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Full transcript of an interview with

ELIZABETH MELLOR

on 1 June 2006

by Helen Miller

Recording available on CD

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Today is 1\textsuperscript{st} June 2006 and present are Helen Miller, 1957 graduate, Pauline Butler, 1977 graduate and Beth Mellor, 1955 graduate.

\begin{quote}
indicates word/s that I couldn't be sure about – JR.

please check spelling – JR.
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Beth, we'll just start and perhaps you could give us an indication of how you found out about kindergarten teaching as a career?

Well, I was probably in an unusual situation but I don't really remember how I found out because it was inbred, it was part of life right from the beginning.

Could you explain to us why?

My aunt was a graduate of the College from way back.

And we're talking about Kathleen Mellor, 1924 graduate?

Right and she was steeped in it all and I went to kindergarten at the Kindergarten Training College in Palmer Place so it was going full cycle over many years. To get there we were chauffeur driven from home. I lived just nearby in Martin Avenue and we had Miss Wilson who chauffeured us in an Austin 7 or something like that.

When you say us, were there?

Other children she picked up on the way to kindergarten each morning. That was all part of kindergarten. It was going there. I remember I was made a prefect to look after the suitcases and that was probably to make sure that I behaved and didn't get my mind onto other things.

How old were you when you were a suitcase prefect?

I was about four, three or four, probably four. I remember lots of things from way back in kindergartens at that very place.

Beth, was the kindergarten in the 95 Palmer Place building?
Both that and in the Doris Beeston, yes.

Right.

I know that we did Music and Movement. I remember where, Bottom Doris, Bottom 95 Palmer Place was like a (both talking).

The area at the back.

Yes. Down with our student room I think but that was Music and Movement really. I think we had other things too but I was pretty young at that stage, I'm not exactly sure of that. The dates line up with that because I used to go back after it so it's very hard to remember what was during that time and what was to visit the aunt or something like that.

Beth, can you remember who the teacher was, the teachers were?

No. I think it might have been Berry.

Margaret Berry?

Was it?

I don't know.

I could remember if it was put before me but I couldn't remember the names of other people. I do remember that we did Music and Movement with Mary Jolley who became Lady de Crespigny who became a teacher in the course. I did Music and Movement right through until I was about fourteen, privately, in another place. It's very hard to tell exactly...

Childhood memories.

…what was kindergarten and what was recalled through other experiences.

Yes. Did you wear a uniform at the kindergarten?

I don't recall that, I don't believe so. I did for the student group of course but not for.
Not when you were a child?

No, no.

You didn't do any of your Primary schooling at the College Kindergarten?

No, I went on straight from there at five, to MLC where I stayed through to the end.

No I didn't do anything else there.

When you went to MLC as a little girl, did you catch the bus? I'm just interested in.

The tram.

By yourself? I'm just interested.

Some of it. There was a girl two doors up and she used to take me on the tram unless I embarrassed her too much, then she'd leave me and I'd cope with the rest of the way but I used to insist on knitting in the tram and that was a bit embarrassing to her at times. The tram went through; I could change in King William Street and get the next tram and then go on.

How things have changed haven't they?

Yes.

Beth, when you were at school you didn't ever think of being a nurse or do something?

Yes, I did. A kindergarten teacher I believe I was told right from the start and then later I changed it to being a nurse. Then when I found out some of the tasks of the nurse, I changed my mind back again. It wasn't too different from kindergarten teaching actually at times with the messy things.

We thoroughly concur. Do you recall when you had an interview for the course?

Yes, I'm not sure if I had an earlier one; I'm not exactly sure about that. I was trying to recall that but I did go and see Dorothy Grant prior to starting, that was in the January, but I don't remember whether I had another interview before that or not.
Do you recall anything about your first day there? Did any other MLC girls go with you?

Yes, Juliette Bayly was on the list and she was there too but that's all. There are other older ones who went there and there are quite a gaggle of MLC girls over the years. I think that the MLC kindergarten was firmly connected with the College.

I'd be interested to know more about that if you had any information.

I have read it in the history books where it says about that.

I understand that MLC had a kindergarten early on.

Yes, it did and that's where I actually went to the kindergarten and I was most impressed I remember, right from the start. The first words that I remember reading were on the front of the building. They stood out, it wasn't etched, what's the opposite to etching? You know it stood out.

Proud. It was proud.

Yes and it says "Come let us live with our children" and that was something I remember from way back. Then of course, the girls that I went to school with, I'm still meeting with regularly, because many of us went right through from the beginning from the age of five.

That's most of your life isn't it Beth?

Mm.

Mm and clearly, your parents needed to support you?

Yes, they did. They had supported me through private school and all my life and this seemed to be not much different except they didn't have to pay fees. That was a change around about the time that I went that there wasn't any fee-paying any more. Instead, we got (I don't know if it was right from the beginning) but we got what we called "glove money". That was to help us to transport us to our teaching practice.
£50.00 a year.

Yes, I thought it was £40 but it might have been £50, it's a bit hard to remember way back there. I used that to help me get around and I bought a Vespa scooter after awhile, which I was renowned for riding all round the place.

I remember. It must have been nice to be independent anyhow because. Beth, who was on staff when you were a student.

Some people I can remember and some I can't but Dorothy Grant was the Acting Principal and there were two or three terms she was, I don't know exactly how long but we were waiting for Margaret Roberts to come from England. She was promised.

We had Lady de Crespigny by then who was Mary Jolley for Music and Music and Movement and Musical Appreciation. I remember Mary Moore??? who was Art. Remember Dorothy Ockenden who was in the Office and I think we had Betty Davis in the third year for Administration.

She joined the College that year because I was a first year and she started that year. Yes, we just got the tail end of that, well the beginning of her journey back to Adelaide.

Mrs Best?

Yes, I don't remember Mrs Best but ///////////.

Biology.

Biology, I had, I made a note about Biology and we had an excursion down to Port Noarlunga and two of us actually went on the Vespa scooter which wasn't a good idea on a stormy day!

Who did you take with you?
Alex Weatherley. We got half way up the big hill and it wouldn't take the two of us so she had to get off and hitch a ride to the top. When we got there, everyone was all rugged up and on the jetty, took us a while to get there! But nobody went into the water except me, I think I remember. I don't know if anyone else did too. All the others had cups of coffee, too cold, so we had to go and get specimens so I remember getting the specimens and bringing them back. I don't know whether Alex did or not, she was probably frozen stiff by then too. We had quite a few escapades. Isn't it nice remembering those things?!

Mm. That was hysterical.

Beth.

We had Art, as I said. We had Carpentry, I can't remember whether it was Mary Moore with that.

It might have been at the Woodwork school down in Gilbert Street.

I don't remember that but I do know that they did go there some time before because I was at Lavis Kindergarten; that was one of my kindergartens. I remember. Some of these things I've been told so now it's many moons ago.

I understand.

Now it gets a bit fuzzy as to whether it was me or whether I heard about it or knew about it.

Beth, Current Affairs, Noel Adams, Editor of The Advertiser.

Noel Adams, I remember him.

Editor of The Advertiser.

Yes, that brings us to the top of the Doris Beeston where we had those lectures altogether, I think.
We were instructed to please listen and behave nicely and not knit.

It was hard to do wasn't it? Current Affairs, I forgot that.

I also remember having Assembly in that room in the top Doris Beeston and after, another funny bit was after Margaret Roberts came and she had to learn to drive a car. She parked it on the hill and didn't put the brake on right and I leapt up from the front row and raced to the back and down the steps and had to go and rescue the car as it went down Kermode Street.

Beth, I was in that room at the time!

That's right, yes.

How did you do it?

I just did it. I got in, it wasn't locked or anything. I had to get in and put the brake on.

My goodness!

Yes, so that was something. Gardening we did and Dorothy Grant was actually gardening when I arrived for my interview; I had to wait for her to wash her hands. She explained to me about the importance of teaching children gardening. Later on one of our members decided that she had some sort of poisoning with a petunia. It wasn't petunia, one of those things so she didn't have to do it so I tried to think how you could do that.

An allergy sort of thing.

Mm?

An allergy sort of thing.

Yes, yes, it was very good, she didn't have to do gardening – that was great! We did things like making books in Craft. That was important because one of the things,
notes I've made about my recollections was that it was in an era and this is where it will go round and round in a circular fashion I think. It was in an era when there weren't many children's books. They just weren't available so you had to make them yourself, probably still got that here. It was terribly badly made but it was. I've also got another book here that's of the observations that I did down at the Lady Gowrie that was found recently and returned to me.

Keep it Beth! Keep it.

It's hard isn't it? That's one thing that you know, when you were kindergarten teaching you kept everything. Now it's a bit hard, hard to throw it all out.

It's ingrained isn't it?

It's awful because even now, to throw out an orange bag, I keep on looking at it and think that would be good. You could weave things in amongst that and have wool with it and embroidery needles and things. That would be great, but I have to think twice and throw it in the bin. Those things are very, very hard for me to do so I'm not doing it too much but those are the things that are just entrenched in you.

Indeed they are.

I've got a whole shed full of stuff.

Beth, do you remember the assignments and those exams and all those boring things?

Well, I don't remember. I remember lots of assignments such as the book-making. We had to tell a story. The first day, we skipped past that, but the first day we probably had to sit on the floor to have the story like the children did and that's what it began. You had to be there as a child and know what it was all about.
I remember a Psychology exam; that was a bit traumatic I think. We had lots of displays of Music and Movement and I'd feature in some of the photos I seem to have found recently or somebody's found them recently. We did one out at Burnside Ballroom. I think you said something about somewhere else but I remember because I remember Lady de Crespigny getting so furious that she kicked a foot and off came a shoe that went right up.

In an arc.

Yes, almost up to the...

Balcony.

...balcony of the Ballroom so you know there are things like that are really, you know, colourful people we had. Which you needed didn't you? Other assignments such as collecting the things from Mrs Beastie???? Best from the beach and the sea and those sorts of assignments and collecting. What else would you like to know in that area?

I think you've given us a really nice picture Beth. That's super.

I can't really remember lots of exams but I do know that we had lots of assignments that had to be in by a certain time. That was a bit of a trial at that age wasn't it, to get it in?

Let's talk about the practical. Let's talk about being in kindergartens.

It was practical.

What was your first placement?

Now I don't know, yes I do. I've written down a few of them and when you said the first I had to quick think. Was it Barker?

Who would have been the Director there then?
Dorothy Best but then, I know that there was a third year there. Had a bit of a problem with Barker. I think that, I think they might have, I might have had a bit of a bias against me, because I was expected to be perfection from Day 1.

You were another Mellor.

Yes and that was a bit of a disadvantage, I think, rather than an advantage. The third year, Jane who just lived up here, who was third year was very good and I think that I remember saying to them, "I think you're comparing me with Jane."

Jane Hamilton?

Yes. Who was third year and knew exactly what she was doing and I didn't have a clue what I was doing so, anyway, we overcame that. I went back there to teach and that was a challenge to go back and Dorothy Best went overseas and I was there with her for a little while, then she was going off on long service leave or something or other. That was the first one. I don't know if the second one was Grove but I do remember going to Grove Kindergarten with Joan French.

How nice, yes.

**Who was Joan Evans.**

Joan Evans.

You might have talked to Joan.

We have.

I'm just remembering some of this and I couldn't remember Patsy's name at Payneham.

Jarrett.

Patsy Jarrett, yes, I couldn't think of that before. The last one I was at was Lavis Kindergarten with Jo Christie????
Was that the only dinner and sleep kindergarten you were at in those days? The others were two sessional?

I'm not exactly sure but I don't think Barker was. I think it probably was just Lavis. I know that there were transition stages with these places going from meal and sleep to two sessions because it was argued that children didn't need to be in kindergarten to sleep; they could do that at home and you could take another group of children in with.

Of course it was post-war //////////////. That's right and that was, because it was post-war we didn't have any toys or things and we didn't have any money. In my recollections, I remembered that the children had to pay to come. It was called a contribution and I remember the Pre-school Adviser I'll call her at this stage, saying at one stage when it went up that it really is just like an icecream a day that they were asking of the families. When I think about it now, it probably is an icecream a day with the cost of.

It was like a shilling a week ////////////// (both talking)

Yes, but it was like the cost of an icecream a day. Now it probably would be about the cost of an icecream a day with the costs that have gone up. I thought that was interesting.

You're quite right.

Yes. Just a little bit of trivia along the way.

So Beth, after graduation, is that when you went straight to Barker?

Yes, yes.

So you were a Director fairly early.

No, I wasn't a Director.
No, but you were a teacher there with Dorothy Best?

I was a teacher, then Mrs Dorling???? was the Director, I wasn't.

I understand.

To go there, because my aunt was the one who appointed people to these things I was interviewed by Margaret Roberts so she, my aunt bowed out of it, and they discussed it because there weren't many teachers to go round and mostly people got what they wanted except in this case. I chose this one and I remember somebody else who lived a long way away tried to go to the same one too and it worked out that I actually got the job but the other one lived at Largs Bay or something or other and I think they thought that was OK. It was, that was the first one and I was just there for a year.

And the next year?

The next year I took another challenge; I was one for a variety of experience and would accept the challenges that came because they couldn't get people to go to some of these places. I went to Hack War Memorial which was a new Centre with no playground, nothing.

That's at Flinders Park isn't it?

Torrensville, it was called Torrensville.

Torrensville.

It's now, beside where the school is, that was a horse paddock. It's beside what then became a Junior Primary School and all of that was built while I was there.

We're talking about 1957, your second year out, yes?

We had to set out from nothing and I remember making a sandpit out of, at the back there were foundations for another room for when they could get some money
together so we put sand in that as a sandpit. It was out the back door, which really wasn't a very good thing to do because somebody fell over and smacked their head on the concrete. Had to take a few risks I suppose didn't you or I'd never have thought of that happening.

No, we didn't think in those same terms back fifty years ago.

No. We had lots of open space and we had David Hookes who was very good on the ball games and things and went on to big ball-game fame. We had nothing really, inside or outside.

Did you have a committee?

Yes, we had a committee.

Of ladies outside of the area.

Yes, yes. It was run by Mrs Hatwell or Mr Hatwell perhaps I don't know, but I know we had Harry and his photo was over the Director's door, large. We used to say good morning to Harry as we arrived.

Had he given the money for the building?

No. No, I don't think so. He was on the Council I think as Mayor of the Council or something. Actually, it took ages to get the committee to meet at the kindergarten because they met at the Council Chambers so they never came to see anything. I had to encourage them to begin to have their meetings at the kindergarten so I could show them things that we needed to do.

And these would be the what I call people of means, either council members or other people.

Torrensville wasn't high means. Yes, yes, it wasn't parents, no.

Yes.
They probably were when they first started working for it.

Beth how long were you there?

Two years.

And you saw a big development?

Yes, yes.

Good, well done!

And then during that time, also, they needed visiting Directors so after I'd been there for a while, as well as that, two days a fortnight I went to Nuri, Nuriootpa and Angaston as a visiting Director to keep those legal because they didn't have qualified staff.

That would have been interesting.

Yes, so that was another challenge.

So what happened after Hatwell?

After Hatwell, they were desperate to have somebody down at Bordertown so I went to the Carol Murray Kindergarten at Bordertown where I was for two years. That was a huge job because there were no other qualified staff and the second year had a very young assistant and they were cutting down on money things too. We had about 105 children enrolled, coming in from the country so it was a huge job and rollover and things. Fairly youngish age. I did two years at Bordertown.

And that's where you and Yvonne Symonds?

Yes, Yvonne. I had her children.

Did you know Jean Hensley?

Yes, I did know Jean Hensley.

Because we interviewed her.
Yes, I know Jean Hensley.

We've interviewed her.

Yes, yes. Carol Murray was very supportive.

The lady after whom the kindergarten was named?

Yes, yes. Of course, I had to board down there and all the rest. That was. Actually, I got quite ill towards the end of the time because it was a huge strain coping with all of the things that needed to be coped with.

You were still young.

Yes. Then I decided I would come back to Adelaide after two years. I thought two years was fair enough. I would go to the Lady Gowrie because that was a team, to join a team, rather than that complete isolation for some time. Whilst the application was in the post, I received a phone call from the Kindergarten Union saying, "If I was thinking of doing that, would I be prepared to go to the Lady Gowrie in Melbourne because they had this crisis where they couldn't get staffing either." So that's where I met up with Helen.

You didn't know that I'd already been appointed there.

No, no. We were both at the Lady Gowrie in Melbourne.

That was the year that Jean Adamson and Lorna Campbell-Smith had just come back from study in America.

Yes, yes. So I was there for one year.

All the philosophy there was so interesting and challenging wasn't it? Being more American-based than we had experienced previously.

I realised over the years that we had quite a good combination of both English influence and American influence and they were put together.
Here in Adelaide?

Yes, and they were put together here in Adelaide.

Very nicely.

But it was, you could see the influence from those two.

And after that, Beth, what was your next challenge?

Right, well I needed to come back to Adelaide and I applied to do that. I was only there for a year and my father was sick at that stage and I decided I needed to come home so I came home. I was appointed as a Regional Director with the Kindergarten Union, working from Head Office and going out into the country to help new Centres start, in particular, or helping in any way such as, when they didn't have qualified staff and I knew a new Centre was to start I'd do all the interviews with the parents and children and get those things set-up.

Or I was working with the Rotary or Lions, probably Rotary and Lions Clubs to furnish kindergartens, to get the equipment together and get it moved from the city to the country. To explain to them why they wanted a whole bag of flour and all of those things. They couldn't understand that dough was a part of the commodity.

And blocks! We used to have big ructions over blocks because they thought they could do that much cheaper and they had to argue that if you made them out of off-cuts of wood they wouldn't stand up and they weren't the unit block form that you couldn't do.

Mathematical.
What you could do with them so those were the interesting things that the men. It was mostly the men that were setting up these Centres.

Beth that's a very interesting example of how the service organisations have done so much for the communities. Which region are we talking about?

I went quite a bit to Whyalla, Port Pirie, even in that time to Woomera; a lot of trips to Woomera. Probably I went anywhere that other people didn't want to go. If they had families at home and children, I was available to travel so that's what happened.

And how many years did you ////////////// a Regional Director?

I went until 1968. I think I was actually appointed when my aunt went overseas and Ruth Gellert was the Acting Pre-school Adviser and during that time I was made a Supervisor and I did more generalised work. Particularly with Woomera and the Commonwealth Government and setting-up of all of those – there were two or three Centres up there. Staffing. There was a whole story with all the getting the staffing. There were two girls in particular that I'm still very friendly with. I had to persuade them to go there. They were on a hitchhiking trip around Australia so they did go there and we've still been friends right through.

Who were they, those girls?

Barbara MacLennan????? I have to remember the old names and things. It's hard with females because if you are John Smith once, you are for life but these others.

Were they interstate graduates?

Yes, yes. She was from Sydney. There were two girls who had hitch-hiked over to the first Festival of Arts. They were doing ushering and they were over across the road at Aquinas, boarding. That's where they had their accommodation and they
stayed, they did relieving for us too. To get the relievers and all the rest it was
terrribly hard. Just, the people were just not available.

There was such a burst in development of pre-school centres at the time.

Yes and not enough. You see there were only ten of us who graduated the year I did
and a lot of those didn't go on to do teaching anyway.

So Beth, after that, what was your next challenge?

I went over to Melbourne to do the Diploma of Advanced Education, is that what it
was called?

Advanced Studies in Education.

Advanced Studies in Education, in 1968, so that was the next challenge. There was
a small group of us there too. I think there were only about five us who graduated, I
can't really remember that but it was a very small group. Prior to that we were lead
to believe that if you wanted to get anywhere in the field you needed a variety of
experience because there weren't advanced qualifications that you could get. That
was where I tried to get the Director of a City Centre or teaching in the City Centre,
Director of the City Centre student practice, having students in the Centre, country
work and there was a list of those things that I worked through systematically. I
ended up doing the qualifications I think that was only the second year that that was
available. They wanted people who would get advanced qualifications and so they
were encouraging us to do that so I was very lucky to be able to do that.

Then I came back. This is a whole thing on its own isn't it? I came back from that
and went back into supervision, did some country work etc. I've done most of the
Centres throughout the state now I come to think about it. I used to go over to
Ceduna, sit on the bus all day to get there, or get there from 6.00 am to get back, it would take all day. Flying up to Woomera and then you had to go up on a Thursday and come back on the Tuesday because that's when the Weapons Research people weren't flying and that's when the seats were available. All of these things. Where did I get to?

You must be nearly in America by now.

'74 I went to the US. I went to the University of Pittsburgh to do a Masters degree. I did that in Child Development and Child Care, which wasn't available here in Australia and then I came back from that.

Beth, if I'm right it was actually a Master of Science degree.

Yes, a Master of Science majoring in Child Development and Child Care. Yes, Master of Science. It was in the School of Health and Related Professions in the School of Education.

Did you enjoy that?

Mm?

Did you enjoy that time?

Yes, it was a very interesting time. Again, it was, to set off for two years with a suitcase and not knowing where you are going by yourself was quite a big thing I think.

Did you live in student accommodation?

No, no I had to find accommodation. We lived in for the first week for orientation. No I had to find accommodation. I found it in somebody's attic, which was quite good.

Beth, how many students would have been doing your specific course?
Thirty? Might have been more, I don't really remember because people came and went to different lectures. They came with very different backgrounds and that was all very interesting I found. It wasn't all steeped in Early Childhood Education, it was broader. Psychologists and Speech Therapists and a whole host of people would come in from various things. Do you want to come back from there, come back to Australia? That was two years, then I came back, by which time, oh before I went there was the trauma of Margaret Trembath and all of those things before I went. I think I was probably shipped off for that.

The court case.

Mm?

The court case.

Yes, well I went. They decided more people had to get higher qualifications etc so, while I was offered this, I think it was a way to ship me off. Then I came back to a very different regime. With Frederick? Ebbeck who, the best thing I could do was to go straight to the country.

Had he arrived during the time you were in America?

I actually met him on my way back and I realised that things, there would be dramatic changes at that stage, so yes. I took off to the country which seemed to be the best thing to do. Again, I had an area and I was based at Clare for a while, over a year. Fifteen months perhaps.

As a Regional Director?

No, as a Supervisor, a Regional Supervisor of the Mid-North.

Right. This is the period when the Regional Advisors were actually being based in the country areas weren't they?
Well, one was anyway.

OK.

I don't know that the others happened but one was and that was probably a very good thing to do at that stage. I can't remember who else was in the country like that. Again, it seemed to be a bit of a lonely position. I just got tired out and I knew that if I kept on travelling those roads I was going to go up a telegraph pole so it was at that stage when I was approached to see if I would apply to be Director of the Lady Gowrie in Adelaide. That took over when I was fortunate enough to get the job I suppose.

What year was that Beth, when you started at the Lady Gowrie?

'78. Then I was there for seventeen years. I said I would give them five years. I'm a slow learner.

And you headed enormous changes during that time.

Yes, I believe so.

Could you give us a thumbnail sketch of some of those changes? I do have to say from my view I can see it from the College's perspective of taking students so there was always that demonstration, teachers were demonstrating and so forth. That continued all the time I guess.

Yes it did. The things that I missed out before in my time at the Gowrie as a student when observation was one of the biggest ways of learning and that we had to be very astute and sensitive, to observe and interpret and do all those things. That seemed to be, there were booths there for large groups of visitors and that seemed to have to continue.
We were also going through a whole change, this would be another thing that I would have to put my mind on to, all the details of it but we were part of the Australian Early Childhood Association or whatever it was called then; Pre-School Association. That changed its name several times. We also had new terms of reference when I went in so it wasn't a matter of continuing on what was already there.

Beth, by terms of reference, where did these come from?

**From the government.**

Federal government we're talking about?

**Federal government.**

And applied to all the Lady Gowrie Centres?

Yes, via the Australian Pre-School Association, who used to do the supervision and various things like that. It was a very different terms of reference. I can't remember what they were now but it's all recorded in numerous books and things.

Did they focus on research or observation ////////////// (both talking)

Yes, but they didn't, I didn't ever think they knew what they meant by that and always found it difficult to find out what. But there was no funding really to support all the extra roles that we had to fulfil. Nothing, so it all had to be done within the staffing we had or what we could afford and what we could get.

And Beth, at that stage the staffing would consist of you as the Director, two teachers in each of the three nurseries?

Helen, I wouldn't be able to tell you off the top of my head because, whether it was two or three but probably two but then there were changes within that.

Were there?
Because we were then getting the pressure to provide care.

As in long day care?

Long day care. We were already set-up for it anyway; we had the meal and sleep. They used to have two afternoons a week off for doing home visits and recording and all of those things. Now all of that just went. There's no luxuries like that. Whatever we did, I remember, as a blanket memory, we had to do more and more for less and less. I did that for seventeen years. Until it nearly killed me. That took me through to retirement.

Can you just give us an indication of how the need for long day care so much changed the focus of the Lady Gowrie role in the community?

What I did was, I don't know what came first, the cart or the horse but I took a few risks and some of them were to appoint Child Care qualified staff who weren't as readily acceptable as teachers in some quarters. I felt that we needed to do that, we couldn't actually pay teachers and we couldn't, this is a very complicated story.

There were awards and things, different ones for teachers and for Child Care and that was a very difficult period. To get people to work together when they were being paid so differently and with different expectations for hours and holidays and all those things, so that was something we muddled through to try and get it to happen.

There were in fact some successes and one in particular I know went off and upgraded her qualifications to become a teacher so that was one of the early ones that we appointed. Again, to get people to accept some of these changes globally
was very, very difficult. My recollection is that whenever we were asked to make changes, Commonwealth-wise, we'd already made them in South Australia because they were in answer to need. Some of the other states had real trouble with it because they hadn't made any changes at all and this was just trying to work out now this is our children, these are our parents.

The very first child that we had in for Child Care and we were well into Child Care, combination of kindergarten and care, before we were told that we had to. The very first one I remember was a teacher's child from, they came from Port Augusta and they had to come to town because of his allergies or something or other, dust or something or other at Port Augusta. I sat down with the parents and said, "What do you need to help you go on doing your work and whatever you need?" They decided that they had two grandparents who could look after him two afternoons a week, if we could do it for three. That was where we began.

With that first child, I watched him when it came to the afternoon session, there were new children coming in the afternoon and he'd had it by then. I decided that OK we needed more than that so we got out the beds, one by one, and put them in the medical room, they were stored under the booths from way back. We were already serving lunch, midday meal, anyway so that just continued and then bit by bit we added to it and had real problems because what did we charge? This was all unbeknown to anyone, how were we going to cope with it? What do you charge? What do you charge for child care and things like that? I can't remember exactly how we got over that but somehow we did but it was a big, big trauma. The whole
thing was a very worrying time but I believe it was done in answer to children's needs and putting children first and saying, "OK how can we accommodate this within the rules that the government gives us and the State government?"

And really, letting the family continue to be functional.

Yes. There were demands from the State government because it was partly funded from there and demands from the Commonwealth government and you know that never the twain will meet with those. Anyone who was a Director then was caught slam bang in the middle of that plus the parents and the children. I actually had diagrams of things of all of the build up of things that were going on. They are in some of the old Annual Reports where it was diagrammatically shown all of these things that were impinging on the work where we were supposed to be looking at children and what were these.

Politics and economics/////////(both talking).

Yes the whole bit.

You were very influential in introducing training too.

Yes, yes. That was in relation to who was going to staff these Centres and again there weren't masses of people and of course, the cheapest way to do it was with unqualified staff and I decided that wasn't on. They needed some background, they needed some training and some support to do a good quality job. Then all of this happened and there seemed to be, I had a bit of a feeling there was a bit of money somewhere that we might be able to get, that would support the other work that the Centre was doing by doing this. I developed what was called a Skills Training Centre because we were needing to do some work with unemployed youth so I decided, I
think it probably was me deciding some of these decisions because they were too complex to share around. If we, I've just lost the track there, can you?

Skills Training.

I was concerned that even if people were working with young children and weren't so called "trained" or qualified, they needed a background so that they could treat children right. There were a whole host, at that time, again it was sort of looking at opportunities and I guess it is this all through, seizing on opportunities to get the funding to do what needed to be done, what I thought needed to be done. We had all these unemployed young people and I decided that if we could run some courses to sensitise them to children's needs and to learn how to look after children that this would be a good thing to do. Even if they weren't working in a Child Care setting they would become parents.

How old are we talking about?

Eighteen year olds, sixteen, eighteen, after school, unemployed, whoever was eligible to be unemployed. So we took in these people to give them help, to sensitise them to children's needs and to learn how to provide for young children. That was the stage when Bessie came in to help.

Walsh?????

How many did you start with Beth? How many young people to start?

Helen, I wouldn't have a clue now but there was a group of probably might have been fifteen.

Any men? Boys?

Not originally, but there were eventually; but not a lot because again that was a very difficult thing to do. There were lots of things they had to cope with.
How long did this?

I did have a male member of staff actually. That was right from the beginning.

That was Ian Fry you're talking about?

That was all part of it too that to get in the male model some years before so he was very good with all of this and with these people. I remember one of the people who came to her graduation, father came along. It was the first time he'd ever come to anything that she had ever done in her life and the tears and things; it was the whole emotional sort of thing for some people.

Some of them turned their lives around through this course. One of them, I picked up something or other down at Port Adelaide not long ago that said about indigenous food stuffs and things, you know, there was somebody here who would do all of this, taking people on tours and things. I realised that name was one that had come.

People got confidence through that thing. Some of them said they'd never passed anything in their lives. Never got a certificate in their lives; never done anything like that. It really did turn some of them right around. I'm sure that they've gone on to do other things but they were almost put aside in society because they didn't have any skills.

Beth, would they have been on unemployment at the time?

Yes, yes.

Did you get funding for this or did it come out of your resources?

It came out of our resources I think. I can't really remember that Helen.
How long would the little courses have lasted?

*It might have been a year.*

They were part-time I guess.

I would have to look up; all of that would be recorded somewhere and Bessie probably remembers that but whether it was six months or a term. I'm not exactly sure but it wasn't part-time I think. One of the things they had to do was get up and get going every morning. They weren't used to doing that either because they didn't have a job, it didn't matter when they got up and when they turned up. Some of that was all part of it but Bessie would have remembrance of that, it's getting a bit hard to remember those details now.

Beth, you built another building on the premises.

Yes, that's where I got that funding for what we called the Skills Training Centre because we had all this going then we had nowhere to put the people. I think that's probably the way things should develop actually. It was hard to do.

Where did the funding for the building come from?

Through the Commonwealth government, because there was another pocket of money I felt that I could access and it was through Beazley. There was the Skills Training money so we developed it //////////////// then Pauline Waugh?? and I went over with the committee's support when it looked like we were going to dip out because there were requests for these things around Australia. It looked like we were going to miss out because there was only $5,000,000 for the whole lot or $3,000,000 – I don't know what it was but there was a little bit.
When it looked like, this was quite dramatic, one of our dramatic times, we packed up and went to Canberra to see Beazley. He came and he said that we'd just have to wait or something or other. We said, "We'll wait and we'll stay overnight if we need to. We'll just be here waiting till he's got time to see us." Sure enough, he saw us because he had to get us out of Parliament House. We said how far we'd gone and what we would miss out on if we didn't have it and what we needed to do because we needed to buy some more land and to change a building and build another building and we needed to do these things.

I thought we needed a Focus Centre for the whole field and particularly for the Child Care field that they could associate with. That's not how it's happened now but these things change as time goes on but they needed that for their own identity and their own self-esteem and all those things that impinge on children.

In the end, Mr Beazley said, I think he thought he'd have us there for a week, and he said to one of his minders, "See if you can find another bucket."

So we said, "When would we know because decisions had to be made about building etc?"

He said, "Well, you'll know by the morning." Next thing we know we stayed overnight and next morning the phone call came and they'd found another bucket and away we went. Again, taking big risks.
Beth, that's the first time you've mentioned Pauline Waugh???? Can you just mention her role?

She was the Administrative, she was the Administrator, general secretary type, administrative officer of the Centre.

She had other staff in the office?

She was good with all the money things, this was the support staff at the Centre.

Who else was in the Office?

I don't remember at that stage.

There were other younger office clerks.

Yes, Rena???? Lena???? Green???? was one of them who I've just heard has got two sets of twins and another couple. She wasn't a really skilled person, they were young staff.

You've given us a picture of a very big and vibrant Centre functioning within the community.

Yes, it was very big and it was very active and there were changes to be made and people had to understand and sometimes I decided they didn't have to understand and they just had to get on and do it.

To do it.

Because by the time you persuaded a whole lot of people it was too late, you'd missed the bus.

And Beth, underneath all of this were visitors from a whole raft of professions, including the teaching students, all of ///////////////(both talking)

Including the new students, overseas people who you know one of them was Lucille Lindberg/h???? who, I know went out to the College at one stage when she was
over from New York and she told me that somebody said, "Where can you see the best in the world?"

She said, "Down the road, go down to the Lady Gowrie Child Centre at Thebarton." They were looking to go all round the world and could I give them a list of where they should go. "Just go there."

So it was well accepted internationally from what was going on. It was changing, it had to be changing, it was dynamic, and it had to be changing to survive or keep it head above water.

Beth, when you look back on your seventeen years do you feel great satisfaction? How do you view that time?

No.

You just did your job.

Had to be done. To me it was obvious. No, I don't think because now I know they have changed so much that the best thing I could do was to walk away from it and not go back. I've tried to do that so that I don't impede but because it's dynamic, things would have happened since I was there. They had to be different anyway.

You don't want to compare.

No, you can't. You can't and you can't keep up with all of that, so either, I was twenty four hours. What do they say now? 24/7/52 because the Centre went from being a place that was open for forty weeks to being a place that was open for fifty weeks of the year, which was another whole different kettle of fish.

Were the hours?
From 6.00 am to 6.00 pm but for the Director it was always there even at 3 o'clock in the morning to get the call down for the, to go and meet with the police and things like that. Those things were happening the whole time, too. Alarms were going off, there were people.

There was one young boy, I had to say to the staff in the end, "Just don't be too kind." He'd come in and somebody would explain that the alarm system, this young boy had been wanting to know about it.

"Well, he wanted to know!" she said. This was one of the young staff members, which means that he came in and did all of this, got in, set it all off, but then the next morning he's there helping the police with their investigations. It was him anyway.

It was just getting very difficult and you can't really say to people, "Don't tell them those things!" Those things come with maturity and it was very hard for everyone to be involved.

Another time when handbags were missing, and somebody said, "Did you see anyone come in to this area?"

"Yes, there was somebody with a red bow in the back of the hair." Well, that's, we learned that was a good trick after a while because you see you walk out and you take the bow out of your hair and nobody knows that you've been there but you've been down to the staffrooms and things. Then you've got to get things out into
lockers and all of those things became very difficult. The trust things went quite a bit but that was just part of life.

Society was like that then.

Yes, the people we were having there were so different, many of them, that we had to cope with that as well.

You were happy to retire when the moment came?

Yes, I was delighted. I felt that I had done what I could when I could, how I could with the resources I had. Yes, I guess I was satisfied with that. I didn't have any great feeling of personal satisfaction except I did feel that perhaps I'd valued it more than other people did because I didn't, many times I didn't get a lot of support, I just had to battle on alone. That's just what part of it was.

Beth, I think you're to be highly congratulated on your professional career, because I think it stands really strong and proud there in South Australia, and you should be very proud of it yourself.

I never took the easy way out.

That's because you're a Mellor!

I can be pleased about that but I didn't look for the problems.

No.

I think I did confront more problem-solving things about what we could do to overcome or make the most of the resources that might be available to us. Sometimes other people didn't know they were available to us but we won through in the end. We had huge building things and then of course we did all the building. The Under Two part.
You know I had to persuade, I had to take the pollies down there into the laundry and say, "Well, you know, this could be where people could see these babies and toddlers. We're going to have to have this as part of the observation." So you know, it was one thing after the other.

If we were going to get into Child Care, if we're going to deal with the Under Twos, cope with those properly, we're going to have to show people, we're going to have to see. We went through all those building years of designing, working with architects, the whole bit, so it was a very, it was rewarding and I'm pleased as I look back.

It's /////////////.

I don't think I could have done anything more but I was looking forward to being sixty in the end. Thinking, right this is it.

Good on you Beth. Anyhow, thank you so very much.