

**VICTOR HARBOR ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, 'Beside the Seaside'.**

**Interview with Margaret Meegan at Kensington Gardens on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2013.  
Interviewer: Rob Linn.**

***Session 1***

**Margaret, you were born in 1934. Before we go on to talking all about Victor, how about we talk about your family. Tell me about your parents. Who were they?**

**MM:** Yes, 1934. Well, my parents were very interesting people. My mother had been born on the goldfields in Western Australia. Her father had come out from England as a chemist/dentist and set up there in what would be another whole story. But she had come through there. My father was born and reared on a farm in the mid north and he, being the second son, had left the farm to go teaching. And they set up their home and they had a marvellous marriage.

**So what were their names, Margaret?**

**MM:** Dora and Ted McEllister. Mum had been a Laybourne Smith and her family had gone on to do great things with architecture -

**Louis.**

**MM:** Yes.

- and with the dental school down there in Adelaide. My father came from the farm and they had been in the Irish migration.

**So was this near Kapunda?**

**MM:** No. It was Pinkerton Plains. It was quite a good farming area. A very good farming area, but hard work back then. You know, no water in the house or anything like that. And of course when Mum was over in Coolgardie, there was no water in Coolgardie at all. What was there came out on a camel train. So we look back to interesting parents.

**Do you know how your parents met up?**

**MM:** Not exactly, no. I never really asked them. I know that my father was tall, dark and handsome, and could dance and was very good at chatting. *(Laughs)*

**Obviously.**

**MM:** Yes. And Mum was devoted to him. She absolutely loved him all her life, which was rather nice to see. Yes, they got on terribly well.

**Where did your father do teaching training? Was he trained in Adelaide or did he do it by the old apprenticeship system?**

**MM:** No, he was trained. I think it was about two years, and then he was sent to Sheoak-Log.

**(Laughs) End of the earth at the time.**

**MM:** Absolute end of the earth. I know he collected quite a range of Aboriginal weapons that were out there, which we had in the shed for years. And then we took them out of here and we took them into the Museum and they were terribly interested in them. So they are residing now behind plate glass.

My father had a natural eye for art. It's just interesting. He was very strong on the visuals, because he took an interest in it and we all took an interest in it as we were reared. My mother had a very good voice. She trained at the Conservatorium and she did singing, but of course in that era it wasn't as encouraged for them as it could've been.

**So this would be 1900s with your mother?**

**MM:** She was born in 1898.

**Yes. So it's post 1910. Sorry, I know quite a bit about the history of the University and Elder Conserv. That's very interesting. So she was there at one of the peak times of singing training.**

**MM:** Yes. She sang French songs very, very well. Her father had been born in England but he was educated in France because I think the English were having a war with Prussia and the family didn't want him caught up with that. So he went across to France for all his education. Actually he was very fluent—naturally fluent French.

**So did he study at the Sorbonne(?) as well?**

**MM:** No. I can't think of the name of the town or how long—that's something I've got to look up. I can't name it off the top of my head—what year he came out to Australia. No, I'd have to think that back through and look through the records to get that consequence just quite right. Except that it is rather humorous to think of him in Coolgardie. *(Laughs)* He was a most meticulous man—stylish and meticulous—and thorough. And I have to admire him immensely.

We went back to have a look at Coolgardie some years ago just out of curiosity, and there it was, sort of blowing in the wind. You know, fracturing away the sandstone. And I found a lady who was doing just interest historian work and she had a lot of stuff in filing cabinets, and in it I found my grandfather's recipes that he had got from the Aborigines to help with the injuries on the goldfields.

**So was that a lady in Kalgoorlie or Coolgardie?**

**MM:** She was in Kalgoorlie.

**Was that Irma King?**

**MM:** I don't remember that name, no. But there again I'd have to look it back. It was a few years ago, but she had all this stuff there and I thought how absolutely marvellous. Here they all are. Course they didn't have a medical doctor out in the goldfields. We went through everything and I couldn't find any medical doctor. It was chemist/dentist, and there were pictures of his rooms, and they were meticulous. All the bottles and everything would be—and he would do all he could do, but you know there must've been tremendous injuries out there.

**There were some rippers.**

**MM:** There must've been.

**There were. No, it was terrible. It was a very hard life indeed in those conditions.**

**MM:** Oh, it was. They had a little house, which was fairly good (*sounds like, stuff*). Grandmother had a small lawn that she kept going with the bowls of water that they used for washing. And there was a tent nearby, and in it was Ray Begg. I don't know if you have heard of him. He made fame through Adelaide University in the dental world.

**Yes, I know exactly who he is.**

**MM:** He was an outstanding orthodontist. Better recognised in America than Australia. So, you know, Coolgardie was the hub—where it was happening. (*Laughs*)

**So your mother eventually translates from there to South Australia.**

**MM:** Yes.

**And your father, who begins his teaching life at She-oak Log, somewhere along the way meets up with her.**

**MM:** No doubt. Yes, somewhere along the way meets up with her. It's extraordinary, isn't it?

Of course Mother was sent to school in Perth from there about age seven. She was sent down to MLC in Perth because Coolgardie was very rough. It was boarding school and she was put on the train, and that was it. She went down there. There was no phone to ring home or anything like that. So she took off to boarding school with a suitcase at age seven. It is amazing, isn't it? I've still got the postcards that went between her father and her because there was no phoning or anything like that. It's just amazing stuff. You know, 'I have sent you a nightdress. I hope you find it nice and warm'. Yes, interesting, isn't it?

**So Margaret, when were they married? Do you know that at all?**

**MM:** I should know that. Oh, you've caught me.

**1920s?**

**MM:** Yes, it must've been because my elder sister is five years older than me and she would've been born well into the marriage. After they first got married I know Mum and Dad ran a dance club for a while and called it the Rostrata Dance Club. And it was by very special invitation. *(Laughs)* Isn't it hilarious?

**Yes. Where was it? Do you know?**

**MM:** Yes. At Lockleys.

**Really?**

**MM:** Yes. Get out your dancing pumps. Yes, they were interesting people. Very interesting people.

**So your father was still teaching at that point?**

**MM:** Oh, yes. Dad was a teacher. He specialised in woodwork teaching, which would now be tech studies, wouldn't it?

**Yes.**

**MM:** And he had a centre at Thebarton, which was purely for woodwork, which he ran beautifully. There was a lot to be said for it. I mean there was hand training and eye training. People go off into different professions, like dentistry and medicine and all of this, and the first thing they're using is their hands.

**So was that the Technical High School?**

**MM:** No. It was in the corner of the yard of the primary school there. It stood on its own in a block on a corner. Course Thebarton Primary School was actually very 'in' at the time. It was a big primary school and rather interesting.

**You were born in 1934?**

**MM:** Yes.

**And you said that you had an older sister. Any other siblings, Margaret?**

**MM:** No. I had an older sister. She's five years older than me.

**Let's come back to your family's involvement with Victor Harbor. Do you have any idea when your parents first came upon Victor Harbor?**

**MM:** You know the things you should discuss and the things that you haven't discussed, but it would've been in the 20s and some of Mum's friends would've been familiar with Victor Harbor. They went down there and fell in love with the place. They thought it was incredibly beautiful, which it is. It's got the most beautiful coastline, and it must've looked very splendid back then with the scrub and -

**My word! Coming right down to the town basically.**

**MM:** Absolutely.

**Now your involvement, Margaret, begins really in very early stages of your life.**

**MM:** Yes, it does. Aged one. Dad didn't have a splendid house. We had a tent, which was a push-up variety, and not very substantial. Not like you can get now from these special places—beautiful tents. There was no caravan park down there so you put up your tent in the sandhills. Well, it got blown down in a storm. *(Laughs)*  
So Dad thought there must be a better way than this. So he came back home and thought about it and thought that he'd like to build a caravan, which he went on and did. He, being a woodwork teacher, was capable and he knew his craft well. He designed the van, which I might add actually is a real little treasure. It's so light—it's up in the Birdwood Motor Museum now as a representative of early home builds. Anyway, he designed this very, very well. It towed like magic. You wouldn't know that it was on the car. It was absolutely light. It was like a shell.

**So would he have made it out of a thin ply of some sort?**

**MM:** The wood was rather extraordinary. It must've been imported wood because they weren't doing it here. You could actually shape it.

**So it was malleable?**

**MM:** Yes. It wasn't heavy stuff. Dad didn't believe in anything heavy. It was shaped in the one strip that went right around the van.

Yes, he got his design together and had some of the van part built. I can remember when he brought home the chassis. He had the chassis built. He did the van. The chassis came home and the floor was on it and I can remember sandpapering the floor. Well, I don't think I was doing anything very remarkable but I was about age three. And so this marvellous creation was made, and we took off in it.

**Do you remember the type of car you had at that time?**

**MM:** Yes. We had a Willys Whippet Tourer. It had mica(?) windows.

**Soft top?**

**MM:** No, I don't think it had a soft—let's go and look at the picture again.

**Did it have a dicky seat in the back?**

**MM:** No.

**So it was a true tourer?**

**MM:** Yes. So we took off to Victor Harbor with the van. Getting down there was quite something. I mean the way the road ran then, you had Tapleys Hill as well as Willunga Hill. It was very winding, very steep, and there was always a little doubt as to whether we would get to the top. *(Laughter)*

**Well, the Whippet wasn't that big, was it?**

**MM:** No, it wasn't, but then Dad had built this very light van, which was the secret to making it work.

Anyway, we were given a big block of wood—the kids in the back. Well, my sister was older than me, and the order was that if this show comes to a halt, you get out and put it behind the wheel at the back of the caravan.

**So you were in charge of the chocks?**

**MM:** Absolutely. So we sort of sat there thinking we hope to goodness this doesn't happen. *(Laughs)* But quite prepared, you know, under orders of those in that era if necessary to get out and put it behind. There was no question about it. So it was quite an adventure to get down to Victor Harbor. You know that windy bit where you can see The Bluff?

**Cut Hill?**

**MM:** Yes. We would all shout, 'I can see The Bluff and I'm the first to say so'. *(Laughs)* So we're the winner. So got down there to Victor and found a suitable paddock in which to put the van, which was in Victoria Street where the traders are now.

**Can you just spend a little bit more time on this magnificent caravan and just describe what it looked like. And the colours and what was inside.**

**MM:** He kept this idea of light, which was excellent, and they've lost that today I might add. They are as heavy as lead.

When you came through the door there were two bunks on the left, one above the other. The van was painted white inside. Mum did all the furnishings. There was a lino on the floor. She did the curtains, just simple curtains. Down the end of the van was a table with a seat each side. You took the table out at night and you slid in two slides and then cushions came down and made the double bed down there.

Mum had a primus stove. Dad built sort of a metal thing to take that. Up higher in the van there were shelves that were open slats. The windows opened inward so that the draft would go through the slats and out through an air vent at the top. All this was necessary if you were going to keep fruit and vegetables because there was no refrigeration or ice or anything like that.

**And it would be used in summer down at Victor I guess.**

**MM:** Oh yes. I don't remember it being in any way particularly disastrous. That idea of the air circulation works fairly well. And Mum had a Coolgardie Safe outside, when we set up. And I don't know if you're familiar with the Coolgardie Safe?

**I am indeed.**

**MM:** Are you?

**A little trickle down the sides.**

**MM:** That's right. Keeps things remarkably cool. Of course Mum was very familiar with the Coolgardie Safe. *(Laughter)* So she could handle all of that.

**Could she set her jelly in it?**

**MM:** I can't remember. You know when you're a child you just rush in and eat. *(Laughter)*

**Of course.**

**MM:** You don't think what you're eating. But she could manage it very well. She was very good at handling that sort of thing. I suppose really she had learnt to become competent. I mean she had had to. You go off to boarding school at age seven, you have to stand on your own two feet and get competent.

**Incredible!**

**MM:** And she was. She could handle all of that. And we had a camp oven set up outside in a hole. What else? Yes, there was a primus stove. I can't remember anything but that we ate very well. And it was all marvellous.

**So there you are, in the paddock on Victoria Street.**

**MM:** Yes.

**Tell me about how Victor Harbor first struck you. What Ocean Street was like, Coral Street. What was the town like?**

**MM:** Well, I was very young. Victor Harbor, to me, felt like magic. When you go for holidays as a child you see it through those eyes. To us it was the beach, the swimming, and the freedom. And of course Ocean Street was the main street. And Victoria Street, yes. I think the thing I thought about Victor Harbor was pleasure. That was what we were going for. We were going for a holiday, and to be free. You know I look at campers arriving today with so much stuff. Well, we never had anything.

**But this is still in the depression, isn't it, for South Australians?**

**MM:** Well, yes. But we never wanted anything. I look back on it with envy. *(Laughs)* I don't look back on it as being *(couldn't decipher word)*. It was wonderful. We had a little wardrobe in there and we had two pairs of shoes each. One for if it turned wet and the other if it was sunny and bright. And we had a winter outfit and a summer dress. And some hats. And that applied for all of us. The rest of things, like shorts and tops and

bathers, they were on the end of the bed. We had one stuffed toy each. That was it. So didn't have to rummage about and worry about what you were going to wear, it was there.

**And Margaret, in this paddock that you popped the caravan into, were there other families around nearby or other people that you can recall who were significant in your memory?**

**MM:** Yes, there are. Henry Newland had the place next door. He had a beautiful house on the front, and the land ran back behind it. He kept a horse called Cherry in the backyard, which we liked immensely. It was a lovely horse. I've got photos of him.

**So this is Henry Simpson Newland?**

**MM:** Yes. He was a doctor.

**The surgeon.**

**MM:** Yes, that's right.

**He lived at Undelcarra.**

**MM:** Yes.

**Not far from here.**

**MM:** That's right. Well, he was next door, and he used to bring us down a chocolate each Christmas, which was a treasure. Well, this is moving a little ahead. As we got towards the war years you couldn't get chocolate or biscuits or anything. Everything was made over to the war effort so you never got anything like that. He'd come down, and where he got his chocolate was magic. Perhaps it came out of the sky. But he'd bring down chocolate and that was lovely. So we enjoyed what we saw of him.

We'll stay with where Newland's place is. Next to that was a little road than ran down to the beach. It was just a soft track and it had big pines down it—huge, great pines. And then on the other side was the Cooper's house.

**This is of the brewery?**

**MM:** Yes. They had a tram in the backyard and the boys used to all stay in the tram, which of course was heaven for them. They had crystal sets up in the trees. One of the lads was the same age as me and the funny part of it is that we didn't see much of each other there other than a laugh and a wave but he married one of my best girlfriends and we've been friends all our lives since. So it's amazing how things turn out.

**It is, Margaret. So which one of the Coopers was that?**

**MM:** The one I knew was Peter Cooper. His father's name I can't—he had The Maltings

**The Maltings, down here at Leabrook.**

**MM:** That's right. That was just interesting.

Across the paddock the other way, not over the road, there was a house there with people by the name of Shierlaw. They had two girls, Mary and Alison.

**Yes, my mother's cousins.**

**MM:** Are they really?

**Really.**

**MM:** Well, their house is still there.

**Yes.**

**MM:** Is it an office or something now?

**I think it probably is. So there would've been Mary and Alison, and Norman and—chap ended up out at Hindmarsh Tiers. A dairy farmer. Joe.**

**MM:** I can remember Mary and Alison, although we didn't get to know them as well. Over the road was interesting. That was the Abbotts. They had bus tours or—they had buses anyway. Then further down from them there was a laundry. It was quite big. It would be sort of roughly where that timber place and that is now. It was a big, high building. Brick. The Chambers lived behind that—a grandma with two girls. I got friendly with Barbara Chambers, and also the Abbott children—Irene and Gordon. Barbara Chambers had an older sister but I didn't get to know her so well. Barbara and I got on very well. Barbara was a great swimmer. She was one of those strong, brown children. *(Laughs)* You know the kind?

**Typically Australian.**

**MM:** Typically Australian. But she was good fun. So she took us over to the Baths.

**Margaret, were all these children and families down for the summer? That was the point, was it?**

**MM:** I think the Shierlaws and the Coopers were. Henry Newland I presume was. I felt furious when they knocked his house down. I remember standing out the front trying to

protest. And there was a brigade of us older people all saying where's the young people? We didn't prevail. It's a great pity.

**Such a wonderful man, too.**

**MM:** Absolutely. And so Victor Harbor.

**Yes. (Laughs)**

**MM:** So terribly Victor Harbor.

**Let's face it. His family were there from the beginnings of European settlement.**

**MM:** Absolutely. And it should've been preserved because it was in itself quite worthy.

**So that's probably thirty years ago now that that would've happened.**

**MM:** Yes. I can remember being quite upset about that. I thought that there would be something you could do with that. But I don't think people who made the decisions were somehow closely in touch with what the values—however we're getting off the point, aren't we?

**Not really. No.**

**Margaret, there's an entourage of all of you children there and you've got your friends, what do you do during the holidays? What are the things that you enjoyed, because obviously for you it's been a time that you still cherish.**

**MM:** Absolutely cherish. A wonderful, wonderful time. Well, I think the idea of the era was that if you went away on holiday you looked outward to make friends. That was the way it was. And so it was nothing unusual for us to cross the road and get to know this one and that one, and this one and that one. And then out of it you formed friendships that particularly fitted in around yourself, and then it was on.

**Yes.**

**MM:** When I say with Barbara, she introduced us to the Victor Harbor Baths, which was of course totally marvellous. The Baths were halfway across the causeway, and they were actually just poles driven into the sand to keep the sharks and stingrays out but the water washed through. It was all over your depth. There were two change-rooms—sheds—each side of it, as I remember. They were galvanised iron. And the walkway around the top was coconut matting, sodden wet. The chief activity was a slippery dip that you got on and it went down and dropped you into the water. You hauled up a bucket of water, you threw it down the slippery dip, you leapt on, and went whoosh! Marvellous stuff.

Barbara was an expert swimmer. I was not. I had to have a bike tube wound around my middle so that I wouldn't drown. But you know Mum and Dad didn't worry about this. I mean we were given a very unfettered freedom. It was presumed that I would use my brains and not drown. (*Laughter*) So that was taken for granted. Though I did manage to climb up on the shed roof when there was a—they used to have carnivals.

**This is the changing shed?**

**MM:** Yes. I got my leg caught on a piece of—it wasn't really good. It all got infected and, of course, we had no antibiotics. So I learnt my lesson. If you do that, you get your leg put up for ages sitting (*sounds like, out of action*). However I recovered from that. They had a little corner thing at the corner of this sort of galvanised iron where they sold bush biscuits. They were big, oblong biscuits.

**These are Menz. Made by Menz.**

**MM:** Quite likely. But you were so hungry after all of this that that was marvellous. Otherwise of course nothing like icecreams or anything like that. It was bush biscuits.

**Just for a second we had better describe a bush biscuit. It's roundabout 15 cms long by about 7 cms deep. It's not a normal sized biscuit. They were massive.**

**MM:** Massive.

**And sometimes if you were really fortunate you had two put together with butter in the middle, but that was over the top.**

**MM:** That would keep you going for hours. (*Laughs*)

**It was the equivalent of eating about six biscuits of a normal type. (*Laughs*)**

**MM:** Absolutely. I don't think it did much for our teeth. They were very sticky.

**I remember them vaguely, that they were around. So this was in a little booth on the end of the shed, so to speak?**

**MM:** Yes. It was just sort of like a slide up and down.

**Yes, I know exactly what you mean. So the swimming was a big thing.**

**MM:** It was.

**Did you go with your parents to the beach at all near where you were?**

**MM:** Yes, we did. We went down to the beach even before the Barbara Chambers and the introduction. We walked down that little roadway to the beach, and of course it's rocky all along there. Quite rocky. But I believe someone did have a circle of it blasted out. We used to call it the Big Pool. Of course you could get right in there, and so we'd get in there and go swimming as often as we liked. Now isn't that marvellous? There's no holds barred. You don't have to say that we're going to pack up and go and get stuff in the car and all that. We could just go down and come back.

As for what to do, it was endless. We had plenty to do. When it was very hot—my father was terribly good with children—he'd put a rug down outside under the tree. There was a tree that leant over and we would play games—knucklebones—and he'd reward us with licorice allsorts. I don't know where he got those but they weren't very glamorous but they looked good. Yes, it was a nice family time. You know I look back on it and it was so nice to see Mum and Dad enjoying themselves, because they were.

**Yes. I'm sure they were.**

**MM:** They were. We all were. It was simple and enjoyable, and people were relaxed. Very valuable.

**We're probably talking about the years of the war, and I'll come back to them again in a minute, but do you recall walking down towards Ocean Street to the Wheatsheaf Bakery for instance?**

**MM:** Yes. I do.

**Would you get your bread from there?**

**MM:** You know food just appeared on the table when you're young. You never thought about anything like that. Dad must've got it. Yes, he would've. I do remember the name.

**That's in that little area near what's now Warland Reserve with the hotels around—the Victor and the Crown and all those.**

**MM:** Yes, that's right. That was all in place. And that marvellous Congregational church.

**Newland Memorial.**

**MM:** Yes. That was all there. This was major building that was there. And it looked lovely.

**And Victoria Street so very wide.**

**MM:** Yes, it is.

**With the big pines all along it.**

**MM:** I can't remember along so much as clumps of them on either side. Course over the road from where we camped, Sole Bros used to bring in their circus every year.

**Did they really?**

**MM:** Yes.

**I didn't know that.**

**MM:** Well, they did. And it was wonderful. Course they had elephants and lions. *(Laughs)* I don't suppose the lions liked it but the elephants didn't have a bad time. And they'd set up the big top.

**So it was a proper circus in the old-fashioned concept of what a circus was like.**

**MM:** Oh, yes. It was very good. I've got strong memories of that. I loved it. They'd set up the tiered seating. Every aspect of it was interesting to watch all of this. Yes, the big top. And the music of course. Circus music is marvellous. And we'd go over there. And there we were, at the circus. And they had everything. They had clowns, fancy girls on horseback, trapeze. Ended up with the lions, elephants. Good stuff.

**Goodness me!**

**MM:** Yes.

**So they would be there for the majority of the summer holidays?**

**MM:** I can't remember how long they were there. They were there for quite a long spate of time. During the day we were able to go over. There was no sort of safety worries as people have today. They were all really nice and easy, and the boys used to give us rides on the Shetland ponies. I've got a photo of myself on one. *(Laughs)* We watched the lions fed. That was endless interest. Then of course they'd take the elephants to the beach. We could go down and see what they were doing. One elephant made a mistake and ate out Barbara Chambers' garden. *(Laughter)*

**I shouldn't have laughed.**

**MM:** That was a very bad elephant. *(Laughs)*  
Another thing you could do. The laundry had this big, very high brick wall. Dad made us beach bats and we started with those. You know, get your hand in. And then later when

we got tennis racquets we could endlessly belt the side of the laundry wall, which was very good.

**Would one of the other attractions for you as a family have been Granite Island? Would you walk there with your parents, or without?**

**MM:** Oh, yes. With my parents, over to Granite island. Oh, yes, wonderful. Granite Island is wonderful. The long causeway over there and sometimes we'd have a special treat and go on the horse tram. That was lovely. You'd sit up on top, right at the front. It was always blowing a gale. *(Laughs)* And the horse clobbering along at the bottom. You know, the sound of it. Everything about it. And we'd go around Granite Island and do what they still do—take a photo under the umbrella rock. Some things don't change. Little sort of footpaths around. It wasn't all set out like it is today. Just a little hiking track. And then around to where they call the bridal spray, where that sea comes in and hits the rock and up it goes. It's all very magnificent. There was no kiosk. And then we'd come back over. That was a great adventure. We loved it. I mean, children love islands, and I was no exception.

**So the screw-pile jetty would've been there then, and the breakwater?**

**MM:** Yes, it was. Actually makes you wonder how they put them all there, doesn't it?

**It's a lot of hard work.**

**MM:** Yes. They find it an effort now to mend a jetty. Strange, isn't it?

**Yes, it is. They had a rig for drilling the piles.**

**MM:** Yes.

**It was just basic engineering for the time I suppose.**

**MM:** It was good, wasn't it? Because the sea does come across there and it's all still standing there.

**It can be pretty rough out there, too.**

**MM:** Yes, it can.

**Would you have got down to Victor at roughly the start of the school holidays?**

**MM:** We were there for six weeks so we can't have been too slow off the mark.

**Did you celebrate your Christmas there?**

**MM:** Certainly did. Christmas was quite especially wonderful down there. Now let me think how it all worked out. Yes, Christmas Eve we'd walk up to Warland Reserve. Course this is starting from when we were really little children. Not that we did much up there but we sort of looked around, and that was that, and walked back.

**So was there anything special at Warland Reserve?**

**MM:** They always had a little sort of fun park in the corner there. It was all very small. There was a merry-go-round there.

**Yes.**

**MM:** That of course was marvellous. Occasionally get a ride on that. Yes, the merry-go-round. Well, that was highly special to me. I loved it. I mean there's something about a carousel. It's got that sound. It's got mirrors. It's got a kind of beauty really. And the horses were all named after racehorses. I liked Peter Pan. So I used to wait before the thing quite stopped from the previous go, and leap on, to get in before anyone else. *(Laughs)* It was an outside up and down horse. And once that was secured we were off. For a child, a merry-go-round felt wonderful. It has the sound, it has the look, it has the magic. I mean I know now that they soar up in the sky and do dangerous things and everybody screams, but I think there's something more magic in a merry-go-round. Well, to me.

**And was it the music also?**

**MM:** Oh, it was the music, and it was the elevation of the horse going up and down. It wasn't frightening. It was sort of empowering. *(Laughs)* It was quite marvellous. And I loved the mirrors. I was so sad when they sold it. I can't believe how anybody could've done it, because the horses were sold to the Americans. They were beautiful horses. The rest was thrown in the dump. How could they?

**Well, I just think there was a time when it wasn't valued, and now I guess what they're recreating (couldn't decipher word).**

**MM:** Yes. And you know we tried. We all went around to the Council. We tried. And they said things like, 'It should have a sealed path around it'. Well, it didn't worry me whether it had a sealed path around it when I had my eye on Peter Pan. *(Laughs)* And the fellow of course wasn't making as much money. They were bringing in other higher, faster kind of things.

**More glamorous.**

**MM:** It just needed to be shepherded through, and then made special. You take your children through these places and you talk to them about these things.

**Yes.**

**MM:** Well, if they are not there, it's very hard to talk to them about them.

**You are reliant on photos or something.**

**MM:** But then, you see, you're talking of a world outside their knowledge. So I think those things are particularly important. And it's all going on again now at Semaphore. They've got a magnificent carousel there. There's much angst going on about where that's going. And yet you go to Paris and they keep all their carousels.

**They do.**

**MM:** Right in the middle of the town. And they are still just as magic as they ever were. They might have all the other things but where does your eye go? Straight to the carousel.

**So Margaret, Christmas Day, did you go to worship with your family?**

**MM:** Yes, we did. We used to put on our best dress from the wardrobe and we'd walk to St Joan of Arc.

**Oh, yes.**

**MM:** Beautiful little church. Beautiful! Once again, it's a Laybourne Smith one from the firm Woods Bagot.

**Woods, Bagot, Laybourne Smith and Irwin.**

**MM:** Yes. It's now called Woods Bagot. Anyway, it was in the Romanesque style. It was a very pretty little church. They hadn't sold the block next—that was another thing I appealed against that doesn't seem to have been very successful. *(Laughs)* It should never have been sold. Some things are worth keeping. There were the tall Italian pines, and there were also saplings. And this little church didn't have that big front porch back then. It had a small entry and it didn't have any of that side attachment that has been put on it, which I suppose has been done as gracefully as one can do if they're going to put a side attachment on. It's not dreadful or anything but

frankly I think with a little church like that you keep it just as it should be and you build another church if it demands. But that's just a personal opinion.

But it used to stand there in the saplings with this little red tiled roof, and it was beautiful. Very beautiful. And inside they had the polished floorboards. It's carpet now but it was polished floorboards. And it had chairs. It didn't have pews that early.

**I didn't know that, that it was just chairs. That's interesting.**

**MM:** You know how you can get chairs three attached?

**Yes, I know.**

**MM:** Like dance halls and theatres and things. There were rows of those. Course the altar's beautiful. Lovely marble altar. Very pretty. That's another thing that worries me, too, when I look at the side building. It comes in and it's square. Well, it shouldn't(?) be. You know, Romanesque is always round.

Of course Christmas Mass in the morning was beautiful for children. We'd come in and everything was in place. Baby Jesus was in the crib up the front, and the candles were all lit, and the vestments had moved on from the purple of Advent to the joyous white and gold of Christmas. You could feel the festivity. There were Christmas carols. There was sound. There's something about sound and beauty. It's very nice. So we loved it. Mass was said in Latin back then. And you had a missal that had Latin one side and English the other. I didn't bother too much as a child looking at that. I just liked the ambience of it. Lovely! So that was all very interesting.

**I loved the thought that you've written in your little memoir about as you were at Mass that the camp oven in the little pit that your father probably had dug was there gently cooking away, and that's where the once a year surprise was.**

**MM:** That's right. Today poultry is an everyday thing but back then it wasn't. You had poultry at Christmas time and New Year. So that was cooking along with a leg of lamb. You'd come home and you could smell it as you approached.

**Were they in separate camp ovens or in the same oven?**

**MM:** I think they must've been in the same oven. Fairly big.

**Huge, it would've been. (Laughs)**

**MM:** You put coals on top of the lid. You know I look back on it, and Mum managed all that. Quick as can be. And inside the van it was decorated. I do wish I'd kept it. It was a sort of a lei—a tightly woven paper lei—and we hung it all around the van. And we had a

set of silver bells, which were actually cardboard with silver paper on them. And that was it. Every year those same two things got out. And there's something rather nice about that. It's a very definite signal.

### **The continuity**

**MM:** Continuity. And I should've kept them and not bothered with anything more. I made a mistake there.

So Christmas dinner, we had that in the caravan, on the table.

### **Just the family?**

**MM:** Yes, just the four of us. Dad had put some beer and lemonade in the cool safe and we had the roast and Mum fired up some pretty good veg. Then we had Christmas pudding. Then we all laid down. *(Laughter)* That hasn't changed either.

### **So the Christmas pudding, would your mother have cooked that in the camp oven as well?**

**MM:** She must have cooked it before she took it away and boiled it on the primus.

### **On the primus?**

**MM:** Yes.

### **Seems incredible that in such a small space with so few implements you could knock everything up at the drop of a hat.**

**MM:** And not only that, it tasted a lot better. There's something about that instant kind of cooking and the whole aroma.

### **I agree with you about the camp oven.**

**MM:** It's marvellous.

### **There's nothing quite like the texture of meat that comes from it.**

**MM:** No, there isn't. It's the total heat around it. It's juicy and beautiful.

### **And Margaret, you were describing that fragrance because that's what it is. It's not just a smell. It was a fragrance.**

**MM:** Yes, it is.

**It was a fragrance. It was beautiful.**

**MM:** It is. Many messages coming from all over the place. And of course Christmas morning before we went to Mass there was this matter of the Christmas presents. Father Christmas had called. Back then you didn't get very much but we thought we did. We got books. We'd get perhaps *Girls Own* and those *Bonzo* books.

**Yes. (Laughs)**

**MM:** They were marvellous books.

**Were they the annuals?**

**MM:** Yes. Laughter annual. I've still got mine. Strangely enough we've named the place at Port Elliot Bonzo. *(Laughs)* I said, 'What can we call it?' 'Well', I said, 'it was my favourite book'. In fact I have a favourite page.

And then I can remember Barbara Chambers coming across, flip flop, flip flop, as she was coming over to the van. 'Look what Father Christmas brought me. I've got Roman sandals'. We often laughed about it. Then she'd flip flop back. *(Laughs)* I think they bought a size too big.

**The way you are still so enthusiastic about Christmas, Margaret, it must've been just magical for you and your family.**

**MM:** It was. It wasn't commercial. Christmas was family, the message of Christmas, the feast, the idea of the celebration. Yes, it was absolutely magical. After we got up we all went down for a swim in the Big Pool. That was that. That was Christmas Day.

**Were Christmas Days invariably hot, or were they sometimes not so?**

**MM:** Oh, a variety. Sometimes they were hot. You know Victor, it can be all things really. I remember them mainly as hot but then I think children tend to remember hot days, sunny days. Course New Year's Day was much similar to Christmas really.

**Now I've had other people tell me that, too, that New Year's Day there were huge festivities down at Victor.**

**MM:** New Year's Day was wonderful. When we were young it was very like Christmas Day. We'd go to Mass at St Joan of Arc and, you know, one was more or less straightened up for the new year. *(Laughs)* You gave thought to what you would like to do—all these matters. Then we would come back to the van.

One New Year's Day was a little different. We got back and the roast was cooking nicely, so we thought when we were at Mass. No. Yes, we had many years like that when it was

similar, but one year it was a raging heatwave and Mum decided to do a cold New Year's dinner. So the roast went on the day before and she cooled it down on the top shelves of the van, and then into the Coolgardie Safe. When we came home the latch on the safe must have lifted, or not been secured properly, and there was a dog. *(Laughter)* And it had our roast in its jaws. And the plate was still congealed to the roast. And it was tearing down through the paddock and out into the scrub behind.

**Were a few words said?**

**MM:** Sometimes those things are so horrific that they're deadly funny. *(Laughs)*

**I can see that.**

**MM:** High hilarity, and I thought that I'd better not show it. There was no place for high hilarity. One just faded backwards and kept quiet. So that was a vegetarian New Year's. *(Laughs)*

**Margaret, I said a little bit earlier I'd just like to ask you a bit more about the Second World War. So you would've been just five years of age when in September 1939 the declaration of war was made, that Australia was now at war because England was at war.**

**MM:** Oh, yes.

**Did it affect your summer holidays at all? Did it seem to?**

**MM:** Only once. When the Japanese—there was threat of invasion here. I don't know why we didn't go away. We might've been better off there. But they tended to stay home.

**1942 probably.**

**MM:** Yes, it would've been around there. No, the Japanese weren't popular at all with me. They interrupted my holidays. *(Laughs)*

**So did you not go down to Victor that year?**

**MM:** That one year.

**That would've been a huge thing.**

**MM:** It was. It was not a popular decision. However we went all the other years. The war years of course bring with them austerity. We had petrol rationing. We had to save

up during the term to have enough petrol to go down for holidays, because we used to go to Port Noarlunga on the term holiday.

**With the van?**

**MM:** Oh, yes. That's another whole branch of this.

**Just as an aside, where did you camp there?**

**MM:** You know where that big house is? I think it was owned by people called (*sounds like Corps*). It was used during the war.

**The one with the solid wall around it near what's now the Surf Lifesaving Club?**

**MM:** Yes, the one with the wall.

**That they always used to think there were German spies in?**

**MM:** Yes, that's the one. See, that added a bit, too. That was up there and there were some tennis courts in front of it, and we used to camp in the corner of the tennis courts.

**That's now a carpark, isn't it?**

**MM:** Quite possibly. I haven't been down there recently. Oh, yes, that's another whole episode of camping, which was good. Once again, you made stacks of friends, some I've still got.

Now we're back to Victor Harbor. Where were we?

**We made a quick digression because we were talking about the war years, and austerity, and you talked a lot about the Sole Bros circus and all the celebrations of the New Year, and Granite Island.**

**Did you, like many others, venture off on picnics as well?**

**MM:** Definitely. I've still got the picnic box that Dad used to take. No wonder people's sheds are so full. (*Laughs*) But, yes, Mum was very good at packing a picnic lunch. She could whip that together quick smart. And we'd go off to all the places around Victor Harbor. You know, Waitpinga and Port Elliot and through to Goolwa. We'd have a picnic day out. It was all good fun.

And then Dad decided that we were to go surfing. We weren't very old, so he made surfboards. They were a bit like ironing boards. (*Laughs*) They were fairly heavy. We couldn't get out into the really high surf because of this but we could catch the waves and come in on the shore. So it must've been very early surfing down there that we were

doing. They weren't bad. We could do it but you don't want to get the head of the board stuck into the ground, and the back gets - (*Laughs*)

**Hits you in the tummy?**

**MM:** Not good. Not good. Course Port Elliot is lovely from that point of view.

**Very gentle surf.**

**MM:** Yes. Well, some days.

**So I guess in your explorations you would've got to know Encounter Bay, for instance.**

**MM:** Definitely, yes. Went around to Encounter Bay and climbed The Bluff.

**How did you go over the river? On the bridge?**

**MM:** Must've been. Course that river went out to sea then.

**Yes.**

**MM:** Yes, we would've gone around in the car I suppose. Yes, because we used to walk around to what we called The Point at night from where we were camping. We would've gone around there over the bridge. And Yilki homestead was still there. Dad talked a lot about the whaling and what went there, and the book that had been written, *Paving the Way*. That's down there on the bookshelf. It all seemed fairly magical to us. You know, they've got more about the Aborigines around there now, which is good, because you had to sort of conjure it up in your mind about the Aboriginal presence there before the white people. So that was all interesting.

Dad would be very good about that. He'd teach us as we'd go, and we'd get up The Bluff and learn about Nicholas Baudin and the encounter that took place.

**Gosh, he was a good teacher, wasn't he?**

**MM:** He was. He was very good with children. He had that ability to interact with you all the time and not just keep it apart.

**So was the remnant of the old flour mill still there?**

**MM:** Yes.

**Before the Gilberts rebuilt it?**

**MM:** Yes. That was there.

**And the Jacka homestead would have been down there on the front near where what's now the Whalers Inn, but that would've been quite hard to get to I would've thought.**

**MM:** I keep saying things that have upset me, but that building on the saddle of The Bluff I thought was a great shame. A great shame. And that little cottage that's there, they're going to shift it.

**I didn't know that.**

**MM:** Well, so I hear. One of the family went to—you know the little restaurant there?

**Yes.**

**MM:** They were told from there that they were going to shift it. Anyway, this person said, 'What's the point? That's where it is. That's where it's history is'. Well, beyond that I don't know. I'll be tackling the next thing when I go down there. *(Laughs)* But we knew all about Sir Hans Heysen and the paintings, and the lovely one across that he did from The Bluff. That's a beautiful picture, isn't it?

**Yes.**

**MM:** That's why The Bluff needs to be kept. It's a place for paintings and poets. There's more to it than just real estate.

**So Margaret, would you go to Petrel Cove, and ever over to Kings Beach at all?**

**MM:** No, we didn't go, back then, to Kings Beach. We'd go to Petrel Cove, which is lovely. Beautiful. Dangerous. All those things.

**Yes. I remember being warned as a child that you don't take this place for granted.**

**MM:** That's right. Warned, we were.

**Margaret, did you ever go inland to Inman Valley way? To Glacier Rock and such like? And the Orange Grove Tearooms?**

**MM:** Yes, that's right. And there's the big rock there. Yes, ice age or something.

**Yes.**

**MM:** Yes, I remember being told about that. Didn't connect very much to the ice age, but it was there. And the Hindmarsh Valley Falls.

**Gosh! Yes, of course.**

**And did you ever go to the reservoir at all?**

**MM:** No, I don't remember that.

**As you grew up, what are some of the other memories that go with the summer holidays down there?**

**MM:** We shifted camp at a certain point and we went to Bond Street. I don't know if you know Bond Street.

**Yes, I can picture that. That's about two or three streets back, isn't it?**

**MM:** It's very close to the river.

**Yes, that's what I'm thinking.**

**MM:** Our Boys' Institute used to be on the corner—the OBI grounds. Well, at this stage they let us use their facilities. So there was a vacant block on Bond Street and it had a nice lot of trees on it, and we set up camp there. So that opened up the Hindmarsh River to be explored.

We got down there and there were three men that ran the boatshed—Pearsons. They were rather interesting actually. They were jovial, and they could talk to kids endlessly. We hired boats and we went rowing up and down the river. It was funny because that was one of the activities my mother had done in the 1920s, only it was done more elegantly then. We'd take children—Barbara Chambers, or whoever we had got to know. And then we'd have these paddleboards that you could kick and go a long way up. There were snakes on the banks. You couldn't go into the banks.

**Blacks?**

**MM:** Yes. So we'd sit on the bench outside their place and talk. We called them the bush lawyers.

**Because of their carry-on?**

**MM:** Oh, yes, they could solve anything. (*Laughs*) So that was all very interesting.

Then after that, that's when we went across to Port Elliot because that was developing then, as a caravan park, and my father had teacher friends there. And there were more caravans coming in of course then. So it takes off there from then.

We'd come back to Victor Harbor quite often because we still loved it. New Year's Eve we'd come over for the celebrations, and back then they would cordon off the main street. And

there was the Central Hotel where there's a bank. I think it's Westpac. I'm not sure. I think it is.

**I know exactly where you mean.**

**MM:** Unfortunately there's a bank instead of the Central Hotel. It had a balcony and there was a live band that played, and the street was cordoned off and people would just come in to celebrate and just be friends. And they'd dance in the street. Just enjoy themselves. Just a fun time. And there was no alcohol, and there was no Police presence. There was no need for it. They'd have a New Year's Ball in the Town Hall. We were getting to that stage then. You know, put on the glad rags and a sundress and the sling-back shoes and take to the dance floor.

**Now in your writing you mention two things that I'd really love you to talk about. One is the guest houses, which we'll come to in a minute. The other is about a polio epidemic, which to a modern Australian probably makes no sense at all but you had two scares in your lifetime, didn't you?**

**MM:** Yes.

**The late 1930s and the late 1940s.**

**MM:** The polio epidemic was terrifying. It's a viral thing and they had no cure for it. It struck anywhere randomly. There was no positioning. You couldn't imagine where you could or couldn't go. I remember being restricted a little bit by Mum who would say, 'Well, it's all crowds, you can't go there'. But you still had no guarantee. And your classroom. Some children would be struck and others wouldn't. It was terrifying. We had a great friend, Gary Grey. He was lovely. He got this polio. As a child, when someone you know really well at that time gets it, it brings it home to you.

**What age would you have been then, Margaret?**

**MM:** I was trying to think of that. I can't have been very old.

**So would that have been in the late 30s/early 40s? Or when you were in your teens?**

**MM:** Must've been about nine or ten. I know that it affected his legs. We couldn't believe that Gary was paralysed in the legs. And up there, the house—what's it called now?

**Mount Breckan.**

**MM:** Mount Breckan. The Hay mansion. That was there.

**Alexander Hay built it.**

**MM:** And it got burnt down and all the rest of it that went on.

**Now restored.**

**MM:** Yes.

**Amazingly.**

**MM:** It is. That's a story in itself, too, isn't it?

**Yes. Still going I think.**

**MM:** Well, it was for sale and I was hoping that they might buy it—the council or the government. Can't seem to get anyone motivated. It's a landmark in Victor Harbor. As you come across you see that standing up. That should be acquired, I think. Have it as chamber music and art exhibitions. There's plenty to do. Dance groups.

**So Mount Breckan became a -**

**MM:** Became a convalescent home and rehabilitation for the polio victims. And Gary was there. I don't know how long he was there for. A lot of them did become rehabilitated but it was a very devastating illness. So that was a fright. Shocking.

**I wonder if you could tell me more about the guesthouses because for many, many families they were the centre of the world for their holidays.**

**MM:** Oh, they were. See, Victor really started with the summer residences of wealthy people. And then of course it was hit by war years, which is the time when we were there doing our thing in the van. Then as Australia moved on from the austerity of war and looked to a more confident future, the whole confidence level rose. So people wanted to have a holiday, and Victor Harbor was within grasp. I mean it was beautiful. It was within coping distance of Adelaide. And so the response was the guesthouses. They were marvellous old places. Guesthouses were. They have verandahs, and comfortable chairs out on the verandah. It was a comfortable kind of family holiday that you could have there. The dining room served wholesome food. There was a large living room with a piano in it and there was usually someone who could play the piano. The idea was mix with the people. And that's changed.

Nowadays, you know, the prosperity has gone on again and everybody has got their own—well, not everybody but a lot of people have got their own little beach house or whatever. And they bring their own set down and they don't move outside of it. That's a bit of a pity

because back then the whole idea was to socialise and mix. You made your fun. It was in the conversation. You cracked jokes. If necessary, people put on games. It might sound old fashioned but it works. People enjoy each other, left alone. There were no phones, no television, no iPads or anything else. The thing was that you went away, you relaxed, you had good food, you had the sea and you socialised.

**And Margaret, it seemed to be, too, at Victor that some of the local families owned those guesthouses for decades and decades and made friendships with the people coming down. There was Warringa on the foreshore.**

**MM:** That's right. And there was Oceania.

**That's right.**

**MM:** And Pipiriki.

**Oh, yes.**

**MM:** Marvellous names, aren't they?

**Yes, they are.**

**MM:** Arcadia.

**All reminiscent probably of Brighton and Bournemouth.**

**MM:** Well, they were. That is another stream of Victor's history that shouldn't be lost. In fact, that is the attitude that permeated the place, and it makes it more interesting than other places. I mean that is the history. That gets back to the merry-go-round and, you know, beside the sea.

**Yes.**

**MM:** A day at the beach.

**So Margaret, was Victor Harbor pretty much that space between the Hindmarsh and Inman Rivers? If you know what I mean.**

**MM:** Yes.

**That's where the settlement was.**

**MM:** That's where the settlement was. Yes, that was where it was, and that beautiful view across when you come over the hill. And the climate.

Of course I must mention the changing fashions. I mean when it starts out we are all in wool bathers. I don't suppose you ever knew wool bathers.

**No, but my sisters had them. That's my earliest memories. And they would've been hand-me-downs from the previous generation.**

**MM:** Quite likely. Well, there's nothing like wet sand and sea - *(Laughter)*

**Oh! I can just feel it.**

**MM:** - on your skin.

**I was going to say, sandpaper.**

**MM:** Sandpaper they were.

**And they had backs on them, didn't they? If you know what I'm saying.**

**MM:** The girls were around here and around at the back. My father had trunks but they were Jantzen wool bathers. Dad was funny. He used to play a lot with us, and he'd do a New Year's dive. He'd get into his Jantzen bathers and we would all go down to the Big Pool, and he'd leap off. And he'd put seaweed all over himself and come up and strike a pose. We all thought that it was hilarious. We would scream with laughter, and all do it. He did that every year for as long as I can remember. *(Laughs)* Yes, he was good with children.

And I forgot to tell you. He forgot to bring his walking shoes one year. I don't know how they appeared. I don't think he found them among the stuff because there wasn't any stuff. He must've had someone put them on the train to send them down, because there was a train. Anyway, the shoes got sent down. Overnight he put them out on the caravan floor. Course we woke up and saw them there, and were shrieking, 'There's your shoes, Dad. There's your shoes'. 'Yes', he said, 'they walked down'. We said, 'They did not walk down'. 'How do you think they're here? They walked down'. That was typical. He would play like that.

**Now tell me, Margaret, you mentioned the shoes coming on the train in all possibility, was the train also a centre of attention for young and old?**

**MM:** Well, it was taken very much for granted. That was the train. It came. It's more of a centre of attraction now—the little Cockle Train. Back then, well, that was it. The train.

**I was thinking of Railway Terrace. There are little shops down there, too.**

**MM:** Yes.

**Shoe repairs, and shoe shops?**

**MM:** Yes, there would've been that sort of thing.

**Stationery I think. Newsagent maybe.**

**MM:** Yes.

**There was a newsagent there. So Victor was really very much supplied by train or by car, if you had a car.**

**MM:** Yes. Mainly by train, I should think.

**Well, I suppose most people walked to wherever they went.**

**MM:** Well, they had to. There wasn't the petrol. And then a lot of cars were put up on blocks to save the tyres because they would perish under the weight of the car.

**Look, I'm sorry. I interrupted you. You were talking about woollen swimsuits. Cossies as they say in New South Wales.**

**MM:** Yes. They've all got their different name, haven't they?

**So there was a changing fashion through the 50s and 60s?**

**MM:** Thank goodness! Yes. Once again, it moves with the looking outward toward the more prosperity again, although some of the movies that came across were actually Americans from the 40s and that, but America hadn't suffered the war like we had. And so they were still in business. And the films came through—Esther Williams swim star. Marvellous. And there were a lot of them. Of course with that comes the fashion. And they weren't in wool swimsuits, badly chafing. (*Laughs*) They couldn't have done what they were doing. And so the fashions changed.

I had a Cole of California, which was considered terribly 'in'. They were made with cotton first. They didn't have the stretchies and the nylons and things. It was a cotton swimsuit and it had a shirred back. But after what we had had, it was marvellous.

**What's a shirred back?**

**MM:** Elastic threaded through.

**Yes.**

**MM:** You put it across your back and then it would fit when you put it on. The elastic would shirr it up. And they were pretty. They had nice colours and shapes and styles. So they were good.

And then of course *The Advertiser* was terribly besotted with the social life of Adelaide at the time, and it would go along every year, Seen at Kyneton(?), and there would be a

series of girls that we'd seen in the paper the whole year through going to various balls and things. Seen at Kyneton(?), and they'd be in more daring swimsuits than we had. Seen at Victor Harbor. And then Encounter Bay. And then it would move up to Port Willunga.

**So what happened with the outfits when it fit the two-piece era?**

**MM:** Oh, yes. Well, at that stage I was young so the polka dot bikini didn't worry me too much, but it must've disturbed the elders a little. *(Laughter)*

One thing I must mention to you is the New Year's Eve at the Ball down there at Victor Harbor. They of course had a dance band. It was run very well. Then at midnight they'd play Auld Lang Syne and you'd all sing the New Year in. Then the streamers and the balloons, and then everyone would pack up and go home and go to bed. There was none of this staying out all night, driving about. Go to bed and get ready for the festivities on New Year's Day. But it was an interesting time. I don't look back on it as dull at all. I thought it was all fabulous.

**So this is your childhood and into your teen years up to your early twenties, Margaret.**

**MM:** Yes.

**Can you recall when you first noticed perhaps a change coming into Victor when you were older? How has it change over time?**

**MM:** It's changed a great deal. I can't think of an exact point. It's more a question of when things were happening and things were being taken away and things were being established. Like, the merry-go-round. I felt that was wrong. Like, Newland's house. I felt that was wrong not to preserve it. It was distinctly Victor Harbor. Who are you trying to be if you're losing your identity? If you lose your identity, what is it that you think is going to attract anybody? I mean, to me, that's of vital importance. So where I saw things that I thought were somewhat violated—I felt nothing but rage when I saw that on the saddle of The Bluff. I thought some things are Victor Harbor. It's hard to actually say it but, to me, if you're preserving Victor Harbor you're preserving who Victor Harbor is and was, and if you lose part of that it's like losing it from your own family.

**Yes.**

**MM:** If you don't know who you were, well, people speak about that. They speak about the troubles of that. It is nice to know who you are and who you were, and that's where the interest is. So in the development of Victor Harbor—it's not really for me to say I

suppose but I'd like to see some that graciousness treasured and kept so that your modern development is there, as it has to be, but it doesn't dominate the identity of the town. I can't express it more than that.

**So there were two things you described there. One of the facilities and amenities, such as the carousel that were just an integral part to what was Victor as you knew it, and the other is the natural landscape and seascape.**

**MM:** The natural landscape is absolutely beautiful, and building big things that get in the way of it, that's not the way to go. Here one has to clarify in their mind exactly—and spend more time thinking about it—but the entrances to the place and the whole idea that you've got to attract people, you don't. If you are yourself, they will come. Like they did in the beginning. I mean we haven't all changed that much. We went there because it was beautiful.

**And the climate was special.**

**MM:** The climate was beautiful. And it was special. So we are not going to go there if it isn't beautiful.

**It's interesting. I was told yesterday that the south coast from Goolwa to Victor Harbor is the fastest growing area in Australia—population-wise. Seems incredible that what was a place that was a holiday mecca is suddenly becoming an all year around mecca.**

**MM:** Well, that's with the older people. It would be mainly older people I would think. And there again, it's interesting. You know, they use this dreadful phrase, called God's waiting room. *(Laughter)*

**I haven't heard that.**

**MM:** It's derisive on many levels. We should be celebrating the fact that older people have come. They've got a lot to contribute. And here again, what's this emphasis that it's other people that we want. Well, they're there. So it would be nice if there was a big arts centre down there, wouldn't it? Amenities that they could go to. *(sounds like, I mean I wouldn't mind going down there either.)* For me, I would miss not being able to go to the theatre and things like that. Goolwa's moved ahead on that score. They have now got the country arts programme running through and they've had their big town hall done up.

**Centenary Hall, yes.**

**MM:** I wrote at one stage to somebody—*(Laughs)*—as to why we couldn't have buildings done up and a centre such that Victor could receive the country arts programme, because some of them are quite good. They send through the young dancing groups and singers. I got a terse letter back to say that that had been done at Goolwa so there was no need for it. *(Laughs)* I thought, well, these elderly people from seventy-five up to ninety-five find it a little hard to drive to Goolwa at night. Really want it at Victor Harbor. I thought perhaps—I missed the name before. Up on the hill. The big place.

**Mount Breckan.**

**MM:** Yes. It doesn't matter if it's not used in the middle of winter. That's not new. That sort of thing is not new. Seasonal, yes. Why didn't they have a bit of land and have sun umbrellas outside and some little kiosk spring up.

**Perhaps there's still hope there with that one.**

**MM:** I hope so. It's a treasure the way you look at it as you come into the town. And then somewhere along the line they do need an arts centre. We are very close. Look at all the conservatorium students. They've all got to have places to play. They've got to develop themselves.

**I don't know if you know that Mildura has got on to that bandwagon. You know, as far removed from Victor as you could imagine but their Chaffey Arts Centre at Mildura is magnificent. All the Melbourne students come up.**

**MM:** We went up there not long ago and went out there and there was a good art exhibition on. It was lovely. And they've got the big piano there, which they should have at Mount Breckan for the chamber concerts. If you read this, you'll laugh.

**This is an article in *The Advertiser* weekender.**

**MM:** Yes. They say the old people don't spend. Well, what can you expect them to spend on? Older people like different things. I mean they've got the little theatre down there in Ocean Street. It has an occasional good film but mostly a fairly B grade movie. And given the fact that you can go to the pictures there *(couldn't decipher word/s)*. There hasn't been a lot of movement, has there?

**No. That's true.**

**MM:** Victor, if it's to retain its graciousness, needs to hold like mad on its coastal views and set out the things that people want. Oh, I'm waxing on. You might have to delete a fair bit of this.

**I was going to say, Margaret, what you are describing is really why Victor is such a treasure to you –**

**MM:** Yes.

**- and why it means so much. Do you think you could put into words what it is that is enduring for you about Victor Harbor? What is it that has made it so special?**

**MM:** Oh, that's a big one, because there are so many things. There are so many impressions that come in from childhood. It was the magic. Yes, the magic. The freedom. The beauty. The sounds. All of these things. We don't want to lose any of them. I want to keep gaining. *(Laughs)*

Ocean Street. Yes, we'll start on that. I'd like to see that made very elegant as a tribute to its past. I mean why shouldn't we have that very elegant—don't do what everybody else is doing. The bookshop should have—when you go in there—the leather settee that you can sit down on and look through the books, and the coffee machine. I think people would go in there. They are wandering down Ocean Street wondering what on earth it's all about. And there's a tattoo parlour there. I won't say what I think about that but I don't think it's elegant.

**What impresses me so much about what you've both written and said, Margaret, is that for you Victor Harbor is an enduring thing. It's not just a memory, it's still there but it is an enduring -**

**MM:** Very much so. It's still ready to go into action at any moment. If any one of these things need defending I will come along with a billboard and walk down the street.

*(Laughs)* Very much so.

Now there's the matter of the swimming pool coming up, and that's highly contentious at the moment.

**I was going to say that you seem to be on the button of every single issue that's in the local community at the time.**

**MM:** Well, I don't know how it is. It's a funny thing. You know, we go down there and I was down there on my own not long ago and I walked up the street and there's Mrs Pomery, who is very active for Port Elliot.

### **This is Lorraine?**

**MM:** Yes. Well, good luck to her. I told her to live forever. *(Laughs)* Of course you know you get upgraded immediately as to what is going on because she's known us for years and years. The whole Port Elliot story's got to go on from here, about us and the relationships we have with the people, and the Anglican Church and all sorts of things at Port Elliot, which we still have. She was talking about the swimming pool.

And then I went into the Council because I wanted some of the steps at Port Elliot—when you get off the bottom step it has been worn away. And I said that for those people who have had knee replacements, or toddlers, that's not fun. So I was getting in there and getting things done before Christmas.

I said to the girl, 'About this swimming pool'. 'We don't want that', she said. I said, 'What's wrong with that?' 'Be on the rates'. I said, 'Oh, it mightn't be too bad. They went on like that at Burnside and none of us have dropped dead'. You see, there are older people and they need hydrotherapy and you can't tell them to go swimming at Boomer Beach. It's not the place for older people. You can't help it. You get there and you get involved. Well, I think I've probably talked more than I should've.

**Margaret, I was just going to say, it's been absolutely a delight to listen to your memories. They are real treasures. So thank you so much for being willing to share them. It's been lovely.**

**MM:** Thank you very much for being interested in them.

**Thank you.**