yes, he wasn't very old, was he, Hugh Hudson?

No, he was in his sixties.

I was looking at your first speech and I noticed *his* first speech came after.

Yes, that would be right.

He made a few comments about Charles Cameron Kingston and various things.

Yes.

I've been talking to you for quite a long time and I thought maybe we could leave it there today unless there's anything you wanted to add today.

Okay. Oh, I suppose the next part is probably my experiences, (laughs) I suppose, in Parliament: there's nothing much else to say.

Well, maybe we could look at them another day.

Yes. I don't think there's much to say there, but I suppose there's something to add.

Yes. Well, I'd be really pleased if you'd be happy for me to come.

Okay, then.

I've got all my fingers and toes crossed that this thing has worked.

You might as well – what will you do, will you send that part out or wait until you get the lot?

It depends when we make the time and how long the woman takes – it depends on how busy they are and all that.

Yes, that's right.

Well, I'll turn this off now.

Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW.