Julie Kay.

SUMMARY TO TAPED INTERVIEW

"William Williamson, concerning his life between 1930 and 1950 in Greta"

HISTORY

OPEN Foundation 1988

Thursday 10am - 12md.

He was born William Clarence Williamson at seventeen Filey Street, Greta on the sixth of August, 1922. His mother gave birth to him in the home as she did with her six other children. There was no doctor present, only the midwife, Nurse Hinton. As a child, Willy never understood why Nurse Hinton ran around in a fluster, desperate for boiling water, until he heard the first cry of a new baby. To him, that cry was the first time he knew there was to be a new addition to his family.

The family home was modest, constructed with any bits and pieces which could be found. Although, it was mostly made of weather-boards, and timber from the bush. Willy remembers where the money came from for the lining of the house: he and his sister had saved thirty shillings by collecting and selling bottles and bones, to buy a horse. One day, Willy and his sister came home, only to find their money had been taken by their father to pay for the lining of their home.

They were a self-sufficient family, growing everything they needed for food. Meals were cooked on an open fire and to use the oven the open fire was pushed under the oven. Willy boasts that his mother's cakes were beautiful and she was the best cook in Greta.

Toys were not abundant. Willy does remember his first bicycle and when he was eight years old, he and his uncle Jimmy would fossick around the rubbish tips, finally collecting enough parts to build his first push bike. It was not shiny and new and it had numerous rust holes, but he was very proud of it.

The financial crisis of 1929 in America impacted on the Australian economy, leading to high unemployment and the Depression. The mining industry in the Hunter Vally was to suffer. Willy remembers the Rothbury lockout and the death of Norman Brown who died of wounds received from a ricocheting bullet, in December, 1929.[1] He has vivid recollections of explosions in the mines, resulting in huge flames shooting hundreds of feet into the sky and the loss of life of men and horses. It seems that these times did not allow a young boy to remain young.

Willy left school at fourteen after spending four years in sixth grade: there was not enough money to send him to high school. As a young man of fourteen, his first job was as an assistant to the milkman, where he helped milk cows and deliver the milk, twice a day.

When World War II broke out, Willy was seventeen. He had been working in protected industries such as Newbold's brickyards and the Civil Construction Corp. as a labourer. At one stage he worked as a cook for the Civil Construction Corp. After obtaining permission from Frank Compton, his employer, to leave the Civil Construction Corp, he and a friend joined the airforce. In the airforce, Willy helped in construction work in places such as Wagga, Kapooka, Darwin, Melbourne, Mount Martha and Borneo. He returned to Australia in 1945, married in 1946 and returned to Greta in 1947 with his wife and son.

On returning to Greta, Willy remembers the Greta army camp as being used as an Italian prisoner of war camp. It was not until 1949 that the camp was converted to a migrant camp. He recalls there were a number of migrant suicides but also feels that those who attempted to mix with the Greta community coped better with their new life in Australia. When the camp closed in 1958 many migrants made their homes in the Greta township. Today, Willy has many good friends of different nationalities.

William Williamson is still living in Greta with his wife. His three children have all married and have families of their own. He believes that his life has contained many varying experiences, both good and bad and that those experiences shaped his life. When asked if he could change anything, William Williamson stated "I'd like to know as much now and be forty years younger."

---

[1] "Greta's Great" School Centenary Publication, "The Lockout"
There have been conflicting stories about this incident.

OPEN FOUNDATION

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY: THURSDAY 10-12.

MARGARET HENRY

RESEARCH PROJECT : TERM 3

TOPIC : GRETA MIGRANT CAMP
1949 - 1958

Julie Kay

The post-war immigration program allowed over one hundred and seventy thousand displaced persons of varying nationalities to emigrate to Australia.[1] Greta army camp was one of the many institutions used as a refuge for thousands of refugees and displaced people from war ravaged Europe. The task of beginning a new life in a new country was made difficult by the language problems, the loss of cultural identity, the harsh foreign climate, separation from families and financial difficulties. For many migrants, Greta camp was to be their home for many years. Not only was this home the nucleus of many hardships and heartache, it was also the birthplace of new oportunities, self discovery and many long lasting friendships.

Prior to being used as a migrant shelter, Greta army camp was used as an Italian prisoner of war camp.[2] It was not until 1949 that it was converted into a camp by the government to temporarily house newly arriving migrants. The camp was a refuge to migrants in excess of ten thousand, from countries such as Greece, Italy, Poland, Germany, Hungary, Yugoslavia and many others, until it closed in 1958.

The camp consisted of three sections, each given nicknames by the migrants. There was Silver City, where ex-army tin huts were situated and hence gave a silver appearance to that section of the camp. Next to Silver City was Chocolate City where weatherboard huts were situated, coated with oil. Then, there was Siberia which was separate from and was located a reasonable distance from Silver City and Chocolate City.[3]

The camp functioned independently from the township of Greta. It contained facilities such as a fifty bed hospital[4], a police station, a school, a kitchen and a canteen. There were also transport and administration offices. Opposite the camp, on the 'Old Camp' Road were two stores where food and second hand

---

1. Catherine Panich, Sanctuary? Sydney, 1988, p XV, as quoted from G. Sherrington, Australia's Immigrants 1788-1978, Sydney, 1980, p139.
2. William Williamson, Interview on his 'Life in Greta, 1930-1950', 1988.
3. K. Leary, Silver City, A Place of Fear but also Hope, Hunter Manning Magazine, 1964.
4. Caption on photographs, viewed at Local History Section in Regional Library

clothing could be bought.

On arrival in the camp, many migrants considered the uninviting tin and wooden huts a depressing sight. They were greeted by a supervisor, who would direct them to the block they were to accommodate. The huts were partitioned into approximately ten rooms by a thin wall or wardrobes and blankets. These flimsy partitions did little to improve privacy. Arguments, crying children, violent love-making, every conversation: they were all amplified under the iron roofs.

Unnecessary hardships were encountered in camp life due to the low standard and overcrowding of accommodation. Survival in war-time Europe had proven to be good training for improvization and ingenuity. For example: old material draped on a suitcase substituted for a lounge chair, and kerosene and four gallon drums could be made into a stove.[5]

In contrast with their traditional foods, the Australian diet was considered bland: mutton being the main ingredient for most meals.[6] Although food was plentiful and reasonably nutritious, there was dissatisfaction with camp food. Often rabbits and native birds were caught in an attempt to vary or improve the existing diet. There were some new taste sensations, such as golden syrup, peanut butter, cornflakes and devon.

There were times when the attitudes of camp directors were less than friendly. One migrant lady remembers being told: "You were brought here not for your brains, but for your muscle."[7] More often than not, complaints of problems such as unappetizing food and the lack of heating in the barracks went ignored.

The migrant residents of Greta camp found the winters to be cold and harsh. Many of the old army barracks were declared fire hazards and therefore heating was forbidden. Because of the bitter cold, the migrants would often defy the supervisors and use heaters. Consequently, camp police would patrol the camp and confiscate any heaters found. It was not uncommon for

[5] Panich, Sanctuary?... p 55

[6] P. Rumel, Interview on her experiences in Greta Migrant Camp, 1988.

[7] Leary, Silver City, 1964

blackouts to occur due to the overloading of generators from the use of unauthorized appliances. Of course, the camp director had heating in his home and it is not surprising that this was resented by many cold migrant families.

Hot, steamy summers were also an element of Australian life with which most migrants were unfamiliar. A past resident of Greta camp remembers a time when her husband and small daughter went fishing along the Hunter River. They had migrated from Czechoslovakia and did not realize the severity of the sun. Her daughter received third degree burns and spent three weeks in hospital.8. Many babies were reported to suffer heat exhaustion and dehydration because their mothers would dress them in warm clothing, even in summer.

Women and children were the main occupants of Greta camp as most men were employed in places such as the Hunter Valley wine fields, the western areas of New South Wales and even as far north as Queensland. The men were known to be away for up to three years at a time.9. Migrant workers brought to Greta were considered more valuable if they were farmers or brick and tile makers.10. The women found employment as servants and cleaners or in factories. The remaining women in the camp were paid to look after the children of the working women.

The education of children and adults took place in the camp: the language problem being the main area of concentration. There was also some instruction on surf life-saving methods and the meanings of flags.11. The Girl Guide organization in the camp was a favourite amongst the young girls. Boys tended to play in the surrounding areas of the camp and were quite often found in dangerous situations. "In the camps recently vacated by the army, such as Greta... children came upon

8. P. Rumel, Interview - Greta Migrant Camp, 1988.
9. Ibid.
10. Newcastle Morning Herald, 16th March, 1951.
11. Ibid.

casually discarded weaponry such as grenades and bullets".[12]

Entertainment was organized by the migrants, themselves. Folkdancing at Greta was a common paso time and there were many times of happiness, when they would congregate together and play their traditional instruments such as the garda.[13] The young people from Greta and surrounding towns were frequent visitors to the dances organized by the migrant community at the vacated army supply depot.

The migrant experience in Greta was a unique one. This distinct community was almost a self-contained entity, separate from the nearby township of Greta, yet somehow part of it. It was neither European nor Australian in character, representing a period of cultural change. At a recent reunion an immigrant from Holland expressed the feelings of many:

> "There were difficult years of adjustment: no other family life; a new language; a loss of social identity; the heat; the financial difficulties.
> And yet despite these, there were also a lot of big plusses: peace, sunshine, space, freedom, opportunity, natural beauty, prosperity, self-discovery and satisfaction".[14]

For the immigrants it was the beginning of Australian life. For Australia it was the transformation into a multicultural society.

---

12. Panich, Sanctuary?... p 74
13. Caption on photographs from Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Viewed at Local History Section in Regional Library, Newcastle. Garda: a Macedonian instrument made of goat skin, similar to the bagpipe.
14. Panich, Sanctuary?... p190

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

BUCHANAN, Maris E., Attitudes towards Immigrants in Australia, Canberra, Australian Government Public Service, 1976

MARTIN, Jean, Welfare of Migrants, Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1975.

Panich, Catherine, Sanctuary? Remembering Post-War Immigration, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1988.

Immigration in Focus 1946 - 1975, A Photographic Archive, Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1986.

World Book Enclyclopedia, Immigration, Volumes 10 and 23.

ARTICLES:

Leary, K. Silver City, A Place of fear but also hope. Hunter Manning Magazine, 1964.

Newcastle Morning Herald, 16th March, 1951

Newcastle Herald, 28th May, 1988

Others:

Greta's Great, School Centenary publication, booklet.

HISTORY AS IT HAPPENED, Sydney Morning Herald, 150 years of news and pictures from our oldest newspaper.

INTERVIEW with William Williamson of Greta, August 1988, Tape and transcrypt available.

INTERVIEW with MRS P. Rumel of Greta, September 1988.

Photographs from Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Viewed at Local History Section in Regional Library.

Silver City, Australian film, Limelight productions, released in 1984

Julie Kay.

Open Foundation : History : Thursday.

Transcript for Interview with:-

"William Williamson concerning his life between 1930 and 1950 in Greta"

Lecturer : Margaret Henry.

Interview with William Williamson (W.W) by Julie Kay (J.K)

My name is Julie Kay. It is Friday, 26th August. I grew up with my family in the small Upper Hunter townships of Greta as did my father and his family. I am about to talk to my Dad, William Williamson on his memories of his younger days in Greta.

Q. Where were you born, Dad?

A. When was I born!

Q. Where and When?

A. When, I was born in Filey Street, Greta.

Q. In the house?

A. In the house. The 6th August, 1922.

Q. 1922! And was that um! Ma didn't go to the hospital at all then.

A. No No

Q. She stayed in the house!

A. No she had them in the house.

Q. And where did Ma and Poppy come from? Did they grow up in Greta? (Ma and Poppy are W.W.s parents) Or did they come from some where else?

A. Mum was from Sawyers Gully. Born at Sawyers Gully between Greta and Kurri.

Q And Poppy?

A. Poppy was born in Newcastle, Adamstown.

Q. I didn't realize that! And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

A. Four sisters. Pearly, Dolly (repeats), Zilla and Phyllis.

Q. And brothers?
A. three, Leslie, Albert and myself.

Q. Did Ma have any stillbirths that you know of?
A. I think I know of two.

Q. We'll go into your childhood. When you were young, what was the house made of?
A. It was made of anything at all they could pick up, I think. Practically nothing. Mainly weatherboards. Splayed weather-board A lot of them were cut out of the bush, back yard mills and thing like that.

Q. And you mentioned the hotel, one of the old pubs!
A. We got a lot of the lining out of one of the old pubs. Thats where my father got a lot of the lining out of one of the old pubs that was pulled down. That was back in the Depression, in the early thirties when he bought the lining out of the bottom hotel that they pulled down. He bought the lining boards out of that.

Q. And where did he get the money from?
A. Thats a sore point, the money part about that. My sister and I was saving up to buy a horse. We'd been gathering bottles, bon and things like that, that we use to gather, to get the money. That was good money them days. We use to get three pence a bag for bones.

Q. What sort of bones?
A. Just ordinary bones. Follow a cow around till it dropped dead.

Q. And what did they do with the bones?
A. Well I suppose they use to go to the glue factories to make glue and things like that with the bones. Buttons and everything like that.

Q. So it was good money for collecting bones?
A. Three pence a bag, yep, for bones. Sixpence a dozen for

the bottles.

Q. And how much did you say you had saved?
A. We had thirty bob.

Q. Thirty. And it got spent on the lining for the house?
A. It got spent on the lining for the house. We was a bit cranky for a while. (J.K laughs) We never got our horse.

Q. I can imagene you didn't. And Ma, did she have a garden? Did you eat what was grown in the garden?
A. We had a big garden, a good garden. We grew everthing that we needed, really, as far a vegetables go and fruit goe We had three blocks of land and two blocks were under garden and fruit trees. We had plenty to eat as far as vegatable go.

Q Any of those fruit trees still there now?
A. Those fruit trees - they're are still, yeah, theres still mandarin trees there, theres still one of the peach trees still there, yes.

Q. And the types of meals then. She cooked all her own, I gather of course.
A. Cooked all her own, on an open fire.

Q. On an open fire!
A. Yes, it was an open fire with a oven along side of it. You stoked the open fire, when you wanted to use the oven, you pushe the fire under the oven.

Q. Did the cakes turn out?
A. Yep! Beautiful (J.K. laughs) Beautiful, she was the best cook in town, thats why we lived so well.

Q. And what about, as far as Ma having the children: when the children were born. I gather that they were all born in the house?

A. All born in the house, yes, the only one that might not have been was Zilla. (As a result of more discussion, W.W. remembered she was born in the house).

Q. The youngest!, And the doctor, did he ever come? Did he ever need to come?

A. No, there use to be a midwife: Nurse Hinton use to be her name and she use to come and I could never understand why she was coming there. No! Untill the baby started yellin', or howlin' (J.K laughs) There'd be a hell of a rush around the house this particul night and this woman runnin' around in white and the kettles would be on the fire. They'd be chasin' boilin water in and out. An' I use to be there - what the hello goin' on? (J.K. laughs). Next minute you'd hear this howl, then there was another one.

Q. And they kept coming?

A. They kept on comin'.

Q. And as far as when baby's were born were you visited by relatives? Did they have a get together or did anyone come and visit?

A. Those days, we were... it was all ... actually in them days, the whole town was made up of, they reckoned, of Hodges and Lodges.... and there was a lot of Lodges. The whole street was Lodges in one part. (Lodge was W.W.s Mothers maiden name)

Q. And when you were little, what sort of toys did you have? What did you play with?

A. Toys!

Q. Were you given particular things or did you make your own?

A. Oh, I don't know that we had much toys, them days. You might hav go a... the only thing I can remember was a little wooden tra set I had, use to pull around on a string. Had no motor though!

Q. I can remember you telling me about a push bike that you had made out of bits n' pieces. Can you tell me about that?

A. Ah! that was me Uncle Jimmy got that for me (Uncle Jimmy Lodge) We use to go around the rubbish tips and all round the rubbish tips, he decided he'd build me a bike. He was about fourteen and I was only so high.

Q. What, fourteen and you were about seven or eight?
A. I'd be about seven or eight. Yes. Jimmy's about seventy-five, six now. So that'd be right. He'd be around about fifteen at the time an' he use to, we use to go around in an old horse and cart and um, I can still remember it, they use to call the old horse Paddy. He was as poor as a crow. He use to get around the rubbish tips gatherin' up all the rubbish around the tips. So we ra onto this old bike frame this particular day at Branxton. That was Branxton rubbish tip, it was, and uh, it had a big hole rusted in the front of it, in the headpiece. And uh, so anyhow we put that together and got parts from other rubbish tips an' a couple of ol tyres and put two tyres on the one wheel so as the holes wouldn't match up - things like that. (J.K. laughs) And uh, that was me first bike.

Q. And how long did you have that for?
A. They use to chiak me everywhere I went on it because they reckon the white ants were into it. There was holes, rust holes into it. (J.K. laughs Oh, I had that for quite some time (pause) till I got a job.

Q. And what was your first job?
A. I started working for me Uncle, first.

Q. Was that a job as a child?
A. As a child, that was, that was a job after school. I use to have to go, yeah after school, back in the early thirties when he started a dairy farm out Tuckers Lane. And uh, I use to go out there after school and get the cows in for him and have a the cows in the yard for him and everthing. It was all scrub country and he was workin' on relief work in the stone quarry out Tuckers Lane and he'd knock off a four o'clock in

the afternoon and I'd have the cows there ready for him when he came in and then we'd milk them then. And separate and feed the calves and everything like that. Well he use to pay me that was seven days a week, I use to go out with him. Well he use to pay me five bob a week, them days, for that.

Q. And what time did you manage to get home? How long did it take you to do that?

A. We'd get home anytime from dark, around dark. Six o'clock.

Q. So, it took you a couple of hours for five bob a week?

A. Yes, I'd leave at three of an evenin', Yeah it'd be six-seven o'cla sometimes. In the summer-time it'd be longer because we'd stop there then till it got dark and plough and things like that.

Q. When your saying the early thirties, your looking at the Depressio What can you remember about that? as far as the mines, the lock out.?

A. That was back in twenty-nine. That was when the big trouble was. Rothbury. I can remember the Rothbury days. I'd only be round about, I wouldnt be no more than seven year old then, and I can remember going over the favourite spot use to be over sittin' on the railway bridge at the railway station 'cause thats where all the miners and all the trouble was, out there. Thats the way they use to go, over the railway bridge an' up through the bush and straight out to Rothbury. And their only conveyance was horse and cart or horse and sulky or they'd walk or other's would ride bikes. Thats all. Well we use to sit on that bridge and I can always remember that when Norman Brown got shot and uh, from then on we'd go over there and that was the cry: "Who got killed today, mister, Anyone get shot today, mister?"" (J.K. laughs) That was back in the twenty-nines, yeah.

Q. And as far as the fire. You said, you'd mentioned before there was a fire!

A. That was later, yes, that was later, when she fired.

Q. Was anyone killed in that?
A. Not in the fire as I remember but they tell me years before tha in a big one over in the same area.

Q. Was that Anvil Creek?
A. That was where the horses and the men and as far as I know they're still down there, today. The horses and men are still there in that pit today. Never been retrieved, never got them out. Never, ever got em out. They sealed it up, as far as I know. But the fires never came until around about, ah, I can remember when they went through, we were saw standin' up on the front verandah and watchin' the flames comin out as the fall-ins, it wasn't very deep the seam, there. And um, she blew, must have been combustion underneath when it blew and fired and all this fall in just collapsed into the ground, and as it collapsed, it took whole trees, full size big gum trees that had been there for fifty, sixty years and they just went down into the hole with them.

Q. Sucked into the ground!
A. With just the top stickin' out. Then the flames, you'd see th flames shootin' in the air out of that, aw' they'd be in the air a hundred feet, shootin' up in the air. Ah, that's the same time as the old Pong Pit, she went at the same time. Where I use to have, you remember as a kid, I use to have the pig yard. (J.K. says: Yes, Yeah, over there) Well, that was the old Pong pit, there.

Q. Pong Pit?
A. Pong! Pong! They called it the Pong. That was the slang name for it. The Pong, P. O. N. G. (spelt out).

Q. I gather it didn't have a very nice odour!
A. No, it didn't, that's right. Anyhow, that where the fire, she blew back out a that tunnel and ignited everything there and burnt all pit top down and everything down there and that was the finish of that pit. In fact, that pit all on that side of the line (train line)

never ever reopened again after that fire when she went through it. They sealed it all up, everythings sealed up, now. Even still today it still breaks out, even now and again it breaks out, now. Bu your mines rescue and likes that now, they're quick on the scene though to fill back in again.

Q. What! Where that well is, did that have anything to do with it? Near that pig pen.

A. That was just a water storage, that.

Q. As far as when were young. Can you remember what sort of industries were around? Was it mainly just mining?

A. Oh, industries!

Q. Yeah! Or was there anything else that was around the town? Was it only mining? Were there any other farms that were productive?

A. Oh, there was lots of farms about, but mainly family farms, round the Hunter River, likes of that. But other than industry, Gawd, the only industry I can ever remember bein at Greta was Gibson's Cordial Factory. A one man show. (J.K. says Oh yes) (W.W. laughs)

Q. That was up the top of Sale Street, wasn't it?

A. That's right, up the back of the house, they use to live. (J.K. says I remember that) He use to get around, he always got around, he took his cordials all around in a old flat top Ford truck, with hard wheels on it. Never had air in em, just hard rubber wheels. Yeah.

Q. And what happened to it? Do you know?

A. Oh, I wouldn't have a clue what happened to it, but he had that for years, that one. Yep.

Q. 'Cause, I mean there's no cordial factory there now. Is there?

A. We use to call him 'mullet mouth!'

Q. Why? (J.K. laughs).
A. Well, he was that tight, he wouldn't give you nothin'. (JK laughs

Q. In other words, you got your change and that was that!
A. Mmm.

Q. And the transport. Can you remember who had the first car? Do you remember who had the first car in Greta?
A. That fella that I'm talking about. I think he might have been one of the first car around there, that he had.

Q. The fellow that owned Gibsons?
A. Yes, yeah, old Reg Gibson. Now, don't say it was the first car, but one of the first. Then there was o'l, then there was whats a name too, they had cars. There wasn't very many cars around them days there was only, there was only the paper shop. Blacksnake McKinnon We use to call him blacksnake.

Q Why?
A. I dont know where he got that name from. He was a bit dark, and they always said he was a snake. (J.K. laughs). So I don know and then the other one across the road, he had the paper, there use to be three of them had papers. Newcastle Morning Herald, was blacksnake McKinnon. Opposite then was the Telegraph, that wa the fruit shop over the road. Ah, and ah that was Campbells, no Harpers had that. Harpers (JK. says Harpers! Yes) Harpers. (J.K. says I remember them) Ah and um, then there was Horrible Tom, we calle him.

Q. Horrible Tom?
A. Horrible Tom Arthur!

Q. Why was that?
A. Oh just Horrible Tom Arthur. Then down the next fruit shop, just a couple of doors down had the other paper, which was Campbells, We called him Eggybum Campbell. I dont know, don't ask me why Eggybum Campbells, that was! So that was three papers. We had

three paper shops in town them days.

Q. Gee, I wonder who bought those names about! Eggybum!!
A. I don't know, I s'pose. I don't know.

Q. And other than those few cars, was it just horse and cart?
A. Horse and sulkies, yes. Buggies. My Grandmother, Grandfather, they had a big, elaborate buggy. You use to go to town every Monday in it, to Maitland, in the horse and buggy. And old Puddy was there, again. Use to drag the buggy down. That was the first time I ever went to Maitland. I went to Maitland in the buggy. And ah, I can remember goin' to Maitland and goin across the long bridge at Maitland, them days. That was the first long bridge. That they called the long bridge behind the hospital, and it was a big old timber construction bridge, them days. Either go along the top of it or you could go along the bottom of it. And it took us two hours to get to Maitland. Twelve miles (JK says: 'two hours!'). Two hours to get to Maitland, in the buggy. I use to sit on this little seat in the front of the buggy. (J.K. laughs (picturing a scruffy little boy sitting on the front of a buggy

Q. And as far as getting onto your schooling. How old were you when you went to school?! Do you remember?
A. I went to school pretty early. It'd be pretty early I went to school. 'Cause I went through school and yeah it'd have to be early. I'd be no more than four when I went to school. I couldn't a' been because when I finished in sixth class and uh I was only ten. Then, I stopped in sixth class for four years.

Q Why?
A. Why! Well they couldn't afford to send you to high school them days. (J.K. says: Good gracious). I stopped there for four years in sixth class.

Q. And you wrote mainly on the slate boards? Were there slate boards then?
A. Yeah. Yeah! It was mainly a lot of slate and uh yeah there

was slate boards. No, you only wrote on slate boards in the early years, like in first class and that, and then I can remember once you got to a bit older it was pretty dangerous for the school teacher because they use to have these little desks. Fit two at it. And you sat in there and they had the ink wells let into the desk (W.W. taps the table with his fingers showing how the ink well were positioned in the desks). And you was ordinary old pens and you dipped them into the ink well. And those ink wells use to fly, full of ink, many a day. The kids 'd get them or land 'em at someone if they didn't like. Next thing an ink well 'd come over at ya. Ink everywhere.

Q. I gather the cane came out for that?
A. Then the cane came out and you got the cane them days.
(J.K. says: I can imagine).

Q. And how big was the school? Was it as big as it is now or was it a lot smaller?
A. Oh, (J.K. says: Greta Public School) No, uh, them days, I would say it was bigger them days (JK says: bigger!!) Mmm, becaus them days we had six classes, uh, and a different room for each class. Second class use to be off on its own, them days. And uh, the school masters house, use to be along side of the school on the same grounds.

Q. It wasn't always opposite, like I knew it to be.
A. 'No, it use to be in the grounds, there. There use to be the school masters house there and then you had the five classes in the mai buildin' and second class use to be always in a class on its ow Different building, and then at the back you had another big buildi down there, it was the manual room. Manual work, woodwork and all likes of that, you use to do. Oh no, I think it was bigger them days. Where today, I think they have two classes in the one room. (JK says: But thats in a lot of schools now, unfortunat They didn't them days. No, No.'

Q. And churches, were there any churches in Greta?

A. Oh, churches. Yes we had to go to church, themdays. Sunday School mainly, always had to go to Sunday School till you got up to the age, I think I must have been fourteen when I renigged and said I aint goin' no more (J K laughs) Thats it, finished (J.K. says: That was enough, was it?) No, there was quite a few churches. Oh yes there was a few churches.

Q. Are any standing now? Do you know? They're not are they?

A. Yes, you've still got the Catholic church, (JK says: the Catholic one was) Yes, its still there and you've got Church of England.

Q. Was that there when you were little? That little Church of England Church?

A. No, the big church. The old Church of England still there down by the Whitburn Dam. (Pause) (J.K. says: I can't place it) then there we [illegible] to be the Presbyterian Church, alongside of the school, the Public School. There was a Presbyterian Church there.

Q. Was that a brick place? Was it?

A. Yes, Yeah an old brick place. thats right. (JK says: In that spare block) Yeah, thats right.

Q. Near the school side of the creek.

A. Yeah, down towards the main street. Yeah. Mm.

Q. I think I remember that!

A. Presbyterian, Salvation Army, More or less. Yeah, they were about the only churches there. There was only the three.

Q. And as far as, we'll get into when you were a young adult. What was your first paying job as an adult? Other than your odd jobs.

A. Oh! What do you call adult? Adult, fourteen? (JK says: Yes, fourteen) Well I started workin' then and thats right, I got a job when I was fourteen on working for Bert Morgan, on the milk cart. Well um, my job them days, it was um, it was pretty hectic too, there. I was only fourteen an' old Bert use to reckon tha I wasn't as high as the can I was carrying around (J.K. laughs) I use to have to carry a two gallon can around, round parts of the town to serve the milk. Them days you just served it in a jug. (JK says: So you'd milk the cow and then you took it... You milked the cow, you'd get up of a morning. Oh, by this time I'd finally got me pony (JK laughs). Anyhow, I boug the pony and I had the pony. Well I use to ride the pony to work then, bareback, over to work, over to the river at Bert Morgans. Which is about, oh be uh round about two mile. Wel I use to leave home, I use to leave home round about four, half past three, four o'clock in the morning, to go to work and uh I'd get over there and get the cows in and milk again then. You'd finish milkin' roughly around about seven o'clock in the morning or half-past six. You'd load up then an I use to go with old Bert on the cart, well he'd drop me off at certain points with the two gallon can and the measure and I'd go that way and carry it and he'd go th' other way in the horse and cart. Then we'd do the run, we'd get home roughly round about nine o'clock from the run of a morning and we'd um, do the washin' up, the cans, the milk cart and everything like that. Then by the time we finished that, it'd be time to get the cows in again. Milk em again. 'Cause you run the milk around the town twice a day them days. (JK says Oh, right). Twice a day, seven days a week. I use to get Sunday afternoons off when I finished the milk run on Sunday evenin'.

Q. O.K! Tell me your wage?

A. Oh, I was getting good money then. Yeah, I was gettin' good money then. I was, we use to do about, I think we use to work around about fifteen hours a day, them days. But I was gettin' ten bob a week, then and me keep.

Q And your keep?

A. Yeah!

Q. Well, thats not bad is it?

A. That was good, yes! Yeah, I was a millionaire!! (JK laughs and says: I can imagine).

Q. So, what, you were fourteen then. How old were you when World War II started?

A. (Pause) Oh, let me think! Thirty-nine, I'd be just on seventeen.

Q. Seventeen. And did you go in the army straight away? Or Airforce.

A. No, No. In that meantime, I had various jobs from then on. I went for the big money then. I went to uh, Newcastle. Yeah, I went to Newcastle to work down at the brickyards. Down at the brickyards, then, for a while. We use to catch the, there was 'no travellin in no cars. We use to get on the Bloomfield miners bus. It use to leave home (repeats) something like about half past five of a mornin'. We'd get the bus to Maitland, get the train from Maitland to Newcastl An' then walk down to, to uh the brickyards, Newbolds. And um, then we did the same thing comin' home of a night time, we'd get the train and then the bus back home. We'd get home roughly rounc about twenty to seven at night. But that was all right. As a kid, as a kid them days, I was gettin' around three pounds a week. But, it had its faults. Once you turned twenty-one they sacked ya!

Q Why? You cost too much?

A. Cost too much. Yes, they had to pay you full wages then, adult wages. Those days, once you turned twenty one in all them lots of factories, you went. (JK says: And that would have made it difficult

Q. As far as when the war did start, how long till you did join up?

A. Oh, let me think.

Q. You were seventeen you said.

A. Yes, I was seventeen, an' I left down there. Left Newbolds. An' I came up and got a job (pause). No I didn't, thats right, I left Newbolds, then got called up for the army.

Q. Oh, you got called up?
A. Called up for the army. So anyhow I packed me bags. Sold me pony.

Q. Sold your pony. Did you get much money for that?
A. No. I got five pounds for him. And uh, Mum packed me bag and away I toddled off to the railway station.

Q. Did many other of the young boys get called up that were in the town?
A. Yeah, quite a few of them, that went over there, that day with me. But I got over there, when I got over there though the Sargent came along an he ticked everyone off on the, on the list. "Whats your name, Son?" he said. I told him who I was. He said "Well, I don't know about you" he said "Your names down here but its been scratched out" I said OK, then you don't want me, hooray. So I went home. So I went home and um, thats right, I was working with the C.C.C. I got a job with the C.C.C. Civil Constructio Corps. They built the army camps at Greta and that mob. That wa the C.C.C. Worked for Frank Compton.

Q. So the army camp was being built then, was it?
A. Army camp was built. Yes it was built then. It was built then. Well they were still building it. I worked for Frank Compton, I roamed around with Frank and we went up to uh, Warkworth, Singleton area and Broke, Jerrys Plains and all them places, puttin' in air fields. Air strips. I was workin' with the builders them days. I use to do the, thats where I learnt me cookin'.

Q. Thats why your a better cook than Mum! (JK laughs)
A. I use to do the cookin'. They wanted a cook. (Repeats) We were camped out at Jerrys Plains in the bush, Warkworth and them places, and they wanted a cook. I was only a bit of a kid. So I thought I don't like that pick and shovel. I'd been on it every day and aw' in the heat in the summer time, it was that blood hot. And I thought anything to get off that pick and shovel. 'Cause there was no such thing as diggers. You was the digger.

And uh, so anyhow they said alright then, we're lookin' for a cook. And there was about twelve blokes there. Well, I only had to cook for twelve blokes. So thats what I ended up doin' up there. Went into th' cook house, started doin' their cookin'. Cause thats what we were buildin': cookhouses an uh the buildings, latrines and likes that on the strips. So I went into the cook house up there an' done the cookin'. Took a dozen rabbit traps with me and likes a that an uh, we lived pretty well, mainly on rabbit. I could cook'em though.

Q. I know, I grew up on them too! (JK laughs)
A. Yeah, that was up there.

Q. So you went into the war then. Did they get it all fixed up, the bit about your name being scratched out?
A. No, well see, they had me down, and how it come to be there it was a protected industry. The last report on me when I left the brickyards, it was a protected industry. (JK says: Oh, I see) that how they had me out (J.K. says: thatshow they scratched you out) I went into another protected industry straight away, straight into the CCC. (JK says: Right)

Q. When did you go over then? I know that you've told me you went to Borneo.
A. Oh well that was when we were up at, we were on Jerrys Plains. Workin' at Jerrys Plains. We use to board in at Singleton at the time. We was workin' at Jerrys Plains and we decided, we'd, meself and Cecil Thrift decided we'd join the airforce. So anyhow one day we jumped the moter bike, instead a' goin' to work we jumped the motor bike. Went to Newcastle, joined the airforce. So we got down there, when we got down there we went in and 'Wots ya name?', we give em our name and everything 'Where ya from?' Anyhow, they kicked us out a' the buildin'. Said 'get back to work'. (pause) Wouldn't have us.

Q. Why?
A. Wouldn't have us. 'Cause we were in the Civil Construction Corp.

Which was, ah, thats what we were doing, building airfields and so on. So anyhow, they said don't come back here. The only way you can come back here and join up is to get permission from your, bloke you work for. If he gives you written permission that he doesn't want ya and you can leave, then you can join the airforce.

Q. So what did you do?
A. So thats what we did. We went back and old Frank was a decent fellu, he said 'alright' he said 'If yuz want ta go' he said 'Yuz can go.' So he give us written permission. Come bac down again and got down there then. Got into the airforce.

Q. And what areas did you go to when you were in the airforce?
A. Awh, awh, lots of areas! Round, down here, around Melbourne, quite a lot. Wagga, went to Wagga. Kapooka, training, that wa an army training camp - eventhough we were in the airforce. In the airforce, never seen an airfield (ww Palters) never seen a plane. (JK laughs) We was on, then I went into an airfield construction corp. I was building airfields again. Cause they too they took a lot of it when you went in an asked what you did in civil life. You told 'em what you did in civil life and things like that. Well thats where they mainly, if you had no, um, didn't take any courses on, things like that. Pilots courses, things like that they put you into wherever it would suit you best. (JK says: Right) So thats where they put me, into a airfield construction, 9-ACS, it was. (JK says: I see).

Q. And is that what you were doing over in Borneo?
A. Then I went to Wagga, We went to Darwin. (JK says Thats right.) I was up around Darwin then. I went to Darwin early in the forties. And uh, I had me twentieth and twenty first birthda in Darwin and Melville Island. I was up there for twenty-two months. Where I left back up there and come home. Well when I came home. I came back home and uh where did we go then? We went down around Melbourne again, around Mout Martha and

done another army engineers course. Then left from there and uh, went to Balikpapan, Borneo.

Q. Where?
A. Balikpapan (JK says: Right!) Mmm. Well we were over there then till aw until six months, yeah, six months, four, five months afte the war finished. We came home from there. That was in forty, forty five.

Q. And where did you meet Mum?
A. Ah, that's a long story. That's a long story, that one!

Q. Was it just at one of the dances?
A. Well, I dont know what happened there (joking). It was a mistake really. Mmm (JK laughs and exclaims: A mistake!) Mmm. We'd all gone out to, we'd all gone to Sydney to a big parade on at Sydney with all the gear and everything and dow Pitt Street in Sydney. So anyhow, we thought we'll have a great nig tonight in Sydney and 'cause when parade was all over, the C.O. (commanding officer) got up and said `alright all those blokes, all those blokes that had their name down to go to the dance at Penri tonight get on the truck. Ye goin' home again. So we ended up avin' to get on the truck and go home and they dragged us all off to this bloody dance at Penrith. Didn't want ta go. An' I s'pose that was me downfall. (JK says: That was your downfall. That was me downfall (JK says: Not much you could have done about it, is it?) Na, that was me downfall.

Q. And after, well after marrying Mum, when did you return to Greta?
A. Aw, after I got married, I went to Wollongong (JK says: I remember you telling me that you and Mum lived in Wollongong Went to Wollongong and uh, we lived at um, we lived at the Black Cat Cafe for quite some time. And then from there, we moved out on our own. Down to Comrol House. Was ah, belong to people, name of Tolley's, - Tolly's Brandy, owned it. That was

the only building in Warawong. The only building in Warawong, that was. It was a private hotel! It wasn't functionin'. It still had no licence. That the 'Open Harth' Pub at Port Kembla today. One of the biggest Pubs in the South Coast.

Q. The same building?
A. The same buildin'. That was the only buildin' there when we were there. We lived in a, in a... We had a flat, they called it a flat. There was one room there (WW draws on the table with his finger) and the other room was the other side of the hall. That was the flat. (J.K. says: That was the flat) That was the flat. We had a,..our cook utensils, I can remember our cookin' utensils. We use to have to cook on a primus - ordinary kerosene primus, them days. Yeah, yes, we was payin' thirty bob a week, we paid for that. Big money, 'cause I was only gettin' four pound ten a week and uh, uh, yeah, thirty bob a week we had to pay rent, aw then you had to pay two bob then, to use the washin' machine and the iron. It'd cost ya another two bob a week.

Q So you returned to Greta, when? What year was it that you came back?
A. Well, we came up here then when ah Geoffrey was born, your brother was born. W'd have been forty-six. Late forty-six. Forty-seven. (corrects himself) What am I talking about. I never got married till forty-six. Yeah, the day before you were born remember (J.K. laug as this was a family joke when J.K. was a child))

Q. As far as when you did come back to Greta, I gather the migrant camp had well and truly begun then!
A. Oh yes, yes. It'd be... (corrects himself) No! No! It wasn't. No No It hadn't started then (J.K. asks: was it forty-eight). No, No, there was no Migrants started there then. In fact, I think, about that time, uh, about that time, I think was about the time that brought a lot of uh, prisoners of wars there. Italian prisoner of wars. (JK says: Right). They had them there. They had them there before the migrants, I'm sure of that.

Q. And what effect did they have on the Township? Were there any problems there?

A. Not much really, they didn't. I think the main effect up there, the mai problems up there was when the army was there. Use to be fights everywhere. Every night of the week, there'd be fights, them days. Because you had a lot of, you had a lot of civilians around there that use to come home from the works of Port Kembla and Sydney and them places and uh, they'd come home at weekends and long weekends and likes a' that and I think well they resentea the army and the army resented them and there was lots a' fight Lots of big fights.

Q. So then, what happened to the Prisoners of war? The Italian prisone of war when um, the war was over?

A. Well, I think, they just uh, those I think quite a few of them, I don't know whether they all were sent back home again or whether they, a lot of them dispersed themselves around here, I think. (JK says: Around the area?) Oh'n different areas.

Q. And so, and then of course the migrant camp, began.

A. Then you got your migrant camp, yes.

Q. And how did the towns people feel about the migrant camp? Were there any problems?

A. No they, there were no problems really. I mean uh, because well, I can remember goin' back, when they first come here and some of them blokes are still here today and infact, good friends of mine, some of em. Uh, but, they were the migrants that got out as soon as they come here. When they were young, as soon as they come here. They got out and they mixed with the locals. They mixed with 'em. Ah, they drank with 'em. Learnt their 'lingo.'

Q. Do I know any of those?

A. Yes. Herbie Ashaber, well he's one of em, he's one of em 'at came here them days, and Charlie Wroniskie (JK says OK, yes) Charlie

Wisinski was another one (JK says: Charlie was) they're still there. (and Mrs Rumel': says JK). Yes (JK says: she was there). Yes there all there, but they mixed, they mixed with the townspeople. Ah, but there's still some of em there, still today, that even forty years after. And uh, they still don't mix and they still can't talk a word of English, some of em. (JK says: Still mm still cant talk a word of English. Yeah, a lot of em. I don't say a lot, but there's quite a few!

Q. I was talking to you earlier, before we stated theo um, and you were mentioning about, there we lots of suicides. (ie of migran Can you tell me about them?

A. Aw! they were pretty gruesome at times, some of them. I can remember (JK says: This is suicides of the migrant people) Migrant people, I can always remember one chap that I felt very sorry because I'd heard of them down the bush and likes of that a friend of mine next door, (J.K.s little boy yells outside the window) Ray. It was nothin' for him to come home and he'd find one hangin' from a tree down around Bill Beeche that was the old wine shop that use to be down there, years ago. And uh, he'd find hangin in a tree, swingin in the breeze, Ray use to say. But ah, there was another chap I always felt sorry for him too. I use to have a, I had a lot a' pigs over there one time, over the property (WW. use to own approximately two hundred acres of land between the railway line and the highway at Greta) Ah, that I'd bought, like in previous years and I had alot, a couple of them pinched one day an' cause I happened to find the fellu that done it. And uh, I got the police on him, and uh, he had ta pay for the pigs of course, but, wasn't a bad fella after all. He was just, ah, put it this way, easily led an' illiterate type. And uh, but after he paid me, paid me up an' everything. Twelve months it took him to pay me. Paid me for the pigs. But then, I always felt sorry for him, because um, he's um, wife hung herself in the lavatory and then it'd only be what another, I'd say six months after. and uh, the poor devil himself then, blew his brains out. Yea you know... I always felt sorry for that fella. Eventhough the troubl that I'd uh, well I s'pose uh, he's done something he shouldn' a done. But ah, to think he ended up that way.

Q. It must have been quite traumatic for a lot of them by the sounds of it.

A I think so too, the poor devils. They put up with a lot. I think they put up with a 'hell uv a lot' before they came here. And uh, and uh, their minds just couldn't take it.

Q. But as you said, you feel yourself that those that mixed with the townspeople coped a lot better.

A. They coped a lot better 'cause they were open minded and they'd tell you their troubles and things like that and they would get it off their mind, you know. They'd come here at different times, I've known some of 'em, come and show'd ye their scar on the backs and likes a that, that had happened to 'em in prisoner of war camps, you know. With different... their scars and that on their backs that they'd copped. Some of 'em had a pretty rough deal. Yeah, Yeah.

Q. And as far as, did the presence of the migrant camp... id it have much of an effect on the business in the town?

A. Oh yes, yes. I think it did. Yes, it did, it had a big effect on it, you know. There was quite a few shops 'n, even Dino, on the hill see (J.K. says: that's right) See Dino started off from the migran camp, when the migrant camp finished, well Dino moved his, his place over to the town. He had a pretty big business, mote and all there, see.

Q. So Dino had a shop over in the migrant camp?

A. Dino had a shop over on the highway. You remember Dino's wife (JK says: mmm) No, I don't think it was you, it must a been Lyn (J.K. says: Lyn; with the big nose) She use to think a lot of Lyn, (Lyn is J.K's sister and WW's daughter) Dino's wife. Lyn got over there this day and Dino's wife picked her up and (said) how lovely she was and this and that and Lyn looked at her and said 'gee, you got a big nose' (J.K. laughs) Dropped her like a hot cake (I can remember you telling me that story: says J.K.) Anyhow, Dino was one. He poor fellu though, he went home and died. Got cancer and went home (Greece) and died. But ah, as I said there was quite a few others too, like as far as businesses go and in smalle ways likes a that.

Q. Were there any problems with jobs? Were the towns people um annoyed? Were jobs taken by any of the migrants?

A. No, I don't think so. There was the same, aw' I wouldn't say as bad today but, there was always plenty of work around. I always reckoned there's plenty a' work around anytime if you want it enough. No work if you don't want it.

Q. Now looking back over your life in Greta. Is there any one particular change or experience, that you think had a big effect on your life? Was there anything in particular that you think changed or made a big difference?

A. Oh, well I think the war changed a lot of us, in every way. In all ways, you know. I think the war had a big thing to change us in our workforce and what we would do in the future an' everything like that, I think.

Q. And is there anything you'd change if you could?

A. (Pause) Yeah, I'd like to be about, I'd like to know as much now and be forty years younger (J.K. laughs)

JK thanks: Right, that's about it Dad, thanks a lot.