

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. TOWNSEND - TAPE 1

This is the 7th October, 1987, and this is Mrs. Townsend, she is 77 and she was born at home at Merri Street, Northcote, and Merri Street is now called James Street.

Now, Mrs. Townsend I've got quite a lot of questions here because a lot of the children at the Helen Street School want to know all about the school when you were attending there, so I will start asking you some of the questions.

What subjects did you study at school?

Well, the usual subjects; spelling, reading, arithmetic and we had mental arithmetic, writing, drawing. They were the main things in the infant room, we also had quite a number of singing games and things like that. Once we got into the 3rd grade we started to learn simple geography and history stories. The girls did needle-work, and the boys, I can't really remember very much what the boys did.

Did the boys do a thing called slo^oid?

The upper grades did slo^oid. I think as far as I can remember the boys in the 3rd grade and the 4th grade puddled around with plasticine. Modelling they called it. We had class lessons for singing, and as we went up through the school at Helen Street, singing was very important. I think that's about all. To me I would say that they are just the normal things, because ^{for} drawing we didn't have anything like pastels or coloured pencils. The only thing we had in colour would be crayons, and they were only used to colour maps when we were in the 6th grade.

So what did you draw with?

Ordinary le^d pencils.

Yes.

On white drawing paper, in fact they were books.

Drawing books?

Yes, certainly, no colouring came into it at all. You had free hand drawing and you then also had drawing, making patterns and things like that. In fact, I found it rather boring, because I was never very good at it.

So you were never encouraged to do your own thing with drawing, like inventing something?

Oh no, oh no, you just had to do it exactly as it was set, and if it was not exactly right, well, you didn't get praised for it.

Right, now what punishments were given out at school?

Well, you could be kept in.

How late would they keep you back?

Oh, no more than a quarter of an hour, longer detention was not permitted. But very often it would be just a matter of being in for perhaps five minutes to finish off something that you hadn't done because you had been wasting time. If you made a mistake in your spelling in the morning you would have set spelling to learn at night and you were tested on it in the morning. If you had mistakes you had to write your mistakes out 3 times or 5 times, then go at lunchtime but before you went out to lunch you had to go to the teacher and spell your words correctly.

Did the boys and girls get the same type of punishment?

Well, it was very rare for girls to be strapped, boys would get it more often, but in all of the years I was at Helen Street, I can't remember the strap being wielded as some people use to think it was. The older boys sometimes, the men teachers, would strap them but if anybody were too difficult he or she were just simply sent to the Headmaster.

And what will happen then?

Well, sometimes they might be given a task to do.

Like what sort of task?

Go out and clean up part of the yard that was untidy, or go around and pick up all the papers that were blowing around, or they might have to go and do something of that nature.

Yes.

Sometimes they would be given a sum or something like that to do at home and bring to the Headmaster the next morning.

Now, you were telling me something about the Headmaster and the strap, tell me about that.

Oh yes, Mr. Bromlow was a remarkable personality. He did have a strap I doubt that he ever used it, but if he had a boy sent to him that was to troublesome he would get the strap out and say aloud - "Well, this is my Doctor, and if you can't be a good boy you will have to have a dose of his medicine". That was generally enough to stop them. One interesting thing that sticks in my mind and always has, November the 11th, ~~Amaster's Day~~ ^{Armistice Day}, 2 minutes of silence came at the end of play on that day when the play bell rang. Wherever you were, whatever you were doing, you stopped. I can remember one year when a group of us were playing a ball game and our ball just rolled down the yard, nobody touched it, everybody stopped, when Mr. Bromlow blew his whistle at the end of the ~~Termans's~~ ^{2 minutes} silence, then we went after our ball. Nobody would dream of moving, we knew it was the 2 minutes of silence, it was important. We were made to feel that the if we didn't do what was expected of us we were letting ourselves down and we were letting our school down.

Now, one of the questions I have got here is, what was Helen Street like 60 years ago but of course it was longer than 60 years ago when you first started there if you are 77.

Yes, I started school just after four and a half.

Four and half that was very young.

Yes, you see there were no Kindergartens and children could start at four and half, they had to start at six. I was raring to go to school, I couldn't get there quickly enough. I loved school.

Do you remember how many pupils were at the school then?

I really wouldn't know, it would be into the hundreds.

Could you remember how many were in each class, around about?

Well, most classes would be 40 or over, some of them were well over, but no at that stage I was too young to remember. I do know that in 1923/24 before Westgarth School was open, the school had 1,400 pupils and when I was back there teaching in the late 20's, (28, 29)

Teaching at?

At Helen Street, I went back as a junior teacher after I had been to High School and there were 1,000 children, even then. But what the numbers would be when I was a little girl I probably would not quite know. You had 2 prep grades, the younger ones were prep A and that's when I started just after Easter, 1915. There were two 1st grades, three 2nd grades, three 3rd grades, three 4th grades, two 5th grades, two 6th grades, two 7th grades and two 8th grades.

What time did you start school?

9.15 in the morning, playtime was about 11 a.m., morning sessions finished 12.15 p.m., lunch was 1.15 to 1.30 p.m. A great number of children, more than half of them probably three quarters, went home for lunch. Afternoon playtime was from 2.45 to 3.00 p.m. and school finished at 4.00 p.m.

Did you wear a uniform?

No, primary school children didn't wear uniforms in those days, not to State schools.

You just wore your second best dress and you kept some clothes just for Sunday and Saturday?

Yes, and of course girls dresses were down to their knees and their socks came up almost to their knees, and the boys trousers were down to their knees.

Boys didn't wear long trousers then, did they?

No, primary school boys, oh no, and even High School boys didn't go straight into long trousers, they wore those apple-catchers, and I guess somebody would wonder what they are, knickerbockers.

What were the teachers like?

Well, of course like all teachers a mixed lot.

Where they male or female or both?

Both, more female teachers than male teachers.

About what age group would the teachers be in those days?

It varied from the junior teachers who were 17 to 18 when they started and they would be there for 2 or 3 years. Some of them went to Teachers College but most of them went out to country schools first. When you are a small child everybody who was grown up, and in those days any lady with her hair up was ~~called~~ *called*.

That's right its the same now!

Yes of course it is, I would say that there was a fair spread of age groups more ladies than men, two or three of the older ladies to us seemed rather severe. I was very surprised when I went back as a teacher to find out they were human beings.

Were they generally liked or were there some that the children didn't like at all?

I don't think any more or any less than now, and of course it would depend on whether you have been getting your own way or whether you have been in hot water or whether you liked the particular teacher or not!

Yes, now there is a bell at the top of the fire escape at the school, but it wasn't there when you were there?

There was no fire escape, we use to have fire drill especially over in the two storey building, but there was no external fire escape. The bell was in the original building which faces Helen Street, on the right hand corner, the corner nearest the infant room, that was the 8th grade room and the bell was in that room.

There was a little tower in the ceiling for it, was there?

Yes, and the rope came down.

But, you don't remember if there were any bell monitors?

I think there would, but you see the 8th grade teacher would be responsible, and which ever boy's turn it was to ring the bell. *would do so.*

You don't think the girls got a turn?

No, girls couldn't pull on that heavy rope, but I think some of them might have liked to have a go at it.

Not at all, they wouldn't get a go at it.

No, it wasn't a job for the girls, like giving out the ink and cleaning up the ink bottles on Friday wasn't a job for girls either.

So, the boys did all that?

The boys did those sort of jobs.

And what type of jobs did the girls get?

Emptying the vases and the older ones washing up the dishes in the teachers lunch room after lunch and things like that. The more domesticated jobs I suppose you call them these days.

Yes, now what were the buildings in the grounds like. I suppose if you would just describe whether it was asphalt or what trees there were?

Well there were very few trees, the yard on the north-west corner had the caretakers cottage right in the far corner, and there was a space between ^{the school buildings} that. The toilets which were further along the block, that was the boys play ground. The older boys played on the block of land that is diagonally opposite on the corner of Helen Street and Hawthorn Road, but it's fence^d now. In those days the story was that nobody knew who it belonged to. Whether that was true or not, but that was the story that all school children had, and the boys used it. It made it a bit more mysterious I think, to say that nobody knew who owned it. The infants played around the infant building and the girls mainly played near the corner of Henry Street, between the girls toilets and the back fence.

And you all stayed in your own little groups, did you?

Oh yes, and you played in your own little groups and you knew ⁱⁿ were your area of play ground was.

Were you allowed to go into any other area or were the boys allowed to go and play in the girls area?

No, and the big ones were not allowed to play in the infants area. As a matter of safety, as much as anything else, because the school ground was very cramped. I have seen it recently and it's certainly is a much more pleasanter place because they have some more trees now. There were three trees planted along the Helen Street frontage and two of them were in memory of two old pupils who had died in World War I. The trees didn't last very long because I don't think really that the ground was prepared properly for them ~~or not~~. The third one was for a teacher who had taught at the school, in fact it was the only school he ever taught in.

What was his name?

Mr. Crisp, he taught in the school and then he went away to the War and when he came back from the War he was in charge of the ~~slow~~ room. Then after quite some time in the ~~slow~~ room, he got a promotion and he was then what the department used to call the first assistant, the title Principal wasn't used, it was Headmaster and the title Vice Principal wasn't used, she was the infant mistress.

The sitting out area that they have ~~got~~ in the school ground now, up on the top of Helen Street at the end of the block, there was nothing like that there at all. There has been quite a lot done and it is much more pleasant now. I saw it a couple of years ago with a family connected with us which are living in Northcote, and they took me up to see the school. They call me Grandmother, although I'm not their Grandmother and they were tickled pink to think that they were going to the same school.

What school rules were in existence?

Well, we have had some of the play ground rules.

Were you allowed to leave the school ground at all, or you had to stay within the area of the school?

No, because so many children went home for lunch and there couldn't be any rule about that. You were not allowed to take yourself off out of the school ground when you should have been in school. During playtime the only people who were allowed out of the actual play ground were the big boys who went to play football. No one else was expected to go wandering off. I suppose ~~there~~^{there} were rules really but they were not formulated, it was more of a matter of behaving properly and playing without squabbling and fighting. Fighting was of course very definitely discouraged. If a couple of boys started to fight then all the rest started getting around and then ~~the~~^{the} boys play ground there was screaming and yelling, then pretty promptly a teacher or two would come on the scene and that stopped. But rules, there was nothing like that, you were just expected to behave yourself.

Now, what did you write with at Primary school?

Good old ~~steal~~^{steel} led pens.

Did you have the slate and slate pencils?

Yes, I think we had them up to grade 3. Yes, slates every Friday night or Saturday they were suppose^d to be scrubbed, so that they were clean for Monday.

But Saturday, who would be there doing that on a Saturday?

No, we took them home. You wore a school bag, you didn't leave anything at school, nothing was left at school. You counted everything, your slate and your pencil box and your prim^{er} or your first book, or whatever reader you had, they all went home on your back everyday. You were supposed to clean your big slate with a good scrubbing on Saturday morning, and of course if your mother insisted on it, it got done. And you^d have a piece of rag tied on a string that was looped through a little hole in the wooden frame of the wooden slate and most people would have a little screw^{ed} jar of water to keep their damp rag, and you had your dry rag. Well, some people didn't ever change those rags.

They must have been smelly!

My memories of summertime-between plasticine, slate rags, sweaty hands, tennis shoes and chalk, by the time Friday came in summer you were glad to go and breathe some fresh air in the back garden^{at home}.

Now, what about this one, did they have school excursions?

No, nobody, not even secondary schools had anything like that at all. In fact not even when I was teaching. All this was comingⁱⁿ to being since World War II. In any case of course, teachers weren't used to camping, the only people who went camping in those days were scouts and guides and very few others. The only time I ever went away and they called it a camp was my last year at High School, and we went up to Belgrave to a boarding house, but it wasn't really a camp as for primary schools, and I doubt^d whether the teachers would even know how to camp.

So you never had any excursions like going to the Museum? I didn't when I went to school.

No, your parents took you to things like that. No, the only things that we use^d to have at school and this was particularly in the War years, was to raise money for the Red Cross. People would come and give a performance of some sort, one man was a glass blower, and another one brought a Punch and Judy Show.

Did you pay to get in?

You paid a penny for the Red Cross.

Was that after school hours?

No, that was in school hours. The thing we did at Helen Street I suppose, was done in other schools, but I don't really know. It was a concert on Empire Day and the infant room put a concert on ~~on~~ Empire Day in the morning for the parents. The big school had an Empire Day Ceremony like saluting of the flag and the Mayor or somebody like that would come and talk to us about the importance of the Empire.

What do they call Empire Day now?

It doesn't have a name. Well, perhaps the children need to know what it was. Actually, it was Queen Victoria's birthday, 24th May, and from 3rd grade up to the 8th grade we would have this ceremony outside and we would give the children bags of lollies ~~and~~ special little bags with a Australian flag on it. There would be two full dress rehearsals the day before, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The morning one was grade 3, 4, and 5 and the afternoon one was for grade 6, 7 and 8, the day before. I don't think the children use to pay for it, the parents would pay. It was quite one of the features of the school and it was still going on when I went back there with the junior teacher.

Did you play any sport and what type of sport?

Well, actually you couldn't say that it was organised sport until we got to the 7th grade, and then it was a bit of a hazard. We weren't taught how to handle a ball, we were shown how to get a basketball through the hoop. We didn't have anything to do with school sports, but the boys did in the 7th and 8th grade. It was a matter of, if a boy was good at football, he was put into the team; nobody taught them how to do anything. Our physical education was about a quarter of an hour after play each mornings.

How often?

Each morning to Friday. It was more like a drill, with a bit of bending, stretching, arm movements and things like that. Then Friday afternoon it was suppose to be sport but it was more playing, like playing tunnel-ball, over-head and cross-ball and that's about all that there was. There was certainly no teaching in any sort of techniques of ball handling or bating or anything like that; and of course a fair amount of skipping.

Yes, we use to skip by the hour during lunchtime.

Yes and we would do it at playtime ^{too,} and there was quite a lot of skipping, hopscotch, hopping, callings, which was a soft-ball usually somebody's old tennisball.

I can remember something like that, you would throw it up in the air.

You would throw it over your head and somebody would try to catch it.

And you had to call out their name out, the one that had to catch it. Is that right?

Yes, when it was caught and everybody would line up and they'd say they were ready and you would turn around and if you guessed right you got the ball again, but if you didn't guess it right, the girl who had the ball came through. *to throw it up.*

Yes.

And then a variant of that was 'Queenie'.

What's 'Queenie'?

Much the same thing, you throw the ball and when somebody had the ball they'd call out 'Queenie', and you had to guess who was 'Queenie'.

The clapping games, like 'Mary Mack, dressed in black, silver buttons ^{down} on her back'.

Yes. Now what did you call your teachers?

Miss ^{Phelbrick} Feldbrick, Miss Madden or Miss ^{Horne} Hall.

No Mrs.?

There were no Mrs. No married ladies. You couldn't remain teaching if you were married. You had to resign before you got married. There was no question of teaching if you were married. I knew somebody who did and kept it a secret for quite a while but she was in awful trouble when it was found out.

And Mr. would be Mr. or Miss?

Yes, sometimes the boys would call the older men Sir. I think everybody called the Headmaster, Sir.

Yes, they did too. I think you would will always call your teacher Sir when you are in class.

Yes, very few men ever got down in the infant room, some of the junior teachers had to give a turn in the infant room.

Were the classrooms heated? I wonder who would cut the wood and bring it into those little fire places.

Well, the caretaker, sometimes the older boys might be sent out to split a bit of wood if they knew how to do it. Well, I suppose they had to be taught, but it was the caretaker who looked after that and brought the wood in and left you kindling.

The fire places were in the corner of the room, were they?

Yes, usually diagonally across one corner and really nobody got any real warmth from them except the teacher, but then you burned on your back and froze at your feet.

What sort of furniture was in the rooms? It would be the table I suppose for the teacher.

Yes, and in some rooms there were those very old fashioned high desks, with the sloping lid that the teacher could stand ^{at} or sit on it with a high stool. The sort of things that you would see in the illustrations of Charles Dickens books. There were few of those around at Helen Street when I was going there but they disappeared by the time I went back to teach. But the little prep ones had little wooden chairs and that was a class that was out in the hall. But when you went into any of the classrooms there were what you would call the dual desks, each had a separate seat and each had a separate lid. Lift up lid.

When I went into grade 3 we had the long old fashioned forms. I think it was 7 children were suppose ^{to} sit in them but they were generally 10 squeezed into them. It was a long form, no back and in front of you it was like one big long desk.

Sloping board, was it?

Yes, they didn't lift up, they were rigid but underneath there was a place for you to put your books while you were in school, but you didn't leave anything in there, you took everything home. We had that in grade 4 and at that time we were in the two storey building. Down stairs there were two huge rooms with folding doors between the grade 4 girls and the other grade 4 boys on the other end, every now and again the doors would be open and the whole class would be taken by one teacher. For say, a geography lesson or the other teacher would be taking order or for singing, things like that.

But your classes wouldn't be split for boys and girls would they?

Mixed classes in the infant room but in grade 3, actually there were a class of girls and a class of boys and a mixed class.

I wonder how they worked out?

Well, it was the matter of the accommodation. Sometimes the 3rd class were the children who were not quite as quick on the up take and needed a bit more of attention, as it was a smaller class. Sometimes the brightest ones would be put into that smaller class. I think it depended partly on how many children there were and the teachers that were available. In the 4th grade there was also a mixed 4th grade. The other double room was 7th grade. There weren't three grades, well of course at grade 7 quite a number of boys would go off to Collingwood Technical School after the end of grade 6, and a few pupils but not many, went down to Fawkner Street to the central school; but most of us stayed to the 8th grade. That upstairs building in those days, there was another long room and that's where the grade 5 boys were and the grade 5 girls were down in a smaller room.

Did you have a school library?

No, we didn't have anything approaching a library until I was in the scholarship class. Our teacher suggested that we should bring along a few books of our own, and she would keep them in the cupboard and when everybody read all of everybody's else's books we took them home and brought back a few more. We did have what were called supplementary readers in grade 7 and 8, but then everybody had to have their own supplementary reader, that was over and above the school paper. The main reading was the school paper.

Yes.

You had the prim^{er} and the 1st book and the 2nd book in the infant room and then you went into the school paper for the rest, right through to grade 8. Grade 7 and 8 had these supplementary readers. Like 'Great Heroes of the World', one of them was called. There were a lot of the well known classics that were simplified for children and certainly no reference books. Although, we did have our own text books for history and geography from grade 4 up to 8. They changed year from year so that they could be passed on from one member of the family to the next. It was also much simpler. The only reference book, if you could call it such, in the school was the big Webster's Dictionary up in the Headmaster's office.

Yes, did you have school assembly and how often did you sing the anthem and did you have a flag display?

Well, we had assembly every morning, unless it was pouring rain, Monday to Friday. There would be perhaps announcements made about various things. Sometimes the Headmaster would come out and talk to us, sometimes it would be the first assistant, that was the 8th grade teacher. Monday morning, always salute the flag, sing the National Anthem, in fact that was a must as far as the department was concerned. If anybody slipped up on that the only excuse for not having that would be if Monday morning was so wet that you couldn't allow the children to stay outside. Well, that would have been a great spot of trouble, especially from some of the older people, if anybody forgotten to do that. It was most important and I don't think it did us any harm.

More about the games at school.

There were a lot of ring games, like drop the handkerchief and two's and three's and "whose going round my house tonight?" Remember that?.

Yes, vaguely.

"Poor old Tom, don't steal any of my chickens tonight, only this fat one". There were quite a few games like that and of course oranges and lemons. The boys didn't play these of course, they were the girls games. The boys mostly played football in football season and cricket.

There were all the seasons for the games like tops, ^{cherry} terry bobs and all those things. You did all that when you were at school, didn't you?

Yes, they went on for ever.

How did the children get to school?

They walked. When they didn't run ^{if} they were late.

What will be the furthest anyone walked to Helen Street?

Well, there were children who came up the hill from say Westgarth Street. I knew other people in Westgarth Street who walked to Fairfield School. It would be a long walk which ever ^{way} they had. Of course the traffic in High Street wasn't anything like it is now in those days. You could get out of the way of a cable tram fairly quickly, but I think it must have been tiring to walk up hill. I knew one family who lived near Rushall Station and there were children who came from Clarke and James Streets. Not many children walked in that area, east of High Street, but children came from Bastings, Mitchell, Separation Streets and down behind the brick works. The west side of the railway line they came from Gordon Grove, Aberdeen Grove, Westbourne Grove, Hawthorn Road, McCracken Avenue, Arthurton Road, Bent Street, Beavers Road up to Gladstone Avenue and Beaconsfield Parade.

Did a group of you all walked together?

Yes, you would collect your friends as you went, a couple from one family and a couple from another. Of course when before the under pass at Northcote Station, we used to have to cross the railway line at Hawthorn Road; and sometimes when you were coming back from lunch you would be stopped by Goods trains, and couldn't get across the railway lines.

They would be big long ones, wouldn't they?

Yes, because the yards were on the other side of the railway station and sometimes when we were late from getting back from lunch, but of course we had a perfectly good reason.

Oh, the Goods train held you up.

Yes, once the sub-way went in there was no excuse. But it was a relief to lot's of parents when that sub-way went in. That happened soon after the line was electrified of course.

Did you have much trouble with the children crossing the line when they shouldn't be and having any accidents?

Well, I can't remember any serious accidents, but I know that there were a lot of near misses. The boys mainly were showing off, including my own brother and I know that the old people who lived in the gate house at the Hawthorn Road crossing, they got a bit perturbed but I think they were over fussy, because they were old they felt that if anything happened to anybody they would be blamed for it. But there was a certain amount of trouble with that.

Arthurton Road was always a busy crossing, so we were not allowed to go over Arthurton Road. There use to be the lorrys from the brick works and quite a lot of heavy traffic always in Arthurton Road with lorrys. But I can't remember that anybody was seriously hurt. Where there were deaths and accidents, was where boys used to go swimming in the creek, down near where Rushall Station is. This was before the Coburg lake was made and the creek would flood. In fact, I remember seeing it flood up to St. Georges Road when I was quite small. There would be occasional boys who sneaked in and went swimming at the quarry at the brick works.

That would be very deep.

Yes, I remember one boy in particular, who was drowned doing that, but considering the number of children in the area, they were quite infrequent.

Now, we have talked about how a lot of the children went home for lunch. Would it be that half the school went home for lunch or more than half?

Three quarters at least.

Even the ones with that long walk?

Yes, they would bring their sandwiches to school. Some of them would have them wrapped up in a old serviette and a brown paper bag and some of them would have them wrapped up in newspapers.

Did they have a lunch wrap first or straight into the newspaper?

Straight into the newspaper but most children had old linen serviettes.

Mrs. Townsend what transport was available?

Well, for going to school we walked. It was unheard of children to be taken to school. You walked in groups, in family groups.

Adults never took you to school, or may be when you first started?

No, when I first started I was taken to school by the girls from next door. The older of those two girls came back to the school as a junior teacher. We were told not to call her by her Christian name anymore, she was Miss, and you were not to tell other children what her Christian name was.

Well, when you were brought up with that attitude, I can understand that now you don't like little children calling older people by their Christian name.

Yes, I really was well in my teens before I got back to calling her by her Christian name. With most people they were either older brothers and sisters or older children in the street and you just all went together.

Apart from getting to school, there were trains and the electric trains didn't start then?

No, the electric trains came in the early 20's and the Whittlesea train went through and that was a steam train for quite a while after the electric ones. It would go around through from Spencer Street to North Carlton, North Fitzroy and Clifton Hill, around in a circle. Later on a diesel was used. Trams, of course, we had a cable tram in High Street. That tram company was owned by the Northcote Council and only went down as far as the top of Queens Parade and you had to get out of the tram and get into the tram, that took you into town down Bourke Street. With us we had the station at the top of the street, so we can go to town by train. The steam train until the early 20's and then the electric.

St. Georges Road was at the bottom of our streets, so we ^{could} can walk down to North Fitzroy to Holden Street and to get on a cable tram and go into town that way. In the early 20's an electric line was put in from North Fitzroy up to the Preston Depot and the East ^{of West} Preston trams. The electric tram went round to the right and up to Plenty Road and the West Preston went along Miller Street to Gilbert Road and up to West Preston. So as for public transport was concerned we were very well covered.

There were cabs, a few.

They would be hansom cabs?

Yes, one thing I can remember one Sunday afternoon in High Street, was seeing Police men piling a crowd of drunken men who of course should have not been drinking in the Hotel. They piled them into a hansom cab to take them around to the Police Station. Again, my sister just spoken about that recently, it is something that stuck in our minds. We were on our way home from Sunday school and here are these naughty men having to be taken to the Police Station, and they were abusive and argumentive and the Police men were pushing them in.

It must have been the highlight of your day seeing all that wouldn't it?

Yes, I don't think there were many taxis after World War I, the only thing I can remember is that our next door neighbour was a member of State Parliament.

What was his name?

Martin Hannah, he was the member for Collingwood and sometimes you would hear a hansom cab pull up next door in the early hours of the morning, when Parliament had a ~~hadder~~ ^{late sitting}.

They used to do work like that, did they?

Hansom
Yes, it was the usual thing. That's something that you talked before about cabs, I hadn't thought about it then and suddenly I remembered it. As a matter of fact my father worked in the Government printing office and he was on the Parliament ~~to-~~
~~hand~~ staff. When Parliament was sitting, dad did night work. I never could put the two things together, because Parliament was sitting, that's why my dad worked. Mum would say to dad "the house ^{late}". Dad would get lifts home with the paper deliveries and bring out the papers to the newsagents. But no hansom cab for a working man, only for a member of Parliament. *Parliament frequently sat till the early hours in those days.*
Sunday school picnics; we went in furniture vans. *Came up to Greensborough once,* and that seemed a long way away. Another time we went over to Doncaster and that was even further away.

And you would sit on the tail board with your legs hanging over, you wouldn't be allowed to do it these days, would you?

No, they used to get forms out of the Church hall and put them in the furniture vans and the girls sat on those, and the boys liked to hang their legs over.

What was your favourite memory of school?

Bromilow
I think it was the Goldstar photos and Mr. Bromolo had a scheme. From 3rd grade up you had written homework every night. If your homework was perfect you had a credit stamp from your teacher. Our father always overlooked our work and we didn't go to school until he was satisfied, so we always got a stamp. At the end of the week we had five stamps. Friday afternoon up you went to the Headmaster's office and you were given a special merit (special stamp) on your book. When you had three special merits you got a red or a blue star, and when you had three red or blue stars (this was getting towards the end of the year) you get a gold star. And some people who did other things, well, who were very good at drawing, *had them* but mostly it was for homework. The end of the year the Goldstar photos were always taken with Mr. Bromolo sitting in the middle. Word would come around, "Girls wear their best dresses and boys wear their best suits to school tomorrow, Mr. ~~Sharp~~ *is coming* to take the Goldstar photos".

Was he the local photographer?

Elma
He was ~~Elma~~ Studio in Smith Street and the family lived in Northcote they lived in ~~Elma~~ Grove. The younger ~~Sharp~~ *boy* was in the same class as I was in.

So how many Goldstar photos were you in?

Seven, I think

Then have you still got those photographs?

Unfortunately, no. My sister and I were generally put together. You would see these two little round faces, smiles all over and the only difference between us was that I wore glasses and she didn't. That was a great event and you felt proud to be one of the Goldstar people.

What was your worst memory of school?

My worst one, I think was when I was blamed for something I didn't do. It was in the 3rd grade and somebody spoke, and the teacher Ms. ~~Fieldbrick~~ ^{Fieldbrick} who was a very tall, severe lady with a high neck collar and we were all rather in awe of her. Miss ~~Fieldbrick~~ ^{Fieldbrick} said "Stand up the girl who spoke." Well, the girl who spoke didn't stand up and I knew who it was. I thought that she was a naughty girl and she went to Sunday School and I didn't think she should not own up. I blushed and because I blushed Ms. ~~Fieldbrick~~ ^{Fieldbrick} thought I had spoken. So I got a little smack on the hand with a little light strap that she had but it didn't hurt, it was my dignity that was hurt.

Fieldbrick

HS:MP17

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. TOWNSEND - TAPE 2

You were telling the story for something you didn't do and when you got home to mother *when you were punished*

Yes she said there will be times when you deserved to be punished and so it evens itself out.

Well it didn't make you feel much better

No, and yet of course years later when I was married the same lady was retired we were fairly close neighbours and we became very good friends but I never ever mentioned it.

So you didn't tell her?

No I didn't like to do that.

So you had a pretty happy time at school?

Oh yes, I enjoyed school.

And what do you think of the children at school today?

Well I think they are the same mix as they always were. Of course, the whole environment is too different now isn't it.

Entirely.

Entirely, in every way and things that were considered important in our day are not in the least bit important now, and many of the things that they are being taught in school leave some of the older people bewildered because they can't even understand them. But I would say is that there is precious little to choose between them, you get the same mixture of good, bad and indifferent children that are loving and careful and pleasant to know and children who could be prickly and difficult.

Yes.

I think we, older people, very often unfortunately, get a little intolerant as we grow older and because things are different to what they were in their day, or because they don't understand what's going on, they are too critical.

There are some lovely young people.

Of course there are, there really are.

They don't get enough publicity like the bad ones.

No and that's the whole trouble, goodness and kindness and pleasantness isn't ~~used~~ *used* these days.

No.

Now we have gone through the list of questions and I am sure Helen Street pupils will be thrilled to hear all that because I am going to give them the tape to have a listen to, is there anything else about the school before we finish that part of the interview?

It was a school ^{where} that we were encouraged to be proud of our school and Mr. Bromolo ^{was} was such an outstanding personality that he left his stamp on ^{the} school. There were rough times, there were bad times, it was pretty grim at the ^{beginning} end of the depression, I was back there teaching then.

What were some of the bad times with the school children attending the school in the depression days?

Well the children who came to school bare footed (and what I couldn't understand about that, because I didn't know enough about it or didn't understand,) was that so many of those children had fathers who worked in the boot factory down in Collingwood.

So you couldn't take a pair of shoes from the factory for your children?

No, that's the whole point, they couldn't because they were making them for other people.

Did they have trouble getting lunches to eat, did they have lunch to eat.

Some of them didn't. The Mother's Club started a soup kitchen and a couple of them used to go to Victoria Market early in the morning and buy some vegetables ~~and~~ ^{and} come, there is sought of a small room - I don't know what they used it for, the bands used to keep their instruments there. Something Mr. Bromolo ^{was} was keen on was the school band, and it was a very good one but it faded out.

It faded out in your time did it?

It started when I was in the seventh grade and it was fading out when I left there as a junior teacher. Now to get back to what I was saying, there was heating or something in the room because they had a huge copper, they used to make soup fresh every day in this copper. Now children who could afford it paid a penny for a cup ^{of} for this soup and no child in the school went without because they needed it. If they couldn't afford to pay for it they got it just the same and the teachers collected the pennies. There was no lining up of children. If one had a penny for their soup, and the other one didn't, they would all end up with their soup, and it was given out during morning recess.

That went on for quite a while and then of course the State School Relief Committee collected clothes from all the schools for those who really needed it. But it really was a distressing time and it wasn't only the people who were less skilled there were plenty of people who were in positions where they wouldn't dream, ^{that} clerks tradesman etc, and of course you saw it in the children, not only the poverty but the distress that it had caused.

they could become unemployed

That was more in the days I was teaching not in the days that I was a pupil.

Would you like to tell me a bit about when you were a teenager growing up and what sort of things you did?

Yes well, I was an indifferent tennis player I played tennis with the church group.

Which church did you belong to?

The Epiphany, the Anglican Church, the one at the top of the hill which is no longer ~~there~~. ^{Anglican}. It is now a Bulgarian Macedon Orthodox Church

That's when all the social life was around the church.

Yes.

I remember when that was.

The church had a weekly social and dance and we went to those and there was a good choice of theatres. We had Northcote Theatre, we were in walking distance of Westgarth Theatre, we were in walking distance of Merri Theatre and there was another one up in High Street beside Thornbury, it was just up from Arthurton Road. Plaza I think they called it, and then up in Preston just ~~passed~~ ^{at the} the junction was the Star so that when walking or going on the tram you had a good choice of films to go to without going into town.

As a family at Christmas time we went to a pantomime. As we grew older we went to musical comedies, Gilbert and Sullivan.

That was a once-a-year thing?

Yes it was and as for going to see films, as a family we all went every Friday for quite a long time until Francis and I had other friends to go with, but most of our social life evolved around the church. Quite a number of people, when the Merri Palais was built, quite ~~a lot~~ ^{a number} of people went to dances but most of the entertainment or amusements seemed to be near home. After the Epiphany they had a Dramatic Society, I didn't belong to it but we would go to the plays, the ~~choir~~ ^{church} used to put on entertainments, like the church choir. We would go to all of those things.

We were just going to talk about some of the social issues and how things differ now from those days.

Well now I wonder if you would call this a social issue. The postman came and delivered letters and what is more, he came to your door and knocked your knocker and put the letters through the slot, twice a day and once on Saturdays. The milkman delivered milk every day all you had to do was leave your billy can out and the milk was there. The baker came every day, the butcher came twice a week, a green grocer delivered twice a week, now who else? There was a man who came from Collingwood who was a rabbit~~er~~. He came during the week but was the fishmonger on Fridays. All of these things came to your door.

What about the iceman?

We didn't have an ice chest because we had a little cellar under the pantry in the kitchen. But of course the iceman came, the old Italian ice-cream man used to come with his horse-drawn two wheeled booth in the Summer selling ice-cream. The grocer came once a week, he came in the morning to take the order and deliver in the afternoon.

What was the bad thing about women having their babies, do you know much about mid-wives in the area.

Well, I could tell you about the mid-wife that was supposed to come when I was born. She refused to come because I was premature.

She didn't want the responsibility?

No she wasn't booked until 2 months later and dad said to her that it would be too late. So he had to go and get an elderly friend of my grandmother's, and then the same thing happened to my sister, she was born a fortnight ahead of time and when dad went to get the mid-wife she said "oh your wife booked it for the middle of March" so dad said, "well I can't help that" and she said "Oh can't come I have to go to somebody else", so dad had to go get grandma, mum's mother.

She was absolutely thrilled. She had three children of her own but it was the first time she had ever seen a baby being born and she was thrilled over it, but then for the third and fourth mum went to a private hospital in Thornbury and I suppose it was getting too much for grandmother, and dad's mother was living with us by then too.

How many children in your family?

My mother had four. She was the eldest of three and dad was the third youngest of ten.

That was a big family.

Yes, it was.

But of course, the change from home birth to hospital birth became more marked by the time we had our children.

Times are changing though, there are girls who want to have their babies at home.

It's difficult having had two difficult births myself

You would like to have the births in hospital?

Yes, the second one was almost a cesarian.

Now what about the gas lights, you remember that the street lighting was gas?

Yes, two doors from us, in the Winter, we used to like to look out, about the time dad would come home, most children did in those days. You would see the gas man come on his bicycle with his long wand which he would put up through the lantern and light it, and sometimes in the Winter on the foggy mornings you would see him put the light out in the morning. I used to think that was a great thrill and I remember the poles going up for the electricity.

That must have been exciting time to get the electricity into your home.

Yes it was, but we didn't get it quite as early as some people. We had an extra room added onto the back of the house and that was the time we had the electricity put in. I think that was the only time in our lives that we didn't do our homework. Frances and I were both in the scholarship class by then,

That was something I wanted you to tell me about, the scholarship class you were in.

And we turned up without homework, and of course the teacher said why wasn't your homework done and we said there was only candlelight because the gas had been cut off and the electricity hadn't been connected. She said I knew there would be some reason why you girls hadn't done your homework.

Now about your scholarship?

Ah yes, this was something of Mr. Bromolo's. He had one very good teacher on the staff, a lady named Miss ^WDuncan and at the end of the seventh grade, the top people of the grade seven grade were put into grade eight, maybe people nowadays would say she was a good crammer but she was more than that. She really was a good teacher, she made it also interesting, and there quite a lot of children who won government juniors and went to University High or Melbourne High and some won scholarships to business colleges and MLC and places like that. She was there for about five years and then to get promotion she had to go to Fairfield North when it opened, as the Infant Mistress. We thought what a loss it was but she was probably every bit as good as an infant mistress. Mr. Bromolo had the teacher who was able to do it, so he organised the school and was very proud of his scholarship class.

What about some of these other big old famous buildings that were there and are gone now?

Sumner Estate - well the main part of that was on the Brunswick side of the creek. There was an SEC Depot there, that was lady Casey's grandparents and I don't ever remember seeing that house and it might have been too far away for a little girl to see.

But you always knew it as Sumner Estate.

Yes there was a house down there, a big two-storey house, I can't remember the name, ^{just north of Sumner's, Hidden Cove.} The only reason I remember it is because there was a boy in the same grade as me and his father had the ink works down at Merri Creek. They made ink, down at the bottom end of Arthurton Road. ^{They also made blag.}

Oh, I haven't heard of the ink works before.

I can't remember what their name was, I think they made ink, clag and glue but I am not sure but it was pulled down quite a long time ago. ^{The name was, Angus.}

Whereabouts did you say the ink works were?

Down at the end of Arthurton Road on the banks of Merri Creek, I am pretty sure it was ink they made. Now what else?

There was ^{Fitt's home} pits in Bastings Street, there were the leather people, their factory was up ^{behind} at the end of Gadd Street up behind what used to be the Fitzroy Racecourse.

Yes I was going to get on to that.

Mmmm.

The Lions that were on Bayview; the pillars, ^{are} on a house in St. Georges Road, around the corner from McCracken Avenue.

Oh are they?

There was ^{a next to} the house at the corner of McCracken Avenue then. I think it has gone ^{It was} down called Delbrae, I think that has been pulled down. Then the next one, that's where they finished up.

Now tell me a bit about the Northcote Grammar School that was formed around 1921.

It was to be for the boys of the Epiphony^a Choir and I think there were other pupils as well, it wasn't only the choir boys. I have no recollection of what the financial arrangements were but I think that was the snag, that it cost~~ed~~ a great deal more than they thought.

Where was the building?

Well now you know where Epiphony^a is, well the building^{was} is on that block, it faced High Street and the gardens went right down to High Street.

Well we have just discovered that there is quite a bit of writing about the Northcote Grammar School in Andrew Lemon's "Northcote Side of the River" so we won't repeat that.

St. Joseph's Roman Parish had a small wooden church and school in Arthurton Road, between the railway line and High Street on the north side somewhere along towards the end of Helen Street, and they were burnt out. They were after a new site and the new site where the Epiphony^a built, but Mr. Richards^{was} was Church of England himself so he sold it to his own people and St. Josephs got the site he wanted. *their present site.*

So was Ruckers mansion sold by Mr. Richards^{to} to the Anglican ~~of the~~ Church

We are going to talk about something to do with the shopping in early days of Northcote.

Yes, well not really early days, I suppose but far enough ago.

Well what are we talking about then?

World War I.

Early days compared to people listening in their 20's or younger.

Well we had some very good drapers shop^s in High Street, Northcote. There was Hatten and Hatten^{and then later} and then became Hatten and Slater. That was south of Hawthorn Road, almost opposite Mitchell Street. We had Moran and Catos on the corner of High Street and Hawthorn Road, there was F.G. Smith, Draper, down between Hawthorn Road and Arthurton Road; we had several chemist shops. The one I remember best was Mr. Walker, J.A. Walker. He was a very helpful pharmacist.

He was a very helpful pharmacist was he. What, do people go to see him instead of the doctor?

Well there was a good deal of that, or if you went there with a doctor's prescription ^{and} or you want extra information about it, he was very co-operative.

There were two chemists close to each other, I have forgotten the names of them, but they are still chemist shops now, ^{the last time I went they were.}

There was Cornish^{as} the grocers. You know the two shops in front of the church that used to be the Methodist church. He was in the end one. Harrison Wright the newsagents, they were near Hattens^{the} the drapers. The other way we had a butcher shop, they were the Powers; I can't remember the name before the Powers.

In those days of the butchers, sawdust was on the floor.

Yes, and you saw the carcasses being carried in from the open vehicles with canvas in the back.

And horse-drawn of course.

Down that end were a couple of shoe shops. Down on the corner of Arthurton Road and High Street was Tharrats Timber and Hardware, and later on Tharats Timber Mill was down opposite the railway line just north of the station.

You could do a good deal of shopping in Northcote. There were two or three good shoe shops.

How do you like the supermarkets as compared to the shopping of those days?

It's not as friendly, you went into the same shop and everybody knew you and called you by name, and people you knew who were locals worked in the shops. We used to go down Smith Street at Easter holidays. Of course you would remember the time when there were only 2 holidays, the Easter holiday and the Show week holiday; except for the one or two public holidays but they were the only breaks we had.

We always went to Smith Street in the Easter holidays to get the winter underwear and get mum to make warm pyjamas and nighties for everyone.

Mother made all the clothes did she?

Yes she made all our clothes, trimmed all our hats, and then we would go down in the show holidays for the material for the Summer dresses to be bought.

You always went to Gibsons, I wonder why you didn't buy it in High Street, it must have been cheaper.

It was the quality.

Couldn't you get it in High Street?

No not the range or the quality. You see, Gibsons was the place for woollies.

This is about your sister and her romance in getting married.

They were engaged before Fred went away. And he worked out a list, one, two, three, four etc. and if he put a sentence with a particular number in the letter that meant a particular place he was going to be.

So came the letter "I will be sending you one handkerchief for Easter". That meant go see the vicar we will be getting married at Easter time. One meant "coming home".

Off went Isabel to see the vicar to make all the arrangements, which was to be on Easter Saturday. I was about 5 months pregnant and we didn't have a phone and we were living over at North Box Hill and we got up on the Saturday morning and Frank and I got dressed in our Sunday best and when we arrived home at Northcote mum was the only one there and we said, "Where are the girls, where's dad", mum said that they had bad news to spread around and we said what's that, Fred has been sent to Darwin.

You see we didn't have the phone, they couldn't get in touch with us and the wedding was to be catered for at home which only meant putting away the cake in the pantry which meant ^{that} all the food that had been ordered to feed quite a lot of people ~~was~~ for a party. *was shared amongst us all*

But then when he did come back to Melbourne it was May and it was miserable, it had rained for three days before, ^{at Easter, the night} and it was such a let down ~~and~~ the church ladies were so disappointed, there were two other weddings on, they did the flowers especially for Isabel's wedding, but Isabel's wedding was postponed by the army.

You were saying that you and your sister had your reception at home because that's what you wanted and you didn't have to worry about all this booking like now.

Yes and of course we had a double room that could be opened up so we had enough space to do it that way.

If you had wanted to book something it wouldn't have been hard in those days, ^{often} you just book with you local church hall.

^{flu} Yes there were a few places around, there was one up in Thornbury, I can't remember what it was called. Friends of ours had their reception there and there was Normanby Hall, you know, it was quite easy. I think that they must wonder sometimes these days if it is all worth it. It seems to be such a hassle.

Well I think we have got just about got all we can now, we have run you dry. Thank you very much indeed for giving us all that information it has been nice to speak to you.

And I have been very happy to do it and thank you for giving me the opportunity.