



**KNOWLEDGE CENTRE
GOSNELLS**

Oral History Interview

Nelly Maarssen

Date: 29 January 2010

**Conducted by Pam Davies
For the City of Gosnells
Thornlie Living History Project**

Pam Davies is talking to Nelly Maarssen on the 29th January [2010]. Nelly just for the record would you tell us your full name and the date of birth.

Nelly Maria Elizabeth Maarssen, seventh (7th) September 1937.

And tell us your parent's names.

Peter and Jenny Simonse.

And were they born in Australia?

No they were born in Holland – my father was born in 1910 and my mother was born in 1913 and we migrated to Australia in 1952.

Were you the only child in your family?

No I was the eldest of four (4) girls, I was fifteen (15) when I arrived here and there was my sister Mary who was eleven (11) and Connie who was ten (10) and Pauline who was five (5).

Where did you live?

We went straight to Midland where a house had been made available for us by friends.

Ok, so when you grew up and were married, your husband's name?

John Maarssen and he lived in Cannington. And he had also migrated from Holland and arrived here earlier in 1952 with his parents.

No connection before you came to Australia?

No, no we came from opposite ends of the country.

Really. How did you meet him here?

At a mutual friend's house.

Ok. So you were married in what year?

1957, in Midland Presbyterian Church.

And you had children of your own?

Only we had four (4) children yes.

And their names?

Terry was born in December '61 and Anita in May '63 and Raymond in July '69 and Bradley in June '71.

Ok (coughs) excuse me did you work before you were married?

I did, I worked at MacRobertson Miller Airlines (MMA) for six (6) years after leaving Midland High School.

Oh doing what? In the office or on the aeroplane?

I was an accountancy clerk yes.

Yeah and did you go to school in Midland?

I went to Midland High School, because although the school leaving age was fourteen (14) and I no longer needed to go to school my father decided I hadn't finished my education and he sent me back to high school.

So that was unusual- for girls?

It was because I was the eldest in the class and there were no other persons my age and I was seventeen (17) when I graduated with my Junior [certificate].

Was that difficult for you being older than the others?

It was terribly difficult because I had been at a prestigious high school in Holland and because I could do algebra and French I was put in the top class, it was called professional, and I couldn't speak English.

I suppose they didn't have ESL [English as Second Language] then did they?

No.

So it was sink or swim?

It was sink or swim indeed yes. But I did learn the language after about six (6) months I could manage to get along and I passed my Junior in English.

Yeah, so that was quite an achievement really.

It was yes. And I became top of the class in French because my French was better than anybody else's (laughs)

So you went straight from school into that job?

To Midland to MMA yes.

And you stayed there til you married?

I stayed there well I stayed there til three (3) years after I was married because John was a second year apprentice when we got married and apprentices didn't earn very much.

So he was an apprentice what, electrician?

Apprentice electrician yes.

So where did he go to school? John?

He went to school in Holland.

Oh, ok, so he came out.

Yes.

How old was he when he came?

He was eighteen (18). He had just done an apprenticeship in Holland or a technical school course and he was working as a second grade welder in Welshpool.

Oh yeah. So where did you live when you first married?

Well, when first we were married in November 1957 and our house that we were building in Thornlie wasn't finished because there was a delay with the bricks, there was a nine (9) months waiting list for bricks, and when Woerlee said 'look your house is not going to be finished for November' we lived in a tent in my parents backyard.

You are joking.

Til February 1958 and then the house was finished, but when we moved in the SEC (State Electricity Commission) hadn't connected the power, and in February and it was one hundred degrees (100°C) in the shade and we had no power, but the Campbell's across the road let us use their fridge to put the milk in.

So were you one of the very first people in Thornlie?

Yes.

So what was your address in Thornlie?

18 Range View Way.

(5:04)

Oh yeah, yeah and who was the builder?

Woerlee.

Woerlee he built quite a few...

He did.

In that area. So describe you house, how big, it was brick and tile?

It was brick and tile but we had a two (2) bedroom house with kitchen and lounge and sliding doors which was quite a novelty in those days.

Yeah.

And that was all, there was no hot water, no fences, no driveway, no nothing we just had a house.

In the bush.

And we were the last house in the street.

Right. So how long were you without electricity?

For about a week then they came and put the power on.

Yeah. So was there roads and everything built?

The bitumen was there but there was no kerbing. There were no shops, there was

not even a letter, a post box, no telephone connections, nothing. The nearest shop was Treen's store in Kenwick on the corner of Albany Highway and Royal Street.

Yeah.

That was the nearest store. The nearest hotel was Cannington Hotel and to go to a hairdresser I had to go to Vic Park.

So did you have a car or access to a car?

No John had a motorbike.

Oh ok and how did you shop?

Well because I was working in the city I used to shop at Charlie Carters and bring it all home on the bus.

Just a bit at a time sort of?

Yes and I rode my bike to Kenwick station to go to work.

Yeah and left the bike there?

And left the bike at Kenwick Station.

And it was still there when you got back?

Kenwick station in those days was manned. It had a Station Master living on site, it even had a shed for the bikes, a lock up shed where the bikes were stored.

See I didn't know that. Yeah so you could leave it there.

Yes, yes.

Yes, excuse me, do you remember how much your bus, your bike cost, your house cost? (laughs)

Yes three thousand pound (£3000).

Yeah and the land?

That was all included.

Oh you had a land and house package.

Land and house package was three thousand pounds (£3000).

And did you go through a bank or you know a finance company or something?

Yes Town and Country Building Society.

And was there any difficulty sort of getting the loan?

No because we were both working and no there was no difficulty.

Yeah, excuse me (coughs). Why did you come to Thornlie?

Because John's parents lived in Cannington.

Right.

And they had seen that Thornlie was being developed and they suggested that we buy a block here and I didn't really want to live in Midland because Midland was very industrialised with the abattoirs and the Midland Workshops and I really did want to get away from Midland.

Yeah so did John, where did John work when you moved to Thornlie?

In Welshpool.

Oh he stayed at the same place?

Yes.

And did you continue to work for three (3) years did you say?

I continued to work for MMA until March 1961.

Yeah.

And they had a very funny thing at work, married women had to give six (6) months notice. So back in September they said and 'when was I going to leave and I said March 1961 I would leave'.

Yeah.

And so then I had to leave in 1961, whether I wanted to or not.

What was the idea of that?

I don't know some company policy they wanted to be ready to renew staff and that.

Yeah.

And they picked on married women.

You were lucky to be able to, well some people wouldn't have married women on staff or they were reluctant to I guess that's part of that, they let you be there but on their conditions.

Because I had already been there for three (3) years.

Yeah.

Yeah. Well I was there for six (6) years altogether in the end.

And there was no question of staying there once you had a baby or were pregnant? Did any?

No and also in those days it was frowned on if your husband, by this time John had a Government job, and it was frowned on if you had a Government job your wife wasn't allowed to work.

Ok. So when you came here it was pretty basic?

Very basic. There were no services at all.

Ok.

No rubbish collection, no bus there was the train from Kenwick Station that was the only transport. There was a bus along Albany Highway from Armadale that was an hourly bus.

Ok and what about (coughs) doctors, if you needed a doctor?

Oh there was a doctor in Gosnells, Dr England was in Gosnells.

Right and you go on the bike if you needed to do that? Did you need? I suppose you were young but?

No John would take me on the motorbike.

(10:07)

Yeah. So what happened when you had children?

Well by the time we had children we had bought an old ute.

Right, so you had transport basically.

Yes.

Moving about, talking about the community I know that you have been heavily involved over the years in very many organisations.

Right from the beginning, the first hundred people or so in Thornlie formed a Progress Association, and we used to have regular dances social nights in the **Buff Hall** in Kenwick and Dot Croft was the pianist. I can't remember the other, we had a little band and we would have cake stalls and fetes and we collected enough money for the first playground equipment at the end of Range View Way in the park. All that was done by the Progress Association and then they gradually went on to do the infant health clinic, and all the other things that came after.

Was it fun though? As well as the fundraising part of it you know that was your socialising.

It bonded the community and we were sort of a bit isolated in a way because there was no public transport connecting Thornlie to the rest of the world.

(laughs) Did you have, when did you get telephones? Was there telephones when you came?

Oh no, no we didn't get telephones for about three (3) years and then we we had one of the only phones in the street for a while because John's employment insisted that he be on the phone and they paid half of our phone bill. And then the rest of the street used to ring and say can you run and tell my wife that I will be home late from work and this sort of thing.

Yeah yeah.

And I was the community relations officer when it came to communications.

Were you involved in any sports?

Yes I had been playing tennis in Midland and in '61 I joined Thornlie Tennis Club when I finished work that was the only sport I was involved in. But right from the word go when I arrived here in February 1958, I joined the Girl Guides First (1st) Kenwick Girl Guide Company because I had been the Girl Guide Leader in Midland already for a few years. I had actually formed the first (1st) Midland Junction Guide Company two (2) years earlier, and so I joined Norma Hood, from Hood's the butchers, she was the Guide Captain and I was the Lieutenant. And eventually Norma left after a couple of years to go to the Rockingham area and I was running the Girl Guides from then on.

How long did you do it?

For twenty (20) years.

Really.

Yes until 1975 I was in charge of the Guides and that's when Pat Morris was running the Brownies.

Were your girls involved in Guides to any extent?

Daughter, my only daughter, yes she was a Brownie with Pat and then she became a Guide.

Yes excuse me (coughs). Any other, well that sounds like you've got a plate full actually with kids and house.

John was actually a Scout Master with Ernie Gleeson.

Oh yeah.

In the first (1st) Kenwick Scout Group.

Yeah.

And when Anita started gymnastics at the Kenwick Youth Club I became a gymnastics instructor.

What? Yeah (laughs). Is there anything that you can't do?

When Anita finished at the Kenwick Youth Club by this time I had my two (2) younger boys Raymond and Bradley and they joined the Maddington Police Boys Club, and I became a gymnastics instructor there I was still taking the boys for tumbling and vaults.

Oh yeah, yeah did you enjoy that?

Yes, yes.

It also meant you were with the kids all the time, well kind of with them.

I had a gymnastics background from Holland, every kid in Holland does gymnastics.

Right yeah. And the kindergarten, you were involved in the beginnings of the kindergarten in Coops Avenue?

Yes, getting it getting it set up and my son was one of the first kids to go to the kindergarten, Raymond in '73

Right.

Well he was born in '69 so in '73 he started kindergarten.

And did your children all go to Thornlie School?

Terry and Anita went to Thornlie School, Raymond and Bradley went to Yale.

(15:03)

Oh because you had moved?

By '70 in '73 we moved across Spencer Road.

So now you're in Debenham, Debenham is it?

Yes to Debenham Street.

You were also associated with the school for a long time as a lollypop lady, how long did that go on for?

For twenty one (21) years.

Is that right?

From 1980 til 2001.

And were you on the P & C at the school?

I was on the P & C yes, I did that too.

Primary and high school?

Well actually I didn't do a lot of P & C at Thornlie Primary School, but I was for five (5) years I was the Secretary of the Yale Primary School P & C, and then I went on to the high school and I did another five (5) years at the high school. And I was also the Secretary of the Church's Commission on Education at the high school where I installed the first Chaplain. I interviewed twenty three (23) Chaplains over a whole week and we eventually decided on this one lady and she became the first Chaplain at Thornlie High School.

It's really worth while too, it's a great huge program now.

Yes, yes.

It was a fight then wasn't it?

And to pay for it we had to come up with three thousand dollars (\$3000) a year, and I ran a quiz night and a raffle for the high school, and I'd also been doing that for the Yale Primary School. Every year I'd run a quiz night and a raffle.

Yeah. Just for a minute talking about the primary school because I'm particularly interested in that, can you remember any of the teachers or the children's teachers; I'm talking now at the primary school?

Yes my son Terry's was there a Mrs Jones, she died later.

Yes, yeah.

Mrs Jones was Terry's last teacher and Mrs Hatch was Anita's teacher and she's died too.

Yes.

And I remember there was the Principals, there was Mr Cawley followed by Mr Frawley.

That's right. Yes (laughs). Did you sort of play a big role in the kid's primary school life or were you... When did you start to work when they'd finished school?

No Raymond was, no the kids were seven (7) and nine (9) when I started at the cross walk.

At the school though, at school?

Yes.

You weren't one of those reading mum's though were you or?

No, no I was never a reading mum.

You were doing other things obviously.

But I did go to the high school canteen by the time the boys went to high school I was on the canteen.

Yeah.

Worked there.

So voluntary like on the roster kind of thing?

Yes, yes.

What do you think, what do you remember about the primary school what are your memories?

Well the whole time after Terry started at Thornlie Primary School they were continually under construction. There was always classrooms being added and the whole seven (7) years Terry turned up with lime and cement, (laughs) covered in lime and cement for the entire seven (7) years.

And it was all demountables and demountables too came then at some stage. I can't think of anything else to ask you really. I don't know if you're interested in the primary school but there is going to be a reunion.

Yes I heard about that.

Would you be interested? We could let you know that and maybe your children if you've got any photos or anything they would be happy to share.

I'm sure I've got a school photo of both of them.

We could copy them and get them back to you if we don't already have them.

Yeah I'm sure I've got photos of... school photos yeah.

Oh but you did tell me something about the primary school about the coat hooks. Tell me the story about the coat hooks.

(Laughs) Well when Terry's coat kept going missing because there were no hooks I went to Tom Bateman who was a good friend of mine because his daughter was one of my Guides.

It's called networking (laughs).

And his two (2) sons were John's Scouts, so I knew Tom Bateman very well, and I said 'there's no coat hooks at Thornlie Primary School', and he spoke to the Minister for Education in Parliament and henceforth we got some coat hooks at the primary school.

So you did a service for generations to come (laughs). That's what it comes to. That's excellent, you obviously led a very community based kind of life you like mixing with people. Is there anything else you would like to add to tell us about?

Well I mean I've always worked with other people's children. Gymnastics and Girl Guides and the cross walk, and now I'm the Junior Coordinator at the Tennis Club and I have about forty (40) kids coming to Junior Club every week.

(20:18)

Really. How long have you been in the Tennis Club?

Well since since 1961. I've been President for the last few years.

So that's fifty (50)...and do you still play?

I still play.

What mid week, and weekends or..?

Mid week and sometimes on a Saturday afternoon but most of the time I have family commitments on the Saturday.

Yeah and so when do the Juniors play? Are the Juniors like a coaching, are you talking about now?

No, no this is just social play for juniors.

Ok.

Thursdays from 4.30pm til 6.30pm and and I teach the beginners forehands, backhands, serving until they're able to play matches.

Get it over a net. So how many kids are involved in that?

Oh fifty (50) or sixty (60).

Really, that's great.

I have seven (7) pennant teams, seven (7) junior pennant teams that play all over the metropolitan area from Wanneroo to South Mandurah. That's a big job every time somebody has a birthday I've got to re-establish all the teams (laughs).

Yes cause they play in age groups, under this or under..

Boys and girls twelve (12), boys and girls fourteen (14) and boys and girls sixteen (16) and I've got two (2) boys fourteen (14) teams.

So lots of paperwork?

Lot's of paperwork yes.

And meetings? Do you go to meetings and things?

Yeah all of that.

Yeah but you still like it?

Somebody's got to do it (laughs).

I know it's always the same people that's what I find though. Ask if you want something done ask a busy person.

Yes.

Everyone's gone "I can't do, it I can't do it". Thank you very much, its great talking to you and I hope it works out on the tape.

*Interview Ends
22 minutes*